

Sarah Bushnell ([00:00](#)):

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Steve Mullen ([00:16](#)):

Welcome to this latest episode of Inside Virginia's Community Colleges. I'm your host, Steve Mullen. This season, we've talked about why community college is a smart choice and how to earn your degree without debt. In these last two episodes, we're talking about how to make the most of life after your degree. Joining us today are two G3 ambassadors. As we mentioned in the last episode, companies that sign up to be G3 ambassadors commit to guaranteed interviews and preferential hiring for G3 graduates. Our guests today are not only helping community college graduates, but they're doing incredibly important work in their industry and throughout the Lynchburg, Virginia community. Joy Cover, President of Freedom 4/24, and Sarah Bushnell, Administrative Coordinator of Freedom 4/24, welcome to the program.

Joy Cover ([01:03](#)):

Thank you.

Sarah Bushnell ([01:04](#)):

Thank you.

Steve Mullen ([01:05](#)):

Joy, let's start with you. Can you tell us a bit about your organization and why you became a G3 ambassador?

Joy Cover ([01:11](#)):

Absolutely. Freedom 4/24, we are an anti-trafficking organization based here in Lynchburg, Virginia, with both a local and a global reach. So our mission officially is to prevent and end sexual exploitation and trafficking both locally and globally. And we do that through a number of ways. One, we provide awareness about the issue. So many people, if they're aware that human trafficking is happening, oftentimes they attribute that to being something overseas, something out of sight, out of mind. But in fact, that's something that impacts us here in the United States, here in our own community. So we have events to raise awareness about the issue. At a deeper level, we also provide prevention education.

([01:57](#)):

This is very intentional education helping youth, parents, different community members within specific occupations to understand what human trafficking is and that it can impact them. And then, what are some really practical ways they can protect themselves and their communities? And then, on the other side, one more way we help to prevent and end human trafficking is through expanding the work of our partners. We as an organization, we don't provide direct aftercare services. What I mean by that, we don't have a safe house. A lot of anti-trafficking organizations are providing that restoration for individuals who've already been victimized. We don't do that direct service, our partners do. Instead, what we do is we give them money. So we give them grants to help fund that work, we take trips to serve alongside them on the ground and we advocate for them.

(02:47):

That's a bit of a snapshot. Our direct services are prevention, education and then we expand the work of our partners through funding and advocacy. We are a G3 ambassador because working with different colleges allows us the opportunity for that education. So we are wanting to educate as many people as possible because we feel everyone needs to understand what human trafficking is and then to be able to protect those within their sphere, within their bubble, so to speak. It's a common term now that COVID has happened, "Who's in your bubble?" Well, in the trafficking world, we want to educate people so that they know how to protect those individuals within their bubble. That's one main motivation. And then the other is to be able to connect with interns who can help us to continue our work to duplicate ourselves and to be able to do more.

Steve Mullen (03:37):

This next question is for both of you, but let's start with Sarah. What called you to this line of work?

Sarah Bushnell (03:42):

Yeah, when I was in eighth grade, I had a friend who was being trafficked. I didn't know what it was, I just knew something was wrong. I started doing a lot of research and I came across Freedom 4/24's website and started educating myself on what human trafficking was and what I could do about it. And then when I was 17, we were on the border of New York and Canada and someone tried trafficking my sister and I.

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But because I knew what human trafficking was and what to look for, I was able to say, "Hey dad, this person we've known for years, he's asking me to go on a yacht and this doesn't seem right," and he was trying to traffic us. So it prevented me from being trafficked, which, when it was time to... When this opportunity came up to work with Freedom 4/24, I was excited because I can help educate more people so that they can be prevented from being trafficked and then we can help those who've been trafficked and help the survivors.

Steve Mullen (04:49):

That's an amazing story. Joy, what about you?

Joy Cover (04:52):

My story is not as exciting. Essentially, it was education. I was in my 20s and I knew about human trafficking, but happened to attend an anti-trafficking film being shown at this local theater, followed by a Q&A led by Gloria Steinem, and so I went to that. And just through the video, the questions and then my own reading, my mind was just... I mean, it's one of those things once you know, you can't not know.

(05:24):

And so for me it became just a personal passion through my own educating, my own reading and I found ways to financially give to different organizations that were fighting this issue. I found ways to volunteer. And so then in 2015, when I had the opportunity to actually work at an anti-trafficking organization, I jumped at the chance because it gave me the opportunity to combine my personal passion with my professional career.

Steve Mullen (05:53):

And Sarah, you were recently hired by Freedom 4/24. What skills do you think a recent graduate needs to succeed at that organization?

Sarah Bushnell ([06:01](#)):

If someone's recently graduated, typically we would have them intern with us. There's not usually a lot of new hires that work with us, but the ability to think critically, to work independently but also work together as a team, basically. Just having a passion to fight human trafficking before starting to interact with Freedom 4/24 is really helpful.

Steve Mullen ([06:27](#)):

And Joy, what would you say are some of the biggest obstacles to new hires in such a very sensitive line of work?

Joy Cover ([06:34](#)):

I think one of the things that we want to make people aware of is that it's not what you see on TV, the dramatic Hollywood depiction of breaking down doors and rescuing people. A lot of times interns that we have, that request to work with us or volunteers who come alongside us, they expect the work to be glamorous and they expect the work to be like what they see on TV. The work that we do involves people using everyday skills, using their skill sets, their passions to shine a light on one of the darkest, most evil things in the world. And so everybody has a role to play in this.

([07:20](#)):

So for us at Freedom 4/24, what that looks like is sometimes sitting at your computer, writing emails, asking people for money to help support different fundraisers that we have, creating curriculum to educate people, hosting events. My point is that if you don't have the correct mindset around what doing something about this issue is, you could be very disappointed because it's not this glamorous thing. But it takes those everyday, faithful interactions to build a sustainable organization that actually does something to provide freedom for a lifetime. We want to make sure that people who join us understand it's those small things that add up and build towards the overall vision and the overall mission for what we're trying to accomplish.

Steve Mullen ([08:14](#)):

And Joy, can you share with us what a day in the life of an intern would look like at Freedom 4/24?

Joy Cover ([08:20](#)):

Well, one thing that we at Freedom 4/24, really do try to do is create meaningful internship opportunities for those individuals who join us. We do have job descriptions, so we have interns, possibilities that range from working with our communications department, writing grants. I've had policy interns, research interns, we've had interns who've helped create our curriculum, who have been able to help implement that. So there's a lot of different roles and what we always tell our interns, when you come to Freedom 4/24, we have built a very competitive internship program. And with that, you're not going to be getting coffee for us, you're not going to be doing small, mundane tasks. You bring value to the organization in your role, and so we take very seriously, who we offer that to. And you will have a specific kind of goal or task. That being said, as with every nonprofit organization, we all wear different hats.

([09:19](#)):

So you could have a main focus, but you'll be involved with whatever we have going on that day, like this morning we had a sponsored breakfast and it was all hands on deck. So an intern could come in and they could be working directly with their supervisor to accomplish whatever tasks they might have that day, and that can range from, again, it depends on the role, but creating graphics for social media, writing a blog, researching some of the most recent occurrences of human trafficking in the state, looking into data regarding what policies are being presented at the general assembly, you name it. So it really is not a simple answer, it really does depend on what that job description per intern is, but we do take a lot of care in creating very meaningful roles. And then we ask interns who join us to take that seriously and to treat it like a professional job because we are treating it equally as important.

Steve Mullen ([10:18](#)):

And the last question goes to Sarah, and I know this has been covered a little bit, but what do you think recent graduates or current students should know about working at your organization?

Sarah Bushnell ([10:28](#)):

The work we do impacts you, too. We think human trafficking is in third world countries on the other side of the world, but it's here in Virginia, in our colleges. A recent statistic is the average age for trafficking in Virginia is the age of 20 to 39, and that's from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. So it's important that they know that our work here is not just for across the world. It's for here in Lynchburg, here in Virginia, and that is something we need to care about, not just something that we have the option to care about. It's something really important and we're a team full of passionate individuals who want to end this.

Steve Mullen ([11:13](#)):

All right, Sarah Bushnell and Joy Cover, thanks so much for being with us today. I really appreciate it.

Sarah Bushnell ([11:18](#)):

Thank you.

Joy Cover ([11:18](#)):

Thank you for having us.

Steve Mullen ([11:19](#)):

To learn more about the important work that Freedom 4/24 is doing, you can visit freedom424.org. And of course, to learn more about the G3 program, please visit viginia3.com. Thanks to all of our guests this season on Inside Virginia's Community Colleges and thanks to you for listening. I'm Steve Mullen.