

Good News Story
JUST-ICE



GAVIN MURRAY SHARES HOW A DEEP CONCERN OVER HUMAN TRAFFICKING COMBINED WITH A PASSION FOR MAKING ICE CREAM BROUGHT JUST-ICE INTO BEING.

'A physio and a vicar walk into an ice cream shop' - it sounds like the beginning of a joke, but it is in fact our reality. We, (my wife, Sally the Physio, and myself, Gavin the Baptist Minister) run an ethical ice cream business providing trauma-informed employment for people with a lived experience of human trafficking. Let me tell you our story of how that happened.

An unexpected evening out for Sally with great coffee and cake changed our lives forever. It was an evening talking about the horror of human trafficking and modern slavery. A few months later, I heard a similar talk. Once we heard some of the stories of those caught up in it - we were changed people. Added to that was the realisation that slavery was happening in this country, we were desperate to be involved - not that we should ignore it if it didn't happen here. Once you've heard these stories - you can't 'unhear' them. Our faith in a God, who became flesh and blood and dwelt among us, was inspiration to be part of the antidote - whatever that looks like.

So, what is human trafficking and how do people get caught up in it and end up enslaved in British houses? It starts with a vulnerability that the traffickers look

out for. The biggest driver is economic - when someone is experiencing poverty they are desperate for a ticket out. It could be a young woman or man in an eastern European rural village or urban environment; a British citizen equally without prospects; a teenager wanting to be loved, looked after or belong somewhere. Similarly it could be people experiencing depression or other mental health episodes, coming out of the care system, or leaving prison.

In all cases, the trafficker comes along and poses as a friend and over time builds a relationship of trust, the foundation to what comes later: a job offer which involves coming to the UK or moving to another city. Once there, the supposed friend turns on them, removes their papers, tells them they owe lots of money and need to pay it back by working, and force them into exploitive labour: sexual, manual or domestic. They are also warned not to go to the police as they are corrupt and can't be trusted. Their nightmare is complete. Night after night, day after day. Abuse, violence, threat, fear. Repeat ... repeat.

The trauma that these people experience is barely fathomable, it broke our hearts, we sobbed and sobbed, as God shared his heart for them, with us.

We began volunteering to help raise funds and awareness to help more and more people get found and rescued. But was it enough? And what could we do, a physio and a vicar? We learned that rescue is not an event, but a process

that begins when they are found and set free. Their recovery is a long hard climb up a steep and slippery slope back to some sort of normality and dignity, and the key to that lasting recovery is healthy, gainful employment in a loving and supportive community.

Rewind a few years, when I was ordained, two good friends gave me a present: an ice cream maker (they knew I loved my ice cream - who doesn't?) and a Ben & Jerry's Recipe Book. We all need friends like that don't we? So started my journey in ice cream making - for family birthdays, special occasions, Christmas, or even charity events. I loved it - and people seemed to like it too.

Then one day, I was serving my homemade ice cream to the family (to Sally and our three children), and had a dreamy moment where I said: 'If we ever had a shop of our own one day, it would be an ice cream shop and we'd employ survivors of human trafficking - you know a sort of social justice thing.'

Immediately Sally replied, 'You'd have to call it Just-Ice!'

And we all went 'Ooooooooh'.

And that was it! The idea started and it became something that we knew we had to give birth to. We were scared about giving up our jobs, moving house, and raising our family. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia said: 'If your dreams don't scare you they're not big enough'. Martin Luther King Jr said:

'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter'. So we kept stepping out.

Straight away, it was clear that God was speaking and opening doors for us faster than we had ever experienced before. People were offering help right, left and centre in all the various skills needed to get a business off the ground.

One particular area was legal and the specifics of intellectual property: could we use the name Just-Ice and make it our own or was it owned already? Cutting a long story short, one of Sally's clients did this legal work for us for free and discovered that the name was already owned by Danone, the yoghurt company. Amazingly, they were Danone's lawyers too! After a brief correspondence they agreed graciously to let us have the name - for free! Wow!

We were bowled over and so we kept following the trail that God laid before us. This was clearly something he wanted us to do, and so much so that we left our jobs in London and moved to Derby where we now live and have our manufacturing base (come and see us if you're passing). We use local and, wherever possible, Fair Trade ingredients to make the best premium, artisan, dairy ice cream ever. And we're committed to good ethical practices for a business such as plastic free packaging and Fair Trade clothing.

So far we have employed nine people from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicity and gender. Some of them have moved on to bigger and better jobs once they had gained their confidence and recovered, and some are still with us, making the ice cream and managing sales.

We have one social franchise in Poynton, near Stockport, Manchester, where they are selling our ice cream and employing survivors too. The journey has been a huge rollercoaster and learning curve but we have seen God come through for us on so many occasions we have almost lost count. It is so clear to us that justice is on God's heart. The Bible speaks clearly about that in many places. Micah 6:8 is often known and quoted:

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

We also see it in the messianic mandate that Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 at the beginning of his ministry:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

It has not been easy at all - pandemic, war, cost of living and the energy crisis all taking its toll on us and our sector. But it is a privilege to partner with God and to see people who've been subjected to the worst form of human treatment, and then to be shown God's love and compassion and healing, and be given a new chance and a new hope. A privilege to be a voice for the voiceless (Proverbs 31:8).

Our vision is to see a network of Just-Ice shops all over the country, providing the same trauma-informed employment for people with a lived experience of slavery ... and, of course, the same fantastic ethical ice cream!

If you'd like to follow us, then find us at justicecreamuk on Instagram or Facebook. If you'd like to support us, then please do go to our website www.just-ice.org.

Gavin Murray is Director & Head Joy-Maker of Just-Ice. Gavin became minister of Morden Baptist church in Surrey in 1999. Whilst there, he and his wife Sally became aware of the issue of modern slavery and decided to start Just-Ice, to offer trauma informed employment to those who had been exploited. In 2017 they moved to Derby with their 3 children to open their ice cream shop. Pop in and say hello if you are in Derby!