

# Greenville partnership to offer path of transformation to victims of sex trafficking

Angelia Davis, [davisal@greenvilleonline.com](mailto:davisal@greenvilleonline.com) Published 6:29 a.m. ET Jan. 3, 2018

Becca Stevens, the founder of Thistle Farms, talks about the transformative power of her organization, which provides healing and a path to freedom for women trapped in a cycle of sexual exploitation, prostitution, and addiction. A model of that program, Jasmine Road, has formally launched in Greenville. See video: <http://www.greenvilleonline.com/videos/life/2017/10/26/transformative-work-launches-greenville/107040804/>



*Kathryn Norwood speaks at a luncheon for Jasmine Road at Furman University on Thursday, October 26, 2017. (Photo: Lauren Petracca, LAUREN PETRACCA\STAFF)*

This year will be the start of a transformation in the lives of some local women.

Jasmine Road, a new 501(c)3 organization, will begin offering a restoration program for survivors of sex trafficking, prostitution and addiction in Greenville.

Jasmine Road was launched in October as part of a new partnership between Christ Church Episcopal in Greenville and Triune Mercy Center. The goal is to heal and provide a path to freedom for women trapped in a cycle of sexual exploitation and addiction, the groups said.

Jasmine Road is modeled after Thistle Farms in Nashville, Tennessee. Becca Stevens, an Episcopal priest, founded Thistle Farms 20 years ago. She wanted to offer a sanctuary for women who had been involved in sex trafficking and prostitution.

Thistle Farms opened up a house and invited five women. She said those women agreed to commit to two years of housing, therapy, restitution, dental work and healing.

"We did it for free, for no cost," Stevens said.



*Becca Stevens, founder and president of Thistle Farms, speaks at a luncheon for Jasmine Road at Furman University on Thursday, October 26, 2017. (Photo: Lauren Petracca, LAUREN PETRACCA\STAFF)*

Greenville is now among sister agencies around the country providing survivors of sexual exploitation and addiction with a two-year residential program, Jasmine Road's website said.

Greenville's place between Atlanta and Charlotte, along Interstate 85, has made it a corridor for human trafficking, said Kathryn Norwood, chairperson of Jasmine Road's Board of Directors.

The women involved have nowhere to go, she said. They go "in and out of our jail," she said.

"It's like a revolving door. Many have been arrested 30 or 40 times," Norwood said. "A lot of them have had their children taken away. They just can't see a different path."

Stevens, the founder of Thistle Farms, channeled a rough, disturbing childhood into advocacy. Her father was killed by a drunk driver when she was a child. Afterward, she was sexually molested.

"It wasn't a great story, but I always knew that wasn't the whole story," Stevens said. "There were some really great people in my life, so I wanted to believe that healing was possible for all of us."

Thistle Farms has an 84 percent graduation rate for those who complete the initial orientation phase and 62 percent of the graduates stay in long-term stable housing, working and sober, the organization.

In 2016, Thistle Farms provided 9,215 nights of safe, supportive housing to women recovering from life on the streets and 14,100 hours of counseling and therapy for survivors, according to its website.

Stevens was named a 2016 CNN Hero and recognized as a "Champion of Change" by the White House for her work against domestic violence.

"I have watched my brokenness turn into compassion and I wouldn't trade it for the world," Stevens told *The Greenville News* during her visit to Greenville last year.

"What I live the rest of my life for is loving people without judgment, believing that all of us are transformed by love and that it is powerful."

In Greenville, Jasmine Road's first safe house is set to open the first half of this year.

"We will create a financially viable business that will provide protected, nurturing employment opportunities to women recovering from sexual exploitation, until they can transition into competitive employment," Norwood said in a news release. "We will also offer products and services that will provide a platform for sharing our mission and funding for the nonprofit."

In addition to the two years of housing without a financial burden, Jasmine Road participants will also receive financial literacy and vocational training, said Marie Majorais, Jasmine Road's executive director.

Healthcare services will be provided through Jasmine Road's healthcare partner, Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, she said.