

## More Than Cinema: A Campaign to End Child Sex

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Philip Greenberg for The New York Times

**MESSAGES THAT MOBILIZE** Guy Jacobson, far right, who helped produce "Holly," with his volunteers in the Redlight Children campaign.

By JENNIFER 8. LEE  
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THE movie "Holly" has a pedigree that any independent filmmaker would envy: a critically acclaimed run through the international festival circuit, a recognizable but not-yet-famous actor from "Sex and the City," a red-carpet screening at the [United Nations](#) with Senator [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) on the host committee.

The film is a fictional portrayal of a 12-year-old prostitute in Cambodia. It cost in the single-digit millions and seems to have enough momentum to recoup its investment and then some. But profit is beside the point for most involved, including the financial backer, Amit Kort, a New York real estate investor.

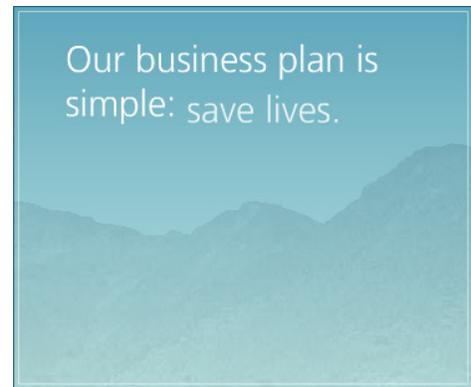
"He would love to put the money back, but he also understands that this goes well beyond money," said Guy Jacobson, whose experiences traveling in Cambodia inspired the film and who served as a producer and screenwriter. "It was also trying to make a difference in the world."

"Holly" was conceived as a project to raise awareness about the sexual exploitation of children worldwide. While Holly herself is fictional, her story is based on the experience of many children, Mr. Jacobson said, including those he met while going undercover as a fake client in Cambodia's brothels.

Mr. Jacobson and his production company, Priority Films, are part of a group of advocates and filmmakers who view films — fictional and documentary — as a way to leverage awareness of social issues. The best-known production company in this vein may be Participant Productions, started by Jeff Skoll, the former president of eBay.

Among Participant's projects are the Oscar-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," "Syriana," which was fictional, and "Reading Lolita in Tehran," which was based

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Other groups, like Active Voice and Working Films, help build advocacy campaigns around documentaries like Rory Kennedy's "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib," shown at this year's Sundance Festival.

But "Holly," directed by Guy Moshe and starring Ron Livingston of "Sex and the City" and the newcomer Thuy Nguyen as Holly, is just one piece of a larger vision. Mr. Jacobson and his partners started a grass-roots organization called Redlight Children, which, in collaboration with leading child advocacy groups, has drawn up a list of policy changes to combat the child sex trade.

Priority Films also made two documentaries as an educational component: "The Virgin Harvest," on child sex exploitation, and "The K11 Journey," about the threats and difficulties encountered while shooting on location. (The company hired 40 bodyguards because of threats from organized crime, and the Cambodian government prevented Mr. Jacobson's co-producer, Adi Ezroni, from leaving the country for two weeks after the project was finished.) The three films are collectively called the K11 Project, named for the infamous Cambodian sex district where the crew did much of its filming.

The packaging for the campaign is as carefully thought out as a movie rollout. Ogilvy & Mather, which named the campaign, did the branding pro bono. "We felt it was crucial that people understand immediately upon hearing the name what the subject matter was," said Eitan Chitayat, the creative director.

The campaign includes advertisements that say, "Picture a 5-year-old forced to have sex with 18 clients a day. (Now picture that child is your daughter.)" "Imagine you've been bought, sold, emotionally abused and raped. (Now imagine you're a 4-year-old.)"

So far, the campaign has enlisted scores of people, almost all volunteers, who have put in more hours than the people who made the original film. Every day, dozens of interns type away on laptops in Mr. Jacobson's Upper West Side apartment. Their efforts include trying to persuade legislators to back Redlight Children's proposals for new laws, better enforcement and more effective allocation of resources.

Mr. Jacobson, who has a background in law and economics, is convinced that much can be done to lessen the demand for child sex. The idea for the movie and the grass-roots campaign came in 2002 when he was traveling around the world while taking a timeout from his job as an investment banking lawyer. He encountered a group of girls in Phnom Penh, and though some were barely taller than his waist, they unabashedly solicited him for sex, grabbing at his crotch and speaking in broken English.

"I yum yum very good," one girl said. When he refused, she replied sadly, "I no money today, Mama-san boxing me." He gave the girls some money and walked away.

Then he suspended the projects at his nascent production company and began writing the script for "Holly" as a way to teach people about the problem.

"I think that is much more effective than education," he said. "The masses will go and see edutainment more readily than they will see education."

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