

<https://chvnradio.com/articles/from-survivors-to-advocates-illuminate-hope-gala-unites-hearts-to-end-human-trafficking>

From survivors to advocates: Illuminate Hope Gala unites hearts to end human trafficking

By Sylvia St. Cyr

CHVN News – Feb 21, 2025

The Illuminate Hope Gala was a beautiful reminder of the resiliency of the human spirit Thursday evening, appropriately taking place at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg.

"The goal is really to elevate the issue of human trafficking and gather the community around this cause," says Janet Campbell, the President and CEO of the [Joy Smith Foundation](#). "To make sure they have information and hopefully inspire them by what they learn and hear today."

There were many special guests throughout the event, including Joshua Perry of Baden K-9 who came from Ontario with two of their specially trained pack.

"We're a family-operated business," says Perry. "I'm second generation and my son's third generation. It was founded by my father and mother. We breed, raise, and train Dutch Shepherds, German Shepherds, and Belgian Malinois. We're a Christian company."

The two dogs did a special performance before the night came to a close.

"It's important to me and my family, to our company, especially when you see the United States ahead of the game with their charities, supporting veterans, supporting sex trafficking," says Perry. "When you have a family and charity, the resources, the mindset, and the mission statement to be able to help support and end this unfortunate situation we're in in Canada, it's motivating."

The Winnipeg Youth Chorus performed twice during the event. To start the evening the women sang "O Canada" as the crowd stood. Later, they sang an original song written about the issue of human trafficking, called "Fallen Angel." As dinner started there was a hoop dancer who performed in the middle stage.

Military Veterans

The keynote speaker for the gala was a retired Canadian Special Forces operator and current world champion arm wrestler, Devon Larratt.

"Arm wrestling is a sport that's grown," says Larratt. "I've done it my whole life. It started with my grandmother when I was five and I went competitive at 19. Now I compete all over the world."

Larratt was in the country of Georgia earlier in the week doing a match, which he won. He flew into Winnipeg just for the gala.

"I'm just so honoured to be here," says Larratt. "When you think about Canada, what a great country we have, it's things like this that just make us that much better. Any way we can draw attention to the activities of the Joy Smith Foundation, I think, makes our country greater."

Larratt is now retired from the military but he has a powerful testimony of resilience after having spent many tours in the Middle East serving Canada.

"While I was serving in Afghanistan, we were shot down on a mission. It's a long story. I did seven tours and a good five of them were combat tours. I feel like a lucky guy."

To introduce Larratt to the stage was a war hero, known as Canadian Dave, Dave Lavery, a friend of Larratt's who was introduced to the Joy Smith Foundation while the pair were in Dubai together serving in the Armed Forces.

Survivor Story

To highlight the work being done to help survivors of human trafficking, a survivor named Nicole Hunter took the stage to share a short portion of her personal journey.

"As a human trafficking survivor, I can tell you that your support is truly touching," said Hunter. "It seems like a lifetime ago when I knew nothing about what human trafficking was, even though I myself had in fact experienced the horror of the modern-day slave trade."

After Hunter was able to get out of being trafficked, she was cared for by the Joy Smith Foundation.

"Ten years after narrowly exiting the mental prison my trafficker locked me in, I found myself sitting in a human trafficking presentation I thought would have nothing to do with me personally. As I watched a small but fiery white-haired lady talk about the tactics traffickers use to lure their victims, I realized my experience was textbook. Joy Smith gave me the missing piece of the puzzle I'd been trying to put together for the last decade. Joy Smith is a warrior and I believe she will never receive the fullness of the honour and respect she truly deserves. She was my champion before I knew I needed one."

Foundation of Community Support

The Joy Smith Foundation now has three generations currently working toward helping end human trafficking. Smith founded the non-profit and she is recognized as a leading advocate against human trafficking worldwide. Campbell, Smith's daughter, is now the president and CEO of the foundation. Campbell's daughter Kate has stepped up to continue her family's work.

"When I fought cancer I needed a team," says Campbell, who was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer in 2020. "Survivors of trafficking need the same. They need a community to help them rebuild. Nobody can fight this alone."

The keynote speaker resonated with Campbell's remarks, sharing that we all have a part to play in ending human trafficking in Canada.

"We lift each other up," said Larratt. "You can be the difference in someone's life and empower them to live their best life. I know because I've been a recipient."
