

Human Trafficking – Q & A with Frances Yarbrough, Executive Director of North Simcoe Victim Services

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Q What is Human Trafficking? And does it exist in Orillia and Simcoe County?

A Human trafficking is the recruiting, harbouring and controlling of a person for the purpose of exploitation. This can include sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, or the forced removal of organs. Unfortunately, human trafficking – especially the sex trade – does take place in our local communities.

Q It is alarming to learn of Human Trafficking activity in our communities. Why is it so pervasive?

A Human Trafficking is second most profitable criminal activity in the world – second only to the drug trade. According to RCMP information, a pimp can earn \$280,000 a year from sexual exploitation of one worker.

Q Who are the victims and who is at risk?

A Victims of human trafficking are typically young women, including young teenagers, who are socially and/or economically disadvantaged. They often have a background of abuse, poverty, or mental health issues – traffickers prey on the most vulnerable. According to a human trafficker interviewed in Toronto: the victims “just want to hear someone say I love you. These girls are broken... you find the crack...”

Q Who are the criminals and how do they recruit sex trade workers?

A The sex trade and the activity of pimping is often referred to as “The Game,” giving the illusion that it is an easy way to make money, but the reality is much harsher. There is a whole set of tactics, rules and language within the industry. Recruitment tactics often include pimps posing as boyfriends offering gifts, lavish lifestyles, drugs, alcohol, and/or a fairytale life together. Victims are recruited from areas where youth gather with minimal supervision such as malls or public transit, the internet, through friends or acquaintances, or the promise of a good job.

Q How does NSVS work with local law enforcement to identify and support victims?

A We have partnered with the local OPP detachment in a program called, “Operation Northern Spotlight. This is a national program, originally started in the U.S. that works to identify individuals believed to be at high risk of being trafficked. We provide on-scene practical support and safety planning. If the individual wants to leave The Game, we assist by connecting them with the resources they need. These often include housing, income support, counselling, health care and legal services.

Q **How can local residents and organizations help?**

A The first way is to become aware of the tell-tale signs of someone who may be a human trafficking victim. It is important to pay attention to clues such as someone being suddenly withdrawn or secretive, unexplained disappearances, new expensive clothing and accessories, tattoos (branding), physical injuries including bruises.

We are currently involved with a fundraising drive to purchase Support Kits that we use for immediate crisis intervention with those we encounter. The kits contain a variety of items, from clothing and toiletries to snack food and coffee gift cards. They help us to provide a caring and supportive environment for victims. So, making a donation is another way to help.

Q **How do you measure your success related to stopping human trafficking?**

A The clients define success – have they have been supported? And have they received assistance and resources when they need them? Each client is unique with their own story, needs, challenges and most importantly, strengths and capacities. They are survivors. If they choose to change their situation, it can be a long and difficult process. There can be many barriers. It takes many organizations working together to provide the support for an alternative future for these individuals.

North Simcoe Victim Services provides assistance to victims of crime, tragic circumstances, and disaster; 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As a community-based organization, specially-trained response volunteers offer emotional support and practical assistance to help with a victim’s immediate needs and provide referrals to other community services when longer-term care is required. For further information, or to make a donation, visit the organization’s website at ns-vs.com.