



Closer to Home Than You Think

By Marisol Fonzeca

Sex trafficking does not just happen in foreign countries and in Liam Neeson movies. It happens much closer to home. Earlier this year, two Lansing residents were arrested for luring an underage teen to work as a prostitute in a sex trafficking ring. The assailants posted nude photos of the girl on Backpage.com, then drugged her, and took her to a motel in Lansing to pimp her. In September of this year, a 28-year old man from Kalamazoo was convicted for prostituting 16, 17, and 20-year-old girls at a hotel in Chicago. Other stories range from arrests made in Grand Rapids for sex trafficking to arrests made in Columbus, Ohio and the surrounding region.

Arrests and convictions are few compared to the number of sex trafficking victims. Although kidnapping children, especially vulnerable runaway teens, and physically coercing them into sex work has become a major phenomenon in our society, people are still not talking about it. Doctor Celia Williamson, a Professor of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Toledo, has been working to change that. As a leading advocate for victims of "modern day slavery," she has taken great lengths to bring awareness to the sex trafficking epidemic in Toledo and surrounding Ohio counties. Williamson founded The International Human Trafficking, Prostitution, and Sex Work Conference, hosted by Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition, now in its 11th year. As Co-Chair of this coalition, Dr. Williamson and staff have trained health care providers, social service practitioners, law enforcement officers, government agencies, churchgoers and citizens on how to respond and prevent human trafficking. Additionally, she is the founder of Second Chance, the first anti-trafficking organization in Ohio that provides comprehensive services to victims of domestic sex trafficking and prostitution.

The 11th Annual International Human Trafficking, Prostitution, and Sex Work Conference was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the research efforts focusing on the multifaceted challenges facing issues in human trafficking today. This year, MSW student Sandy Sieben, currently serving her field placement at Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition, helped organize and was the Co-Chair of this conference. A handful of The School of Social

Work faculty and students from the University of Michigan made the fifty-five minute commute to attend the conference at the University of Toledo.



Truckers Against Trafficking, <http://www.truckersagainsttrafficking.org/>

Susan Crabb, a Field Faculty Liaison at The University of Michigan School of Social Work, shared about the conference: "What I like is that it really gives my community organizing and my social policy and evaluation students real—real work to do." In summary, human and sex trafficking is happening closer to home than many of us think. With Toledo and Detroit so close to international borders, airports, and major freeways, it is shocking that this issue does not get more attention. For Crabb, it's obvious, "You know it's happening everywhere, yet we're not talking about it." Let us start talking about this. Let us realize the spectrum of prostitution and let us acknowledge that this is an issue that is actively occurring right here in our own backyard.

If you would like to know more information on how to get involved, please visit The Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition website at <http://lchtc.org/>, follow them on Twitter @LCHTC419, or find them on Facebook. Also, be sure to keep an eye out for the 12th Annual International Human Trafficking, Prostitution, and Sex Work Conference presented in the Fall of 2015. If you or someone you know is a victim of human or sex trafficking, or if you would like to report a tip, please call 1-888-373-7888