

HART Shining Star Awards

The HART shining star awards is an initiative to honor the exceptional work being done by DCF staff, HART Committee Members, and community providers in CT whose focus is on eradicating human trafficking as well as empowering victims of this crime. These awards will be announced quarterly in the Newsletter. Our recipients this quarter are:

Community Award

The Underground



The Underground is a grassroots, faith-based initiative dedicated to ending sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in Connecticut. Founded in 2013, the Underground has grown to over 500 volunteers from over 100 different churches. The Underground is supported by a church collaboration: Wintonbury Church in Bloomfield, Mill Pond Church in Newington, and New Life Church in Wethersfield; and is led by Annmarie and Brian Boulay, Stephanie and Simon Wainwright, Heather and Paul Joss, and Gordon Ramsay. One of the Underground's primary goals is to engage ordinary people from all walks of life in the fight against trafficking and exploitation. To that end, the Underground has hosted and presented at several awareness events throughout Connecticut. The Underground's volunteers have assembled over 60 backpacks for at-risk children, have made over 30 care packages for survivors in recovery, and have donated hundreds of winter items for homeless youth. The Underground has funded over 8,000 information cards and over 10,000 bracelets with emergency phone numbers so those in need can find help. The Underground has also connected several volunteers to local agencies where they can become trained to be mentors or foster parents. Because the Underground uses a unique financial model where churches pool their human and monetary resources to cover overhead expenses, all donations go directly toward benefitting victims, survivors and those at-risk of being trafficked or exploited in Connecticut.

Community Award Detective Joshua Lewis

Detective Josh Lewis has been in law enforcement since 1993. In 2004 he joined the Hartford Police Department. During this time he worked as an officer in Patrol and then a pro-active Street Crimes Unit. He has received several departmental awards, unit citation and the prestigious Chief's Medal of Valor. In 2010, he was assigned to the Hartford

Police Special Investigations Division, where he was promoted to Detective. Initially assigned cases of juvenile sexual and physical abuse, Detective Lewis then transitioned into working cases involving Registered Sex Offenders and Sex Offender Registry violators. In 2015, Detective Lewis began training in and working cases related to Human Trafficking. He was assigned to the Homeland Security Investigations Task Force for Human Trafficking in early 2016 and is currently investigating all reported Human Trafficking cases for the Hartford Police Department.



“Being in a profession where I see kids struggle everyday in a system where resources are lacking, Josh Lewis is a breath of fresh air. When LiAnn went missing I knew she was in serious trouble because going even a few hours without talking to her was unusual for me. Being a mother figure in her life, I reacted like one. I was restless, panicked, and scared to death. I called anyone and everyone for help but there was little anyone could, or was willing to do. Someone mentioned Josh as a resource and we called him to see if he was able to help. Josh jumped right in and helped. He was the first person to provide us with information about her possible whereabouts. From that moment on, Josh was

unstoppable. He talked to informants, set up a raid, pulled LiAnn out of hell and saved her life. Josh then handled LiAnn with a sensitivity and understanding. He understood her vulnerable position and made her feel like he was her champion. He made her feel that he would protect her from that moment forward and that no person would hurt her. "They will have to go through me before they get to you" were the words he gave her. He allowed her to feel a sense of safety at her most vulnerable time. Without Josh Lewis, LiAnn would not be alive today. I thank him from the bottom of my heart, he is a hero.”

Amy T.: LiAnn's High School Teacher

“Many people gave up on LiAnn because of her history, but not Detective Lewis. He never gave up on finding her. When all hope was lost, he never wavered; he never stopped. In our eyes, Detective Josh Lewis is a HERO! He saved LiAnn's life, not only from the men that kidnapped her and held her against her will, but he also saved her from herself. Thank you Detective Lewis!”

The Danko Family: LiAnn's Foster Family