

Karen Strassman Is A Voice For The Homeless and Trafficked

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Actress and voice actress, Karen Strassman, uses her voice for good and evil on the screen, but entirely for good offscreen, as she works with, and advocates for, homeless and human trafficked youth in Los Angeles. To learn more about this passionate woman and her powerful work, please read our exclusive interview below.

Where are you based?

My apartment and my cat are in Los Angeles, but I work in many cities including Atlanta, New Orleans, and New York City.

What got you interested in acting?

I was inexplicably drawn to acting ever since I was a little girl. I made up plays in my basement with my friends, which my poor parents had to sit through, and I joined every school play that I could. I dreamed of being one of those girls in the TV series "Little House on the Prairie." Then when I was 13 years old, I got to play the role of Helen Keller in a beautiful production of "The Miracle Worker." I couldn't wait to get to the theatre after school for rehearsals and I never wanted to leave. I would blindfold myself for many of the rehearsals, and spend any extra time trying to find my way around the theatre or my home with my eyes closed so I could try to imagine what it was like to be blind and deaf. The whole experience was magical, and it was then that I fell irreversibly in love with acting and the empathetic nature of it.

As a voiceover artist, you have also lent your voice in many games,

cartoons and commercials, including Disneyland Paris! How did you get involved with voice acting? Growing up, were you always into voiceover work? What got you interested in it?

Growing up I was always passionate about theater, movies and TV. Voiceover didn't really cross my path until I was a student living in France. I was hired along with three other actors to record audio cassettes for French children learning English to accompany a French/English magazine called "Hi Kids!" It was the first time I had ever been in a recording studio, and I just kept winging it. They had me recording a voice for Pocahontas, Lady Godiva, old women, little children, animals, and all kinds of accents. The other actors were professional v.o. artists already, and I learned so much from watching them. After that, there was a big search in Paris to find the right person to dub the voice of St. Bernadette into English for the big French movie director Jean Delannoy's new film about the Saint. I had never even been in a dubbing studio before and had no idea what to do, but somehow I ended up auditioning anyway, and my voice just sort of magically fit into the body of the actress playing Bernadette. Working on this film was my school for dubbing and ADR, and if you take a pilgrimage to Lourdes, I'm told they still show the film there with my voice-over. After that the world of animation, video games, and so forth started opening up for me, and the rest is history.

Is there a genre you like to do voice acting for the most?

Definitely original animation and motion capture.

How do you find it different from acting? Do you have a preference between the two?

It's actually not as different from other acting as people might think. A lot of people think that voice acting is about "doing a voice," but it's really about

making a character come to life under imaginary circumstances, just like with theater, TV or film. The only difference is that people can't see you, so you have to allow your feelings and predicament to be expressed just through your voice. People often ask me the best way to train for voiceover, and I tell them to do as much theater as they can.

We see that you trained in France. Do you find the film and acting industry different in France? What was the environment like compared to Hollywood?

No, I don't think it's fundamentally that different. Great acting is the ability to tell the truth in imaginary circumstances and allow all of the subtle and vulnerable sides of ourselves to come through. There are brilliant actors, story-tellers, theatre, TV and movie-makers all over the world. This art defies cultural and societal barriers. Any differences are just superficial.

Jejune loves that you work with [Covenant House California](#). Can you tell us a little bit about this non-profit? Why did you choose to work with them?

Covenant House California (CHC) is a non-profit youth homeless shelter that provides sanctuary and support for homeless and trafficked youth, ages 18-24. They believe that no young person deserves to be homeless; that every young person in California deserves shelter, food, clothing, education, and most importantly, to be loved.

Homeless youth between 18 and 24 years old have very few options. Once they have aged out of any child-protection services, their only choice is to live on the street or find a very temporary shelter. Covenant house is not only a shelter for these kids, but they also provide wrap around services. CHC offers a full continuum of services to meet the physical, emotional, educational, vocational, and spiritual well-being of these young individuals

with the goal of providing them with the best chance for success in independence. They provide medical services, mental health services, career services, school (charter school onsite), three meals a day, and activities. CHC has facilities to help kids get a GED or high school diploma right on-site. Their mission is to help heal these kids from the inside out and give them opportunities they've never had before.

The first time a friend introduced me to CHC, I just couldn't get over how extraordinary the origination was. When I started listening to all of the moving success stories, life after life that was not only saved but literally transformed, I couldn't stop crying. As an actor, it's sort of a reflex to constantly be putting myself in the shoes of others, and I just couldn't imagine how hard some of these children have had it in their lives, and what they have been able to accomplish because of CHC. There are very few shelters in California to begin with and no others are like this one.

Homelessness is a prevalent issue across America and we love that you are working to support young adults and the youth at homeless shelters. Can you tell us more about their present needs?

On a given day in the State of California, it is estimated that there are 6000 teenagers on the streets. CHC serves 4700 young people a year between LA and the Bay Area. They usually have 60 waitlisted at a time because they don't have the resources yet to serve more. They house 88 young people on site, then help them move into other housing permanently, and they want to continue to add more beds and serve more youth. They're even expanding to OC in the next 12-18 months.

Covenant House California not only works with homeless kids, but trafficked youth. Can you talk more about this?

One in four of the youths that come to CHC are survivors of human

trafficking.

Outreach vans targeting trafficked youth go out onto streets once a week, handing out food, make-up kits and providing the information to come to the shelter.

If a trafficked youth shows up at the shelter, they do NOT go on a waitlist, but are admitted right away so they can be protected. They have a special room, and care for their, HT victims, as well as work with other organizations to best serve them.

CHC is currently looking for someone to donate their time and talents to help beautify that room that the girls go into and they also really need sweatpants for girls of all sizes.

I've included the information for those who wish to contact the organization for those reading this and wanting to get involved or support them on any level.

Human trafficking is an ever increasing issue. Do you see it becoming more prevalent in California?

Yes, absolutely. It used to be hard to identify or find these victims because they are taught to blend into society so well. You have probably passed a girl who's being trafficked a hundred times and have no idea. The good news is organizations like CHC are getting better at identifying these victims and paying more attention to the whole issue.

What are some of the difficulties or challenges of working with the homeless?

In the 18 to 24 year old age range, a big of a challenge is that they aren't always ready to make changes yet (which can be normal with anyone in that age group, homeless or not).

CHC has an open door policy, and kids can come in and out as much as they want. Often, they will come and go a lot before they commit to going through the program, and many never get that far.

I love what CHC says about this. They say that their job is to believe in these kids more than they believe in themselves.

Homelessness is also on the rise in France and remains a significant social issue. Is the homeless problem in France similar to the narratives you see here in the States?

Yes, absolutely. However, France does have more government funded services.

What would you like to see be done about the homeless problem? What can people do now to help alleviate the issue?

The cost of living in Los Angeles is too high for anyone on minimum wage. It's become almost impossible to survive on minimum wage. I believe this somehow needs to change.

Less than three percent of shelter beds in California are designated for transitional age youth 18 to 24 year old. And this blew me away when I heard it: 50% of all homeless youth who age out of foster care will be homeless within 72 hours.

So given these circumstances, helping organizations like Covenant House really does make a difference.

(I would add that it's surprising how few organizations there are to help the homeless in California.)

Covenant House would welcome any kind of help people can offer — donations, financial or otherwise. Corporate gifts are a great help as well. If you or anyone one you know has a platform to help advocate for them (like I am doing here), that is also greatly appreciated.

What is next for Karen Strassman?

You can see me on shows like Creepshow, Bosch, Penny Dreadful and Homecoming. I was in charge of casting all the smaller roles in the Playmobil movie that just came out. Resident Evil II has been nominated for all kinds of awards at present, and you will soon be able to see me as one of the leads in Tom Six's bold new film, The Onania Club, which is set for world-wide release in 2020.

What is your motto in life?

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.

Please list any websites and social media

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www.IMDB.me/karenstrassman

www.karenstrassman.com

Information for Covenant House (Address & Contact info):

Alana Weinroth

323-461-3131 x254

1325 N Western Ave, Hollywood, CA 90027

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