

## **January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month**

### **IICONN Program Spotlight: Project Rescue**

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims are forced, defrauded or coerced into labor or sexual exploitation. It is estimated that approximately 800,000 to 900,000 victims are trafficked annually across international borders, and between 14,000 and 17,000 of those victims are trafficked into the US.

IICONN's Project Rescue, an Anti-Human Trafficking Program, is designed to assist victims of human trafficking identified in the State of Connecticut. Project Rescue is funded by a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, within the U. S. Department of Justice and a Trafficking Victims Assistance Program grant through the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

Leonela Cruz-Ahuatl, Program Manager of Project Rescue, co-chairs the Connecticut Coalition Against Trafficking (CTCAT), a coordinated anti-human trafficking network in the state of Connecticut. CTCAT's aim is to increase awareness of the issue of human trafficking among law enforcement, professionals in a variety of industries, and the public at-large so that more victims can be identified and assisted. CTCAT members include victim service providers, law enforcement personnel, activists, faith-based community members, educators, researchers, and state and local government officials. Through its members and partners, CTCAT offers specialized training on prevention, victim identification, and legal and social services available to victims in the state.

### ***A Story of Resilience and Reunification***

Elena fled her home country of Honduras in 2006 seeking safety and economic stability. She was a single mother, unemployed and without a home for her family. She left behind her two children, with the hope that she would be able to provide a home for her family soon thereafter. Her brother, who lived in the United States, offered to help her out with a place to stay. She got as far as Mexico and her brother changed his mind, refusing to assist her. Elena's mother, still in Honduras, found someone - a "coyote" - who could help Elena cross the US/Mexico border. The coyote helped Elena cross the border but then imprisoned her at his workplace, forcing her to work as an exotic dancer in his bar. He attempted to prostitute her but was unsuccessful. He also forced her to pay a large debt, in exchange for helping her enter the US, threatening her and her family if they did not pay. In response, Elena's mother sold her house to pay the debt to the coyote. The threats persisted and Elena was finally able to escape.

Elena fled to her brother's house. He and his wife took her in, but they were both drug addicted, frequently becoming violent and physically abusive. Once again, Elena fled. She was able to connect with a family member who helped her as she struggled to face and deal with the physical, sexual and emotional abuse she had experienced for so many years. Finally able to

get mental health counseling, Elena's counselor referred her to ICONN's Immigration Legal Services.

ICONN's Project Rescue staff supported Elena with referrals and services to help her regain her dignity and stability in her life. ICONN's Immigration Legal Services staff provided sound professional legal advice and identified the immigration relief to which Elena was entitled. During the long multi-year process, ICONN's attorney helped Elena navigate the process of applying for a T-visa and helped her remain patient and hopeful. At last, Elena received her visa, which provided her with legal protection and enabled her to apply for her children to come to the United States. Project Rescue staff, along with her ICONN attorney and the International Organization for Migration collaboratively coordinated the travel arrangements for one of Elena's sons.

On December 13, 2016, after ten years apart, Elena was reunited with her twelve- year old son. He landed at JFK and walked into the warm waiting embrace of his mother. Elena expects the rest of her family to arrive early in 2017. After many years of separation, the family will once again be reunited.

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#### **ICONN Partner Highlight: Grace Farms Foundation**

Thank you, Grace Farms Foundation, for the Giving Tree! For the second year, ICONN clients were the gracious recipients of gifts from the Giving Tree at Grace Farms Foundation in New Canaan. Members of the community provided beautiful and generous gifts to refugees, survivors, and their families.

Before ...



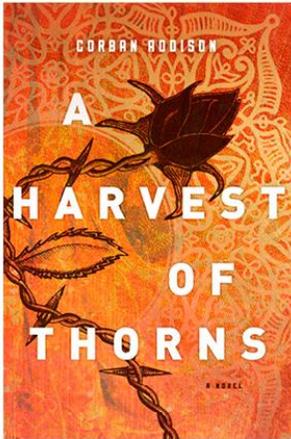
After ...



IICONN is honored to be one of Grace Farms' Justice partners and is proud to work side by side as we fight to eradicate human trafficking in the state of Connecticut and worldwide.

If you have not visited Grace Farms, we encourage you to go! Grace Farms is a welcoming place, where a series of building are seamlessly integrated into 80 acres of open space for people to experience nature, encounter the arts, pursue justice, foster community, and explore faith. We encourage you to explore their website [gracefarms.org](http://gracefarms.org), or better yet, visit in person.

Among other wonderful programs, IICONN would like to highlight the following upcoming event at Grace Farms:



for more information  
and registration visit  
[gracefarms.org/calendar](http://gracefarms.org/calendar)

join us for the launch of international bestselling author  
Corban Addison's *A Harvest of Thorns*

*A beloved American corporation with an explosive secret. A disgraced former  
journalist looking for redemption. A corporate executive with nothing left to lose.*

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Saturday, January 28 | 2–4 pm | free

Grace Farms  
365 Lukes Wood Road  
New Canaan, CT

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featured reading by the author  
and commentary from:

Humanity United  
Grace Farms Foundation

Audacity Factory  
Transparentem

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grace farms & Corban  
foundation Addison

**Lastly, hope you can join us this Wednesday, January 18 for the launch of a documentary  
about labor trafficking and exploitation.**

**The U-Turn, A Transformational Journey**

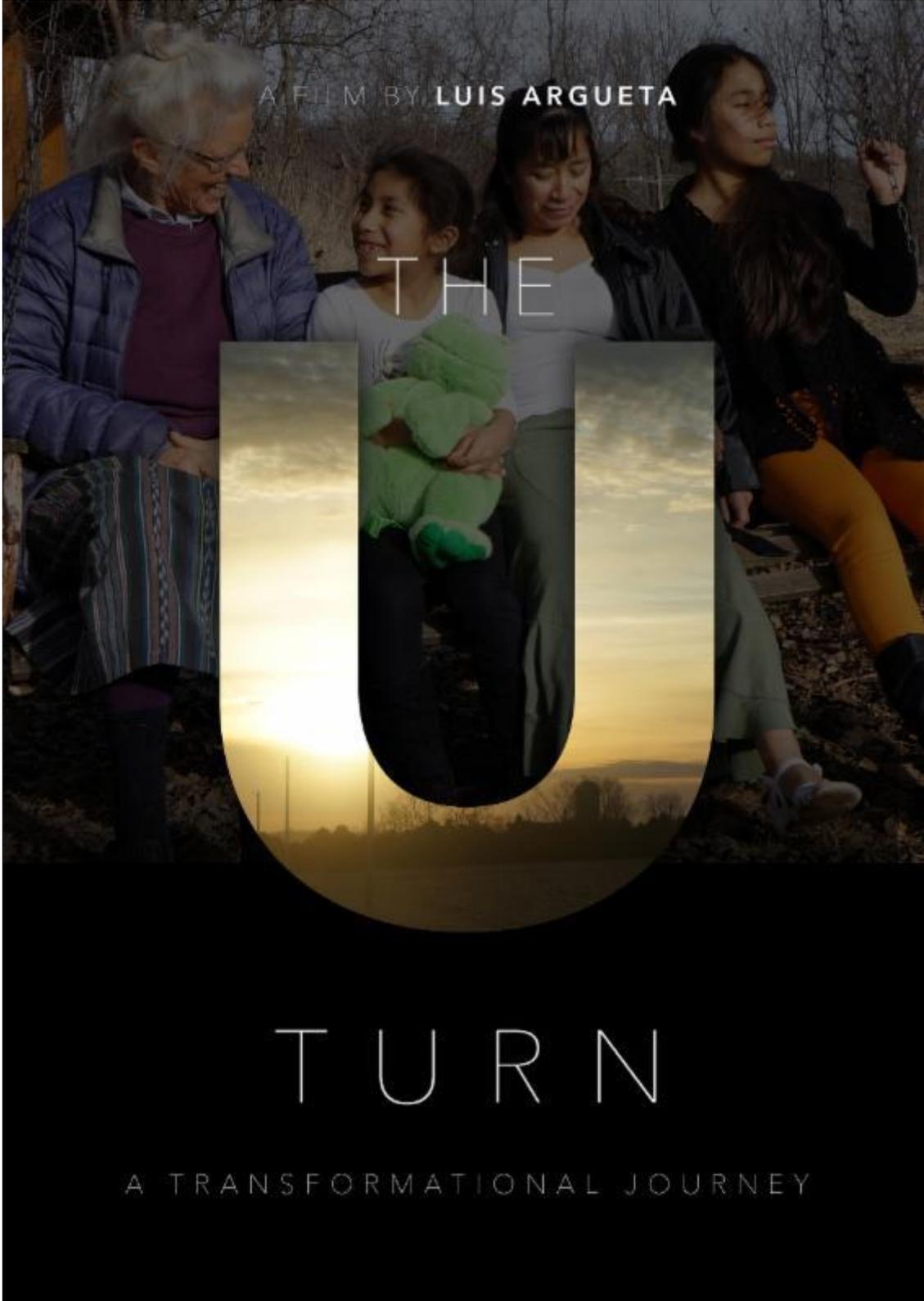
*Co-hosted by IICONN, Neighbors Link Stamford, & Catholic Charities of Fairfield County  
Immigration Services*

**Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup> 7:30pm**

**The Avon Theatre**

227 Bedford Street, Stamford, CT 06901

[Watch the trailer](#)



A FILM BY LUIS ARGUETA

THE



TURN

A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY