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Human Trafficking Awareness ? time to understand the danger

By Constance Scrafield

February 22, 2021 is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day in Canada. This day is meant to bring into focus the devastation that human trafficking imposes on its victims and the people who love them; to raise awareness, and to give those agencies who can help the support they need.

The Region of Peel has Anti-Human Trafficking Service provider table, representing 40 agencies.

There are so many levels to being saved from this crime that a victim could enter or exit this situation through a variety of organizations, the police, Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services and many more.

A Caledon Councillor told the Citizen, ?Often the victims don't even realize the extent to which they are being involved.?

They don't always realize how far into the dangers of human trafficking they are.

The nuts and bolts of human trafficking is the money. A woman working for a pimp can make him a great deal of money, enticing teenaged boys, still going to high school, they can be recruited to start on the path. They begin by engaging younger, vulnerable teenage girls, wishing to be popular, maybe looking for a little excitement.

What if she gets invited by a boy she admires to go to a party? While there, she drinks too much and is later told she owes the host money for her visit. It can start as easily as that. Embarrassed to complain to the boy she admires or to tell her parents, the girl goes with a man for money to pay the debt, a cycle of extortion that never ends.

She can be trapped unless someone notices something is wrong: in her demeanour or studies or health. A parent, a counsellor at school, a friend or a friend's parent.

It is not just boys from high schools that are involved in the corruption of young women, as there is far too much to be gained. Other men come here also, looking for vulnerable girls, whom they might meet in the malls or walking along the streets. There is evidence to show that young women who have ?developmental issues? or live in group homes are particularly at risk from these predators.

This systematic victimization of (mainly) women is a trade, a profession, corrupt, demeaning, ruinous.

However, as soon as help is sought, it is available and any person, with a connection to young people should know the telephone numbers that can be called at any time for immediate assistance. The truth is, that while there are a lot of trained volunteers at the other end of telephones, while there are accommodations and help, the problems need to be recognized by people associated with the victims or, possibly, those at risk of becoming victims.

The strategy of Peel Anti-Human Trafficking is three tiers: first, prevention by increasing awareness within government employees, shelters, schools, private corporations, parents and guardians.

Second is Intervention, in the way of providing core services including trauma counselling, navigating the system and coordinating social services.

The third deals with Exits/Housing, which means emergency housing, then transitional housing and a connection to Peel Access to Housing (PATH) for a long-term place to live.

Exits means getting out from under trafficking.

The pressure for successfully involving a young person in being captivated and victimized on the Internet cannot be overstated. The stay-at-home policies imposed by the COVID-19 restrictions have made it much worse.

With the proliferation of platforms, many of which carry sexual content, the perils of an easy acquisition are increased.

Said the Caledon Councillor, ?Now, with the prevalence of social media platforms, it's that much scarier. Every platform has that in it. My daughter and I have had very serious conversations about the pitfalls. I think parents should tell their teenagers what the dangers are and equip them to deal with it.?

?From my prospective,? she added, ?I'd rather my daughters know how to recognize it and know enough to delete.?

Online, it can happen this way: an online flirtation and the boy asks for a photograph, a bit risqué - ?just for him? but later he threatens to broadcast it online and she is trapped in her own embarrassment, and the vicious circle begins.

Peel has developed a task force. If a victim or survivor winds up in home care, the care provider could say, ?I am there to help them for a clear path to getting that individual housing.?

Even with immediate housing, very often survivors are in and out of survivor housing until they finally get out on the path: there are psychological elements of self-blame, feelings that a person can't leave: families are threatened, life is a mess...

It was important to Councillor Johanna Downey to become involved after she ?...met Constable Joy Brown who chairs the Peel Anti-Human Trafficking and I asked to sit on committees,? she told the Citizen.

?Oftentimes you need the political input. So, agencies are vying for the same funding ? this table in Peel works together. I was working on getting the group in front of the miniseries of the province.?

Bringing it home to this neighbourhood, Ms. Downey talked about Bob Burnside, Chair of a new organization, CryNot.

?This has come together from different bodies,? she said. ?It is a group of concerned men and women.

As Pina Marino of the Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services (DCVS) says, you have people ? there is a demand. Without the demand, the [human trafficking] service wouldn't be provided.?

In a follow-up conversation with Bob Burnside, he told the Citizen, ?I heard of Joy Smith, from Calgary ?she's the mother of anti-human trafficking. She was responsible for forming human trafficking laws in Ottawa as an MP. She's become a resource person, training police and giving information to judges.?

Further, he explained, ?I went to a National Prayer meeting in Ottawa. She was speaking and she was the one that grabbed my interest and grabbed my heart. She's really making a difference. She's a grandmother and she just really stirred me up.?

Once Mr. Burnside had heard Joy Smith speak, he ?took part in a webinar and spoke to her on the phone. There had to be something we could do about just making people aware of this ? just let people know.

?Actually, there are cases within Caledon and Dufferin.?

Determined to help, Mr. Burnside interested the Orangeville Rotary Club in a zoom meeting with Pina Marino. He also invited Compass Church.

?I'd like to have them involved because they are a long-standing presence in the community.?

Coming from the combination of the Compass Church and Rotary, now is the Compass Rotary Youth No Traffic: CryNot.

?There are 17 on the committee, plus resource people ? we have to get on social media,? Mr. Burnside elaborated. ?We're just talking to anyone who will hear us. There's no judgement on the victims. It's very evil. Johanna was a real blessing to me when I first contacted her. There are numerous groups, slowly coming to work to defeat this.?

Mr. Burnside outlined the inception of the CryNot group: ?We started formally to meet as a group last August, maximum six months. Primarily, we want to help and stand by other groups, like DECAF. A lot of people are doing the work and we all know a lot of people. We have a lot of different talents among our groups; people want to help and dive into this and we're making progress. We've been soaking up information for the last six months.?

Indeed, Caledon and Orangeville are this this week issuing proclamations to the effect that these municipalities will stand against Human Trafficking and support such agencies working to support victims and bring forward public awareness of the problem.

If you or anyone you suspect is involved with human trafficking on any level, you can call authorities 24/7 for very quick and local response at 1-833-900-1010