What Can I Do To Promote Awareness About Human Trafficking?

If you are interested, there are many ways to get involved. In any social movement, the most important “stakeholders” are the population that is directly affected— in this case, YOU and your friends! If you would like to take a stand against human trafficking, here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Read a book written by a former victim of human trafficking.
- Host a human trafficking movie night with your friends.
- Use social media to promote awareness of the issue.
- Speak with your caseworker, friends, family, and community about human trafficking—and if they don’t know what it is, educate them!
- Talk to other kids in foster care or at a shelter about it and let them know how to get help.
- Contact your local legislator and tell them your stance on human trafficking, or challenge your friends and the media when they glorify “pimp culture,” or other themes that condone human trafficking.

Did you know that the scenarios above are some examples of situations that may be human trafficking? Did you know that human trafficking is illegal?

This brochure is designed to help you learn more about the topic of human trafficking, and about valuable information to help protect you and your friends from this crime.
Are You or Someone You Know at Risk of Being Trafficked?

Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking. It doesn’t matter what your age, job, income, nationality, education level, sexuality, or gender is. Traffickers often prey on those who are hoping for a better life, lack employment opportunities, have an unstable home life, or are seeking a new or exciting opportunity. Traffickers target people who are vulnerable. Those who are at a higher risk are these who:

- Have histories of being abused (physical, sexual, emotional) or abusing substances;
- Are in foster care or in the juvenile justice system;
- Are a runaway, or homeless;
- Have limited education or disabilities;
- Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (LGBTQ); or
- Are refugees, immigrants, and/or non-English speaking.

Sex traffickers frequently target runaways or homeless youth because these youth often need food, clothing, shelter, and money. You or someone you know could be at higher risk of being trafficked if you ran away from home or are absent without consent/AWOL from your current placement.

What are some signs to look for if I think someone is a victim of human trafficking?

A victim of human trafficking may:

- Have excessive amounts of cash;
- Frequently have hotel keys;
- Run away or is homeless;
- Lie about their age and/or carry a false ID;
- Engage in prostitution or receive money or things of value to engage in sex acts;
- Maintain a pimp, or refer to an employer using a slang term like “Daddy;”
- Have tattoos with a pimp’s name;
- Be physically exhausted from working long hours, but has no money to show for it;
- Always be doing “chores” for someone (taking care of children, tending to elderly family members, and/or cleaning);
- Be isolated from friends and family and only spend time with a person who seems to be controlling them, including telling them who they can talk to, where they can go, and what they can do.

It is important to know that these are just some possible signs of human trafficking or sexual exploitation. Many victims don’t know they are a victim or may refuse to identify themselves as a victim of human trafficking. They may not trust anyone other than the trafficker out of fear of being hurt or deported (if they are not a citizen). Human trafficking may sometimes appear to be something else, like domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, or medical or mental health issues. Also, sometimes trafficking or sexual exploitation may appear to be one where the victim is choosing to be involved in prostitution, when the reality may be that a trafficker is prostituting that person by forcing, threatening, or manipulating the victim to perform sex acts and prostitution. Even if the victim initially was willing to be a prostitute or received money in exchange, he or she may become a victim when another person starts trafficking them or making them remarry “in the life” when they want to get out.

Who Are Traffickers?

Traffickers can really be anyone you come into contact with. They may be a stranger or they could be someone you are in an intimate relationship with, a family member, someone you work for, a gang or gang member, a pimp; or any other person involved in coercing and forcing a victim.

Sometimes traffickers may start a relationship with you by acting like your boyfriend or girlfriend. They may act like they are “caring” care of you, do nice things for you, give you special attention and/or buy you gifts that make you trust them before they start to traffic you. This is called “grooming.” Then they may start asking you to do things for them (like have sex with people or work for them with no pay) and these requests may turn into threats, force or manipulation where you feel like you have to do what they want you to do. You may feel like you have no choice. All of this may make it harder for you to seek help because even though you know what they are doing is wrong, you may love or feel a sense of loyalty for the trafficker. It may be hard, but if you are being trafficked, it is important that you seek help and safety. You can do this by discussing your situation with a trusted adult, and/or calling the resources listed under the section titled “Where Do Traffickers Find Their Victims?”

Where Do Traffickers Find Their Victims?

Traffickers look for victims in places that youth hang out:
- Foster home/group homes;
- Runaway homeless shelters;
- Outside of schools;
- Outside of youth programs;
- Bus stations and truck stops; halfway houses; restaurants, bars, and exotic dance clubs; shopping malls; or
- Parks and playgrounds.

Traffickers also sometimes use newspaper ads and social media to recruit victims.

What Happens If I am a Victim?

Depending on the circumstances, you may qualify to be confirmed or certified as a human trafficking victim. Under the Anti-Trafficking Law, victims can be referred to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to see if their circumstances qualifies for official status as a victim based on the definition in the law. If you are confirmed or certified as a victim of human trafficking, you may be eligible for the following services: safety/protection, foster care/shelter, legal services, medical care, mental health counseling, and other forms of victim assistance.

Even if you don’t meet the definition of human trafficking in the law, there are other ways you may receive services and there are other laws to protect you. The Safe Harbors Act recognizes that children who are charged with prostitution are actually victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Instead of being charged criminally, victims can be treated through family court as a Person in Need of Supervision (PINS). Safe Harbors also provides for many of the services previously listed and, in addition, establishes special services: safety/protection; foster care/shelter; legal services; medical care; mental health counseling; and other forms of victim assistance.

What Can I Do to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Human Trafficking?

- Educate yourself on the dangers of human trafficking and the warning signs.
- Don’t go to unfamiliar places without people you know.
- Develop your transition plan to help you find employment, secure safe and stable housing, and build a support network.
- Make a safety plan so you know what to do—and who to call—in unsafe situations or emergencies.
- If someone offers you a job, do some research online or ask around about the employer if you are not familiar with them.
- Follow your gut, if something doesn’t feel “right,” be cautious.

One of the most important things you can do is be prepared by someone with a situation that sounds like it could be or could lead to human trafficking is to stop and think and then talk to a supportive adult. If someone offers you a place to stay or to take care of you in return for some “favors,” be cautious and ask questions about what will be expected of you in return.

Who Do I Call or Contact to Get Help?

If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, you should contact an adult you trust, such as, your caseworker, a teacher, your police, your counselor/therapist, or a staff person.

If there is immediate danger, call 911.

If the victim is a minor (under 18 years of age) you, your parent/custodian, or a court appointed guardian should also call the Statewide Central Register (SCR) at 1-800-342-3720 (DD/TTY 1-800-638-5763). The SCR will make a determination if an official Child Abuse/Maltreatment report can be filed and an investigation can be initiated.

If you are uncertain if you or someone you know has been a victim of human trafficking, or if you need additional services, support, referrals, or have questions about human trafficking, you can call the free and confidential National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC). See resources below.

Resources
National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHRTC) Hotline 1-888-373-7888 or text INFO or HELP* to 233733 (BeFree) www.traffickingresourcecenter.org or email them at nhrtr@polarisproject.org