

# Marion Kendall '15 Lights A Path for Survivors of Human Trafficking

**M**ercy College alumna Marion Kendall '15 knows the isolation of trauma, having grown up as a foster child in multiple group homes. Many with such a life background would tend to hide it when pursuing a career. Not Kendall. The Mount Vernon, New York native finds both her career and life purpose in helping victims of trauma. Today, as the executive director of Lifeway Network (Lifeway), a Tarrytown-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting female survivors of human trafficking, she is lighting a path of hope and empowerment for a far too often forgotten population of New Yorkers.



Photo provided by Marion Kendall

Kendall's path toward this work began in Mercy's Social Work Program as an adult learner in her mid-thirties. At that time, she was fresh from grieving the loss of her brother to murder. In Kendall's grief, she recalled a conversation she had with her brother in which he stated that she had an ability to "touch people and empathize" with them. He encouraged her to do something with these traits.

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Kendall said she truly found a place her grieving soul needed while she was a student at Mercy. "I was able to cope with the loss of my brother through my studies and through learning about the concepts and the framework of social work." In contemplating a future career, she realized she gravitated toward the lessons and the research her professors brought to life. "They brought real-life experience about social work into the classroom. It was inspirational," said Kendall.

After earning her bachelor's degree, Kendall earned a master's degree in social work and went on to serve in various leadership roles in health care and education. Yet, a chance to find her true calling came in 2019 with

the news that Lifeway's pioneering founder, Sister Joan S. Dawber, SC, was stepping away from her executive director role. After being appointed by Lifeway's executive search committee to fill Dawber's role, it became obvious to Kendall she had landed in a place that fit her life's mission of serving those with critical needs.

Since Lifeway first opened its doors more than 15 years ago, it has offered short-term emergency housing for female survivors of human trafficking, and for the last decade has operated a long-term transitional safe house. The program centers around four areas: community, healing, economic empowerment and life skills. "It's an individualized holistic approach

to help survivors," said Kendall. "Each woman is given the chance to rebuild life after trauma."

Though commonly misunderstood to be a problem occurring mainly in underdeveloped nations, New York rates as one of the five top states in the country with human trafficking cases. Lifeway is one of two organizations in New York State to provide resources and comprehensive services to women who have been victimized. Often described as a form of modern-day slavery, human trafficking occurs when a trafficker uses force, coercion, fraud or a person's economic vulnerability to lead a person into sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices.

"We are just there to support them. And that support can come through empathy. It can come through being an instrument of change by being vulnerable," said Kendall, who does not shy away from sharing her own challenging past with Lifeway's clients. Her belief is that this sharing makes inspiration and transformation possible.

Leading by inspiration is something Kendall has done with her son, Kendall Saxby, who followed her footsteps to Mercy, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice in 2019. "Mercy has been in my soul for a very long time," said Kendall. "We've both had a wonderful, amazing experience." To hear more from Kendall, visit [www.mercy.edu/marionkendall](http://www.mercy.edu/marionkendall).