

## **Blanket Fort Hope Overview**

The exploitation of children through commercial sex acts and forced labor is a multi-billion-dollar industry. The average age a child is first exploited in the sex trade is 11-14 years old, and it is estimated that at least 100,000 children are victims of sex trafficking alone in the United States each year. Considering that many children are victims of labor trafficking, the total number of trafficked children is likely much higher. It is staggering to realize that these deplorable crimes are happening in the cities and communities where we live. In Alabama, interstates I-85, I-65, and I-20 converge to create a trafficking corridor by which victims are transported rapidly around the state and beyond. These interstates make it possible for traffickers to easily move a high volume of child victims from state to state.

The average lifespan of a child in sex-trafficking is seven years. By the age of 21-22 many of these victims are dead due to STD's, HIV, beatings, starvation, and drugs. These children experience deep trauma, and they need specialized care in order to begin healing. Our window is short and we are here to make a difference today!

The mission of Blanket Fort Hope (BFH) is to love and care for child trafficking victims through housing, services, and long-term commitment to the children, and to prevent children from becoming victims by educating children, and professionals who work with children, about human trafficking. By intentionally collaborating with national and local agencies, law enforcement, businesses, churches, and the general public, BFH identifies child victims and seeks to provide them safety – offering them healing, restoration, and the opportunity to thrive. We envision a world where children are not disposable but rather invaluable. Our communities need hope that today we can choose a different path besides one where countless children are preyed upon and exploited.

BFH incorporated on January 21, 2015. It was born from a clear recognition that there is no place in Alabama dedicated to housing and assisting trafficked children. In our short existence, we have joined the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, written our first curriculum to educate children and professionals, released our first prevention education video, trained approximately 500 students and professionals through our prevention program, and assisted with many child trafficking cases, the youngest being three years of age. We are in the beginning stages of developing our Children's Home, and we look forward to providing safe housing and vital care for child trafficking victims. In the meantime, BFH assists with cases in a variety of ways, including helping with coordination of services, basic necessities, transportation, medical and legal needs, locating shelter, finding interpreters, and providing human trafficking information to other agencies.

Blanket Fort Hope is located in both the Birmingham and Montgomery areas in order to better serve the children in Alabama. BFH is one of the few organizations in the country dedicated to assisting children who have been trafficked. Together, we can forge a path of purpose and hope for our children.