

The Bra Voyage: From Lingerie Drawers to a Survivor's Bra Store

Opening Slide

Slide

Free The Girls Mission

Free The Girls provides job opportunities to women rescued from sex trafficking in developing countries by helping them establish micro-enterprises selling bras in the second hand clothing markets.

And, through the collection of bras in Western countries, Free the Girls educates people and organizations about the scourge of human trafficking worldwide.

Slide

What happens to your bra after you donate it to Free The Girls?

The process of handling bra inventory is no small feat and involves numerous people across thousands of miles.

Follow your bra's journey, here, in The Bra Voyage

Slide

The Bra Drive

Since 2010, women have been collecting bras for Free The Girls. Women donate gently-used and, often, rarely-worn bras.

- Over 500 bra drives have been organized either in conjunction with another event (girls' night out, bunco, church craft show, etc.) or over a period of time.
- Almost 100 businesses, schools, or churches have put out a bra bin and invited women to drop off bras anytime.
- Over 300,000 bras have been collected to-date

Individual donations can be mailed directly, taken to a local bra drive, or dropped off at one of the third-party drop-off locations all over the United States and Canada.

Slide

The Bra Mail

Free The Girls receives bras from all over North America at its inventory sorting facility in Chesterton, Indiana. Sorting donated bras is the mission of Duneland Community Church in Chesterton. The church office receives at least 10 packages every day from USPS, UPS, FedEx, and DHL carriers.

The boxes of donations are stacked in a storage room until there is enough inventory for a "bra packing party."

You can mail your bra donations to the address shown on the screen.
Free The Girls, 1552 Pioneer Trail, Chesterton, IN 46304

Slide

The Bra Packing Party

Every 4 to 6 weeks, Free The Girls volunteers in Chesterton, Indiana come together for a “bra packing party.” Boxes are opened, the contents are piled on tables, and bras are sorted and boxed into uniform-sized moving boxes suitable for overseas shipping.

While volunteers go through the piles of bras, they also sort out three categories of items.

1. Non-Bra Items
2. Unsellable Bras
3. New Bras

Slide

Non-Bra Items

Free The Girls knows people have good intentions when they send in non-bra items, but bras are the only items which may be sent to the women because of the regulations governing the importation of certain types of goods.

Non-bra items found in bra donation boxes have included underwear, socks, toys, picture frames, books, beauty products, school supplies, knick knacks, and assorted other household items. Free The Girls donates these items to a local charitable thrift store in Chesterton, Indiana.

If you have non-bra items you'd like to donate, please explore local charity organizations in your community.

Slide

Unsellable Bras

When volunteers identify donated bras that are in poor condition, the bras are sorted out, boxed up separately, and color coded.

These bras are sent to a textile recycling company, The Bra Recyclers in Arizona, who helps Free The Girls ensure that no bra ends up in a landfill.

Slide

New Bras

Donated bras that are new with tags, or surplus/overstock bras donated by industry partners, are sorted and boxed separately, color coded, and set aside for Free The Girls programs in Uganda which requires new bra inventory because of local regulations prohibiting the importation of used undergarments.

Retailers or manufacturers interested in donating new bra inventory may email **info@freethegirls.org** and request a call back from Free The Girls National Director.

Slide

The Bra Haulers

The majority of the bras sent in to Free The Girls are simply repacked by volunteers into uniform-sized moving boxes suitable for overseas shipment.

The boxes of bras are stacked on pallets and shrink wrapped.

Then Free The Girls arranges with volunteer truckers to pick up pallets of bras and take them to LR International in Chicago.

You can join the volunteer trucker email list by sending your name and contact information to: **truckers@freethegirls.org**

Slide

The Bra Shipping Specialists

Paul Jarzombek and his great crew at LR International receive and store pallets of bras for Free The Girls at LRI's huge warehouse near O'Hare Airport in Chicago, IL.

The bras are warehoused at LRI until there are enough boxes to fill a shipping container. Then LRI goes to work making all the logistical arrangements for shipping the bras overseas.

Slide

The Bra Boxes

Once Free The Girls is ready to ship boxes to a program location, LR International begins the process of preparing the boxes of bras for shipment.

First, boxes of bras are staged, as shown in this picture.

Next, because the contents of the boxes are used clothing, the boxes must be fumigated.

Slide

The Bra Container

The next step in shipping boxes of bras involves packing the boxes into a 20- OR 40-foot shipping container. To maximize space in the container and keep shipping costs low, the crew at LRI takes the boxes off the pallets and carefully stacks them one by one into the container.

This means as many as 670 boxes, or 150,000+ bras, can fit in one 40-foot container!

Once the container is packed, it is loaded by crane on a rail car and taken to a dock where it is again lifted by a crane and stacked with hundreds of other containers on a cargo liner.

Slide

The Bra Delivery

Upon departure from the United States, the journey can take anywhere from 8 weeks (for a container headed to Central America) to 5 months (for a container headed to inland Sub Saharan Africa).

After the boxes of bras arrive at their destination and clear customs, they are ready to be unloaded. While a few boxes may have deteriorated during shipping—requiring the bras to be repacked into plastic bags—the majority of the boxes are simply taken directly from the container and put into a large delivery truck which takes them to Free The Girls in-country storage facility.

Slide

The Bra Program

The boxes of bras are delivered to program locations where they are unloaded into a secure storage facility—typically, a large, steel storage unit.

The storage facility is padlocked to keep the inventory safe until it is distributed to the women in Free The Girls program.

Before a woman begins selling bras, she receives hands-on training from Free The Girls in-country staff to ensure that she has the knowledge, skills, and other tools necessary to be a successful entrepreneur.

Slide

The Bra Sellers

The women in Free The Girls program receive a bag of bras (about 100 bras) as their initial inventory for resale and personal use.

Whenever a woman is running low on bra inventory, she stops by and purchases additional bras at a price well below the local wholesale price.

As the women's businesses grow, so does their customers' demand for bras and, as a result, many of the women in the program purchase their additional bra inventory by the box (about 220-240 bras).

Slide

The Bra Store

So what does a bra store look like? It can take on many forms. Some women, like Ofelia pictured here, set up along the streets near their homes.

Each woman is given the freedom to choose how she wants to sell bras. As a result, the women come up with very creative ways of displaying their inventory, attracting new customers, and maintaining repeat customers.

Slide

The Bra-Velous Results

For women like Ofelia, selling bras not only offered her a way out of human trafficking, but allowed her the chance to get healthy, live independently, go back to school, and take care of her family.

Slide

The Bra Challenge

Free The Girls offers every woman the opportunity to be a part of something big, and getting involved is simple:

Donate a bra. Give a former slave a job.

Closing Slide