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News & Media

Human Trafficking Task Force Forms

Port Saint Lucie – The only way to end human sex trafficking is to make the community aware that it's happening.

"It's here, it's real, and it's happening right in front of your eyes," said Suzanne Kulscar, vice president of the newly formed Human Trafficking Coalition of the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee.

According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, the number trafficking calls in Florida increased from 883 in 2012 to 1,518 in 2015, while the number of cases nearly doubled from 237 to 407.

"Florida is No. 3 in the country for the amount of people who are trafficked, and many of those are minors," Kulscar said.

The coalition, composed largely of representatives from the dependency and delinquency systems, was formed last fall to reverse the upward trend in trafficking cases. Members meet regularly to discuss local problems available and resources and work to increase awareness through outreach activities, education and training.

The coalition is looking for more members to help participate on various committees. A committee of particular interest to the local child-welfare community is Stop Trafficking and Rescue Survivors, or STARS, which focuses on the juvenile aspects of human trafficking.

STARS works to identify gaps in services between the dependency and delinquency systems in an effort to better identify and serve young victims of human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking.



Coalition Executive Board, from left:

Amanda Lafary, Leslie Pfeifer, Debbie Butler, Eric Ludwig, Suzanne Kulscar, Dorothy Malik, Ross Partee, and Ashleigh Holsinger.

Not pictured are: Blanca Reyes, Elaine Andersen, and Terri Pettengill.

“There was a time, not too long ago, when underage prostitutes were arrested and charged as criminals rather than seen as the victims they are,” Kulscar said. “In Florida, the age of consent is 18 – anyone under that age is a child and cannot consent to having sex, let alone make a life choice to become a prostitute.”

The shift in attitude toward the trafficking of child prostitutes was anchored in 2012 with the passage of Florida’s Safe Harbor Law, which recognized that children found in prostitution should be treated as dependent and not delinquent.

Coalition meetings are held at 9:30 a.m. on the third Wednesday of each month. Those interested in joining the coalition should email Debbie Butler at dbutler@gfnf4kids.org.

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April 8, 2016

Contact: Christina Kaiser
(772) 528-0362



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