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From the "Ouachitonian": Isabella Bejarano



By Angela Web

October 17, 2022

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – After witnessing a heartbreaking experience, she wanted to make a difference. She thought about those around her and desired to take a stand so that others could look out for it as well.

Isabella Bejarano, a sophomore elementary education and Spanish double major from Bogotá, Colombia, led the 2021 Walk for Freedom at Arkadelphia High School in October. This event had a total of 130 attendees and 22 volunteers raising more than \$700.

Bejarano explained that The Walk for Freedom is meant to raise awareness for human trafficking, modern-day slavery. It is a silent walk held in cities around the world to show support for victims and survivors, to raise awareness in our communities and to fundraise.

"I found A21 as I investigated organizations against trafficking that I could get involved with," Bejarano said.

The event started seven years ago by the organization A21. A21 is a campaign that is global 501 non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to fight human trafficking, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, forced slave labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude and child soldiery.

“When I was 16, I witnessed a human trafficking deal, and had no idea what to do to report it or how to help the girls being sold,” Bejarano said. “So, I researched because I never wanted to be in that position again, and I don’t want anyone else to be. I want people to feel informed and empowered about what they should do if they ever witness a situation like that or if they are trying to educate others to mitigate risk because if only 1% of the world becomes aware of this problem, we will have twice as many advocates as victims.”

Bejarano created a committee with someone from each classification and an alumnus, with different talents and connections that allowed the committee to reach different clubs and organizations on campus, as well as engage local churches and businesses. They met up almost every week and discussed what the committee needed to do. On the night before the event, they gathered volunteers to make posters and assign them their roles.

“Mrs. Judy Duvall is my greatest encourager to serve and lead,” Bejarano said. “She also sent it out to TranServe to help me get more volunteers.”

After holding the first Walk for Freedom in Arkadelphia, Bejarano hopes that this event will be a yearly occurrence for Ouachita as well as the Arkadelphia community. Ouachita students are encouraged to serve the community and help other students, like Isabella, change the world one step at a time.

Photo by Levi Dade