

Advocate Spotlight Award

Genice Jacobs



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About Genice Jacobs

Billboards, buses, bus shelters and trains in Oakland and Los Angeles are ablaze with provocative human rights messages that draw attention to each city's child sex trafficking epidemic and offer help to victims. The campaign was spearheaded by Genice Jacobs, an Oakland mom, who learned about the problem three and a half years ago from an NPR story and took-on raising awareness in her city of Oakland.

How She Got Started

Jacobs was shocked to learn that her community was one of the nation's epicenters of child sex trafficking. She soon came to understand that many other residents were also unaware of or misinformed about the rampant sex trafficking in their city. "Once I knew that girls as young as 11 or 12 were being beaten and raped for profit on the other side of town, I had to do something about it," Jacobs says. "This is a human rights crisis, it's

impacting our children and it wasn't getting the attention it warranted." She adds, "a lot of at-risk kids don't have moms to advocate for them. I figured I could be that mom."

She became an advocate for MISSEY, an Oakland nonprofit supporting commercial sexually exploited children (CSEC), and a spokesperson for California Against Slavery's Proposition 35 (Human Trafficking Initiative). In May 2013, Jacobs organized a hearing on CSEC by the Oakland Youth Commission and co-authored a resolution, which led to the creation of Oakland's CSEC Taskforce. In June, she approached Oakland Unified School District about sending a parent alert to middle and high school families.

What She Has Accomplished

Jacobs' efforts led to a provocative campaign known as Protect Oakland Kids, which appeared on 35 billboards and 30 bus shelters in Oakland and neighboring cities. Jacobs initiated a collaboration between the Alameda County District Attorney's office and MISSEY and secured donated billboard space from Clear Channel

Outdoor. She joined forces with creative director Suzanne Boutilier and graphic designer Jed Davis to create two campaigns with six different PSAs and produced the work for a total of \$5,000. The billboard PSAs targeted the general public, the bus shelter PSAs targeted victims of child sex trafficking. The ProtectOaklandKids campaign, which launched in January appeared on 35 billboards and 30 bus shelters in Oakland and neighboring cities. The campaign was extended to Los Angeles in April and appeared on 13 billboards, and all of LA County's 260 trains and 2,200 buses.

The campaign reached more than 1 million people and generated extensive news coverage, including the LA Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland Tribune, and CBS Local. The LA campaign is reaching more than 1 Million a day on buses and trains alone. The public service campaign was lauded in the U.S. House of Representatives and displayed in the California's State Capital and the National Press Club. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors honored Jacobs with the 2014 Modern Day Abolitionist Award for Advocacy.

What's Next

With California Against Slavery, Jacobs co-wrote SB1165 Sexual Abuse and Sex Trafficking Prevention Bill and helped introduce SB1388, a bill to penalize sex buyers. She is working on a series of radio public service announcements targeting urban youth. The Protect Oakland Kids campaign has been licensed to Clear Channel to enable other cities to use it. Several counties have already expressed interest.

Photos of the outdoor campaigns can be found at ProtectOaklandKids.org and ProtectLAKids.org.

For more information, contact genice@profluence.net.

Genice writes the blog Abolitionist Mom, which spotlights the best resources for public awareness and prevention education. www.AbolitionistMom.org

Q&A

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your work?

It has been gratifying to see how our billboard campaign raised community awareness and changed perceptions of the trafficked kids in our city. But, I have to say that being thanked by trafficking survivors who feel acknowledged by this campaign has moved me the most.

What has been the greatest challenge to bringing about change your various social justice endeavors?

Our city and school district still hasn't prioritized the prevention of child sex trafficking. This is gradually improving, but changing the status-quo is a longer process than it needs to be. It's disheartening that more people aren't moved to take on this extreme human rights abuse that is happening in our backyards. While this is unrelated, I have finally come to understand how 6 million Jews were allowed to be murdered during the Holocaust. Apathy is the culprit.

What message would you like to give to your readers?

You may be surprised by what you can achieve when you set your mind to addressing injustice and changing what isn't working. You don't have to be rich, famous or elected to make a difference. Regular people can lead the way to social change. The combination of passion, focus and initiative can enable you to make a big impact. You will never know what you are capable of achieving if you don't try.