

Trafficking...

Continued from page 5

and to implement support programs, training and other services.

She trains law enforcement personnel to recognize trafficking victims and understand how to help them, how to learn the truth about their situations, and how to work closely with service organizations who are more likely to learn about these victims. "They won't be walking into a police sub-station; they are more likely identified by faith-based organizations, medical personnel or other service providers," she says.

She speaks rapidly and passionately about her mission, and she knows the enormity of her task in educating the public. "In public awareness about human trafficking, we are right now where we were two decades ago in our knowledge and awareness of domestic violence," she says. "The problem is that law enforcement looks on these crimes as an immigration issue – not theirs."

She related stories about some she has helped rescue, how in Central and South American countries parents who cannot afford to feed their children sell them to traffickers, thinking they will be educated and have better living conditions in the States. Everyone wants to come to America for a better life, but those who are exploited by greedy traffickers and depraved "consumers" have anything but that.

One rescued 16-year old boy, who is now in a program to help him overcome the trauma he has endured since age 11, witnessed a young girl being decapitated because she refused to obey her traffickers. Rodriguez worked with one young girl for a month after she was arrested for prostitution before she gained the girl's trust enough for her to identify herself and her traffickers.

Overview of Human Trafficking issue⁸

Approximately 800,000 to 900,000 victims – young children, teenagers, men and women – are trafficked each year across international borders worldwide, and between 18,000 and 20,000 of those are brought into the United States, according to the U. S. Department of State.

These victims are subjected to force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor (domestic servitude, or restaurant, janitorial, sweatshop factory and migrant agricultural work) – and all have the common

denominator of secrecy, degradation, abuse, misery and hopelessness.

Traffickers use various techniques to instill fear in victims and to keep them enslaved. Some are kept under lock and key; however, the more frequent practice is to use less-obvious techniques: •debt bondage •isolation from the public, outsiders, family members •isolation from members of their ethnic and religious community •confiscation of passports, visas and/or identification documents •use or threat of violence and shame •threat of imprisonment or deportation •holding victim's money for "safe-keeping."

Massage parlors in Jax

JSO Vice detectives frequently target massage parlors in undercover stings and arrest prostitutes, mostly Asian women, in those businesses. Lt. Mike Gwynes, Commanding Officer of the JSO Narcotics and Vice Unit, says usually following these arrests, the women leave the area – unlike street prostitutes (mostly drug addicts) who continue to ply their trade and are repeatedly arrested. This seems to validate what is known of traffickers' methods of operation – constantly moving their victims to avoid detection.

Last year, a Palatka labor complex came under fire and was raided by federal officials who likened it to a slave labor camp.⁹ Officials said the camp lured homeless men and women with room and board, drugs, beer and cigarettes, which they had to buy (at exorbitant costs) on credit. But the workers piled up so much debt they could not leave and were forced to endure lousy pay, shabby housing and slave-like working conditions.

They can never earn enough money to buy their way out of the camp.

A "shame to our country"

President Bush, when addressing the Dept. of Justice's first national Conference on Human Trafficking in February, condemned this horrendous practice as an affront to America's fundamental values and committed his Administration to combating trafficking on every front at home and abroad. He made clear that a successful approach to combating trafficking combines aggressive law enforcement with compassionate outreach to the victims.

Since 2001, the Civil Rights Division (CRD) and the U.S.

Attorney's Offices prosecuted 287 traffickers – a nearly 260 percent increase over the previous five years. As of February this year, the Justice Dept. had 216 open trafficking investigations. Also since 2001, the CRD has helped 926 trafficking victims from 55 countries obtain refugee-type benefits under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Qualified trafficking victims can secure a "T-Visa," which enables them to live and work legally in the U.S. for three years while their cases are

investigated and prosecuted.

We need to learn more about this escalating problem – how to recognize innocent victims and maybe help them escape. (See sidebar – Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking)

Rick Dent, Jacksonville's FBI Supervisory Special Agent of White Collar and Civil Rights, urges citizens to call the FBI at 721-1211 with any information about someone you suspect may be a victim of human trafficking. You may save that person's life.

Editor's note: Researching this subject, I was overwhelmed by the volume of information available; I can't even begin to do justice to the subject. Please visit the websites given or just type "human trafficking" in your browser to obtain much more information.

I sincerely appreciate Stani Bodenbender of World Relief, who generously shared her resources and insights to the trafficking problem and her connections to victims whose stories will be told in future issues of the Victims' Advocate.

Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking

Victims of trafficking may look like many of the people coming to your organization for assistance every day. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women. By looking beneath the surface and asking yourself these questions, you can help identify potential victims.

- Is the person accompanied by another person who seems controlling (possibly the trafficker)?
- Is the person rarely allowed in public (except for work)?
- Can you detect any physical or psychological abuse?
- Does the person seem submissive or fearful?
- Does the person have difficulty communicating because of language or cultural barriers?
- Does the person lack identification or documentation?
- Is someone else collecting the person's pay or holding their money for "safekeeping"?
- Gaining the trust of a victim of human trafficking is an important first step in providing assistance.

Sample questions to ask potential victims of human trafficking

If you get the opportunity to speak to or question the person alone, asking the following questions can help you determine if you are dealing with a victim:

- Can you leave your job or situation if you want?
- Can you come and go as you please?
- Have you been threatened if you try to leave?
- Has anyone threatened your family?
- What are your working or living conditions like?
- Where do you sleep and eat?
- Do you have to ask permission to eat, sleep or go to the bathroom?
- Is there a lock on your door so you cannot get out?
- Does someone prohibit you from socializing or attending religious services?

Before questioning a person who may be a victim of human trafficking, discreetly separate the person from the individual accompanying her/him, since this person could be the trafficker posing as a spouse, other family member or employer.

From the brochure Look Beneath the Surface, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

World Relief is an international non-governmental faith-based organization which opened an affiliate office in Jacksonville in 1991, focusing on refugee resettlement. In April 2005, the office launched a network of emergency trafficking services (NETS) with a three-fold purpose:

1. To provide emergency services to pre-certified trafficking victims in the U.S.
2. To educate local law enforcement, service providers, churches and other key community groups about identifying and responding to human trafficking in the U.S.
3. To facilitate effective anti-trafficking collaboration and coordination among key law enforcement agencies and service providers.

The NETS program offers the following services to pre-certified trafficking victims from the point of identification to a point shortly following federal certification or economic self-sufficiency: •Case management (including service advocacy and referral) • Interpretation •Transportation •Housing/shelter •Food/clothing •Health/medical •Legal •Trauma counseling •Employment assistance •ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)

Services are provided directly through World Relief's office and locally partnering agencies (Hubbard House, I.M. Sulzbacher Women's Center, Lutheran Social Services, Trinity Rescue Mission, the Salvation Army, Community Connections, Families First, Mental Health Resource Center, Clara White Mission, Leimbach & Associates, Micah's Place, Betty Griffin House, Language Services Int'l Corp). Program costs are covered by grant funds, volunteer activity, locally donated care and goods and pro bono services.

Stani Bodenbender, NETS Project Coordinator and point of contact since August 2005, can be reached at the WR 24/7 hotline: 904/566-2477, or 904/448-0733. Their office is located at 5107 University Blvd., W, Jacksonville, FL 32216.

Stani also facilitates the Northeast Florida Task Force Against Human Trafficking, which includes representatives from the U.S. Attorney's Office, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations (service providers). The goal of the task force is to 1) increase identification of trafficking victims, 2) ensure victim safety and access to needed services and 3) increase the successful prosecution of human traffickers.

¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/story>

² <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/fln/PressReleases>

³ <http://www.fox30online.com/news/local/story>

⁴ <http://www.fbi.gov/page2/june05/humantraffico61005.htm>

⁵ http://www.anti-slavery.org/slavery_today/primer/types.html

⁶ <http://www.naplesnews.com>

⁷ <http://www.stophumantrafficking.org>

⁸ US Dept. of Health and Human Services, www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking

⁹ *Human Rights: Fighting modern slavery*, Florida Times-Union, June 10, 2005