

# Human Trafficking:

*A hidden crisis for youth in Orange County*



**Orange County  
Safe Harbor**

*Eliminating Exploitation, Empowering Our Youth*

— IN PARTNERSHIP WITH —



Orange County  
Department of Social Services



SAFE HOMES  
OF ORANGE COUNTY

# Awareness:

## The key to recognizing a child victim

Outward appearances can be misleading. Recognizing certain "red flags" and clues can help you better assess if a child is being exploited. For example:

- ▶ **Have a history of multiple runaways or homelessness**
- ▶ **Do not attend school or are frequently absent**
- ▶ **Unexplained change in lifestyle such as excessive amounts of cash**
- ▶ **In a controlling relationship or have visible signs of physical abuse such as bruising, scars or hearing loss**
- ▶ **May show psychological effects such as shame, humiliation, anxiety, submissiveness or disorientation**
- ▶ **They often are hungry and appear malnourished, fatigued or exhausted**
- ▶ **May show evidence of untreated sexually transmitted diseases**
- ▶ **Work unusually long hours and are paid below minimum wage or not at all**
- ▶ **Often live at a workplace, with an employer, or at a location with many other individuals**

While the presence of one red flag does not necessarily indicate that a child is a trafficking victim, it may be part of a pattern of clues and vulnerabilities that, when recognized, will significantly increase the likelihood of making accurate victim identifications. Of course, arming members of our community with these insights not only makes it possible to end the abuse, but also to take the steps necessary to provide the most effective services to victims and families.

## What is human trafficking?

Simply put, human trafficking is nothing less than a form of modern day slavery. Its victims are forced, coerced, defrauded and exploited for sexual purposes, compelled to live in domestic servitude or perform sweatshop or migrant labor.

## How big is the problem?

The answer is shocking – the International Labour Organization estimates that nearly 21 million men, women and children are victims of human trafficking worldwide. Of that number, hundreds of thousands are enslaved in the U.S. alone.

## Right in our own backyard

It may come as a surprise to many, but this scourge is prevalent across New York State, including right here in Orange County.

Using data collected by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, researchers found that between 2007 and 2012 New York was one of four states generating the greatest number of potential reports of human trafficking.



**85% of child victims of sex trafficking had prior experience with the child welfare system**

*\*Source: OCFS NY*

## Young people are among those at greatest risk

Children and teenagers under 18 years of age are among the most frequent victims of human trafficking in all its forms, from being coerced into prostitution on the streets and in private residences, clubs and massage parlors, to online commercial sexual exploitation; exotic dancing and stripping; forced labor on farms and factories; involuntary domestic service in a home; illegal drug trade; and street peddling and begging. In fact, according to the International Labour Organization, 26% of the estimated 21 million global victims of human trafficking are children.

***In 77% of all human trafficking cases, the perpetrators are family members, friends or other people the victims know***

*\*Source: Covenant House Trafficking Study*

## The face of the trafficker may be one you know

Trafficking youth is not confined to pimps, smugglers and kidnappers. Here in Orange County, you're just as likely to see the face of a trafficker in the mall, at a baseball game or in the workplace as you would on a wanted poster. Family members, friends, boyfriends, acquaintances, employers and "caring" strangers may be among those who traffic children.

These predators often exploit the youngster's vulnerabilities – lack of parental guidance, their hopes for an education, a decent job or a better life – and may use violence, intimidation or threats of physical or psychological harm to the children and their families to gain control and reap the financial rewards from their exploitation.

## What about children at risk?

Anyone - no matter their age, nationality, race, religion, socio-economic status, education level, sexuality or gender - can become a victim of human trafficking. However, traffickers often target children and teens who:



- ▶ Have histories of physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- ▶ Have substance abuse or mental health issues
- ▶ Have been placed in foster care or the juvenile justice system
- ▶ Have undocumented status
- ▶ Have low socio-economic status
- ▶ Lack employment opportunities
- ▶ Have an unstable home life
- ▶ Are runaways or homeless
- ▶ Are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- ▶ Are refugees, immigrants or non-English speaking
- ▶ Have limited education
- ▶ Suffer from physical and/or mental disabilities

Being aware and able to identify such risk factors is vitally important, as it can provide increased opportunity to educate children about how to protect themselves against traffickers and, potentially, prevent a child from being victimized.

Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline if you or someone you know needs help: **1-888-373-7888**



## Orange County Safe Harbor: *Eliminating Exploitation, Empowering Our Youth*

The Orange County Safe Harbor initiative is a collaboration of the region's most effective service providers for victims and survivors of human trafficking.

### How to report human trafficking

If you or someone you know has been impacted by human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at:

**1-888-373-7888**

The Hotline operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in more than 200 languages. When you call, a NHTRC representative will connect you to the Safe Harbor initiative. For more information, local resources, services and support, please visit:

**OrangeCountyGov.com/SafeHarbor**



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