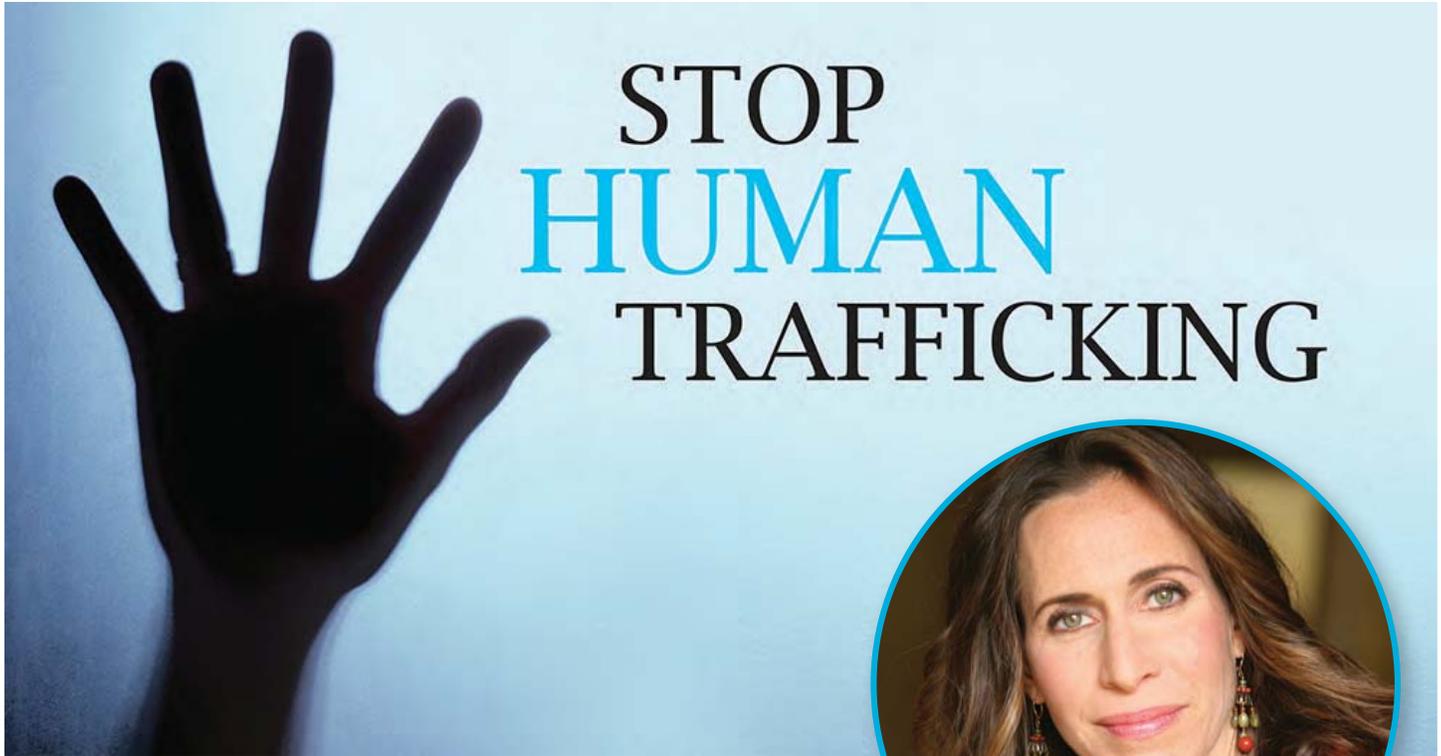


Fighting EXPLOITATION

Foster helps coordinate efforts to stop human trafficking



For as far back as she can remember, Rachel Foster '89 has aspired to help the vulnerable.

"I have always been committed to advocating for and empowering individuals who must navigate complex and what can often feel like insurmountable and unjust systems," Foster says. She's certainly accomplished her mission. As a Cornell student, Foster served as an advocate at the Tompkins County Task Force for Battered Women. She went on to work as a community organizer, helping elderly tenants at a Settlement House in New York City. After graduating from Brooklyn Law School, she worked as an attorney at South Brooklyn Legal Services.

Now Foster is working to combat human trafficking and help victims of sexual exploitation. She is the campaign director for the New Abolitionists, a national project to raise awareness about human trafficking, and a founding co-chair of World Without Exploitation, a national coalition of survivors of sexual exploitation and anti-trafficking advocates coordinating the fight against human trafficking.

"Human trafficking is not an issue that only exists in other countries" she says. "American-born women and girls, as well as a smaller percentage of boys, are bought, sold, and exploited in the sex trade. It is important to recognize that trafficking victims are often lured or coerced into prostitution as young adolescents."

The vast majority of victims of human trafficking experienced sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence, Foster explains. "The commonly used term 'sex work' fails to capture the majority of experiences individuals have in the sex trade both as minors and as adults," she says.

"The trauma experienced as a result of violence, threats, loss of identity, isolation, and a lack of education, self-determination, and stability, profoundly impact the psyche of a trafficking survivor well beyond the time she is actually enslaved."

Understanding the psychological underpinnings of sex trafficking is an important component of Foster's approach, which began in college.

"Human Ecology gave me a lens that helps me to look at an entire person and

Rachel Foster

where they fit in society," she says. "Learning

about psychology, anthropology, natural sciences, history, political science, and sociology helps me approach my work with a broad focus on the range of factors that influence people's lives. My approach to advocacy is based on a commitment to always seek a deeper understanding of an individual's life circumstances and influences beyond the particular issue I am dealing with at the moment."

In 2012, Foster received the New Yorkers Who Make a Difference Award from United Neighborhood Houses for her work representing disenfranchised New Yorkers. She also served as a member of the Citizens Committee for Children and chair of the Cornell Alumni Network committee in Brooklyn for 10 years.

— Sheri Hall