



## collaborative to End Human Trafficking™

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### **RECENT HUMAN TRAFFICKING ARRESTS A REMINDER THAT 'IT HAPPENS HERE TOO'**

#### ***Knowing vulnerabilities can help prevent human trafficking in Cuyahoga County***

**CLEVELAND, OH** – Recent local arrests as part of a local human trafficking sting have magnified the importance of dispelling myths about where human trafficking happens and who is involved, according to the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking.

Kirsti Mouncey, President & CEO of the Collaborative, which brings together more than 70 organizations to end sex and labor trafficking in Cuyahoga County, said it's important that people realize human trafficking happens here too and then need to work to prevent it. The nonprofit has received dozens of calls in recent days by members of the community seeking advice on how to stop human trafficking.

"Since the release of recent news, we have filtered countless phone calls from people who asked how this could happen right under our noses and how they can be better equipped to identify and respond to it. People think it's the 'creepy guy' in the neighborhood who is a buyer, and that's really a myth. Given that trusted members of the public were arrested in the latest sting, it has really hit home for people," Mouncey said. "Human trafficking is a community problem, and we all have a role to play in eradicating it."

Research has shown that certain vulnerabilities make individuals more susceptible to being trafficked. Anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent of victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking, are or were formerly involved with the child welfare system. By attacking the root causes that increase the chances of someone becoming a trafficking victim, we can end the cycle of trafficking. People are more susceptible to being trafficked under the following conditions:

- Family involvement in trafficking rings
- Addiction
- Poverty
- Homelessness, including runaways
- A history of abuse and neglect
- LGBTQIA youth

"We are grateful for our law enforcement, especially the Northeast Ohio Human Trafficking Taskforce and North Olmsted Police, and members of Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response, who continue to assist the survivors," Mouncey said. "While the headlines have been about the alleged offenders involved in the stings, we must remember the survivors and support them."

The Collaborative recognizes the importance of prioritizing the voices and experiences of survivors after these news stories break. Here are some ways to support survivors in this time:

1. Create a safe and supportive environment where survivors can share their experiences without judgment or blame. The Collaborative's Survivor Advisory Council is here to provide peer support when needed.
2. Give survivors an opportunity to express themselves. Show empathy, understanding, and validate their emotions and experiences. Avoid interrupting or dismissing their perspectives.
3. Provide support services if desired. Connect survivors with appropriate support services that can assist them in their healing journey and provide avenues for seeking justice if desired. The Collaborative can provide referrals to local services, and an interactive resource map can be found on the Collaborative's website.
4. Advocate for policy changes. Engage in advocacy efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of sex trafficking and exploitation. Support policies that prioritize survivor-centered approaches and provide exit strategies for those involved.
5. Educate and raise awareness. At the Collaborative we promote education, training and technical assistance to challenge societal misconceptions and stigma surrounding survivors of sex trafficking and exploitation.

Education and training are available for any organization that wants to learn more about how to recognize and prevent human trafficking. "Call us," Mouncey said. "We have free trainings available. We can help with all of it."

## **ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE**

*The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking's mission is to lead, empower, and connect our community to eradicate human trafficking. The Collaborative provides leadership and expertise to empower a systemic, community-wide response to human trafficking, through education, resources, training, and facilitating a multi-disciplinary collaborative. As the backbone organization of a 60+ organization membership program called Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking, the Collaborative provides strategic leadership to create social change.*

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