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Owners of a Days Inn in Northeast Philly will pay \$24 million to women who were forced into prostitution there

Eight women who were 14 to 17 years old when they were forced into prostitution at the Days Inn on Roosevelt Boulevard will share the money.

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by Vinny Vella

The owners of the Days Inn on Roosevelt Boulevard in Northeast Philadelphia have agreed to pay \$24 million to eight women who were forced into prostitution at the hotel when they were teenagers.

The women, who were between 14 and 17 at the time, were held against their will — and sometimes beaten — by sex traffickers who arranged for them to have sex for money, then kept the profits, according to a civil suit filed in Common Pleas Court and recently settled. The traffickers rented rooms at the hotel for days and weeks at a time, the suit said, and the criminal activity they engaged in over three years was “open, obvious and notorious.”

At least one staff member at the hotel, a security guard, was complicit in the abuse, and helped shield the illegal activity from law enforcement, according to the lawsuit.

Attorneys for Days Inn did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Most of the victims had been in the child-welfare and foster-care system, said Nadeem Bezar, an attorney with the Center City law firm Kline & Specter who handled the case with his colleague Emily Marks.

“The trafficking of minors and the degradation that goes on in this kind of harm and abuse is beyond horrible,” Bezar said in an interview Thursday. “They’re depriving these young women of control over their environment, their body, and their psyche. I hope these cases can empower these survivors and give them back a little bit of what the hotels and traffickers took away.”

The operation was eventually shut down by federal agents who had been investigating human trafficking at short-term hotels along the Roosevelt Boulevard corridor.

Three men involved in the ring at the Days Inn — Rashaad McIntyre, 35; Craig Johnson, 50; and Jerel Jackson, 36 — were convicted in federal court of sex trafficking of minors. McIntyre and Johnson pleaded guilty in 2013, and Jackson pleaded guilty in 2015.

According to court filings, the three advertised underage girls on the website Backpage and forced them into performing sex acts at multiple hotels in Northeast Philadelphia, including the Days Inn.

A fourth man, Adrian Palmer, who worked as a security guard at the Days Inn for about six years, pleaded guilty in 2015 to conspiracy, sex trafficking of minors, and related offenses.

Prosecutors said Palmer gave Johnson advice on how to operate the sex-trafficking ring and provided “protection” to Johnson in exchange for a daily fee of \$60 to \$100.

In a statement to a federal judge ahead of Johnson’s sentencing, one of the victims described the trauma and shame of the abuse.

“I feel as though there is a layer of dirt which can never be removed from my skin,” she wrote. “I feel less of a young lady and often ashamed because of the acts I have performed.”