

## HER VITALS

### Hometown

Washington, DC

### How she beats stress

Running. "Nothing's more peaceful than a night run through the tree-lined FDR Memorial."

### Must-have item

Plants. They cheer her up on rough days.

## hotline hero

### Katherine Chon, 26

**Why we admire her** It's 2 A.M. when Chon receives a call from two terrified girls. Locked inside a hotel bathroom, the teenagers run the shower to avoid waking the man who has kidnapped them and forced them into prostitution. Not knowing their exact whereabouts, they describe landmarks, which Chon quickly recognizes as downtown DC. Within 3 hours, Chon and her staff help the police locate the girls and escort them to an emergency shelter. A high-stakes night like this is anything but rare for Chon, who runs the Polaris Project, an international nonprofit that helps bring victims of human trafficking home.

**How she got started** As a senior at Brown University in 2001, Chon was shocked to hear fellow classmate Derek Ellerman talking about present-day human trafficking (forcing someone to perform a service against their will). At Ellerman's urging, she searched online and found a newspaper clipping about six Korean women who had been rented for sex just down the street from her home in Providence, Rhode Island. "It hit hard when I read they were about my age and from my native country," Chon says. When she found few resources for victims, she and Ellerman created a business plan—which won second place and a \$12,500 prize in Brown's annual entrepreneurship contest—for a Web site that would offer fast, hands-on help. By 2003, they had established an office in Washington, DC. "We wanted to build a community-based response where social change was coming from the ground up instead of strictly top down," Chon says. When a victim calls in, Chon and volunteers leap into action, tracking down police, lawyers, and the victim's family.

**With Bill Clinton after winning a 2005 BRICK Award for social change.**

**What she's accomplished** In less than 5 years, the Polaris Project has helped more than 100 women escape sexual exploitation and deportation. Chon and Ellerman now receive about \$1 million in government funding and private donations. They run three Web sites (humantrafficking.com, polarisproject.org, and slaverystillexists.org) aimed at different audiences, from students to law-enforcement officers; four hotlines (in English, Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish); and three additional offices in Colorado, New Jersey, and Tokyo, with at least one employee and 10 to 30 volunteers each.

**What's next** Chon plans to set up two more Polaris Project offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, or Miami this year.

» For more on Chon's organization, visit [polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org).



**Womenshealthmag.com/actionfigures** Read more about other great Action Figures online. And tell us about someone you know who's making a difference.

Chon is interviewed for a documentary on human trafficking.



## Three small steps toward utopia

**1 Observe V-Day** On February 14, celebrate another V-word by attending *The Vagina Monologues*, which is being performed on campuses and in theaters across the globe. Or go to one of dozens of other events that support V-Day, a nonprofit dedicated to ending violence against women. Check out [vday.org](http://vday.org) to find an event near you.

**2 Start a Buzz** Here's a reason to splurge at Starbucks: It's the largest buyer of Fair Trade coffee in North America, which means it doesn't support abusive labor abroad. Other Fair Trade coffees include Green Mountain and Dunkin' Donuts espresso drinks. For more on fair trade, visit [transfairusa.org](http://transfairusa.org).

**3 Get the Goods** Help trafficking victims get back on their feet by selling their handmade items like jewelry and scarves at fundraising parties. Go to [madebysurvivors.com](http://madebysurvivors.com) for details or donate craft materials to the Association of Albanian Girls and Women ([aagw.org](http://aagw.org)).

ACT NOW!



STOP SEX TRAFFICKING

## ACTION FIGURE FLASHBACK

**Sex Defender** NO DOUBT LARRY FLYNT STAYED HOME WHEN *Female Sexual Slavery* hit bookshelves in 1979. Written by feminist Kathleen Barry, it was among the first to equate the sex industry—porn and prostitution—with slavery, and it's still one of the preeminent texts on human trafficking. In 1988, Barry helped found the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), the first international organization to protect females from forced prostitution.

