Human Trafficking in the United States

Slavery is often treated as a thing of the past, but more slaves exist today than did throughout the entirety of the transAtlantic slave trade. While trafficking in the United States is often portrayed as the sex trafficking of a young girl, the reality of trafficking is more subversive and widespread than most people are aware. An estimated 70% of trafficking victims in the United States are domestic citizens. (Polaris 2016) As much as 50% of human trafficking victims in the United States are sold for labor and an estimated 50% of sex trafficked children are boys. (ECPAT 2005) There are many misconceptions about modern-day trafficking that make it difficult to properly recognize and report.

Within 48 hours of leaving home, one in three child runaways is forced into commercial sexual exploitation. (ECPAT 2005) One in five homeless youth have been trafficked at some point in their lives. Because members of the LGBTQ community have a greater likelihood to be homeless, they also face higher odds that they will be trafficked. Victims of sexual assault and children who have entered the foster system are also among the most vulnerable population to trafficking. (Loyola 2017) Rural and agricultural communities are more prone to labor trafficking and are often underserved by law enforcement and community support due to language barriers, lacking knowledge of laws and resources, and an increased fear of police. Urban areas are subject to more labor trafficking in service industries and see higher rates of sex trafficking, as well as greater movement of trafficking victims.

Peace is sometimes narrowly defined as the absence of war, but peace is only truly attained in the absence of violence. Human trafficking is a form of violence that occurs in every country in the world, but so little is understood in how to combat a widespread problem that has so many different manifestations. This project aims to ameliorate the conditions that support this global form of violence through a grassroots approach that relies on community awareness and response to ensure sustainable peace.

Combating Trafficking: Project Description

The objective of this project is to increase the number of reported cases of human trafficking in Georgia through occupational education, and to qualitatively prevent future occurrences of trafficking through community awareness. Because both sex and labor trafficking exist within Georgia, trainings will be offered on both forms of trafficking and will be targeted to specific occupations based on the area visited. Georgia’s combination of rural and urban areas means that trafficking must be addressed in a variety of ways: agricultural labor trafficking cannot be recognized, investigated, or prevented through the same means as urban sex trafficking or even labor trafficking in restaurants.

The focus of this project will be educational workshops offered to working professionals who are most likely to come into contact with human trafficking victims in their communities, including homeless shelters, medical clinics and facilities, and at-risk youth outreach programs. These workshops will focus on properly recognizing and reporting human trafficking in different circumstances, and will be offered in Georgia’s largest cities, including Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus and Savannah, as well as regional workshops in northern and southern Georgia. The organizations invited and the workshops’ themes will be customized based on the area’s needs, demographics, and former trafficking statistics. In an attempt to reach the community at large, at least one workshop (in each location) will be hosted that will be open to the interested public.

In addition to informing key community members on how to recognize and report human trafficking, the workshops will aim to arm the attendees with educational information to pass along to their coworkers, specific objectives for their organizations to better handle human trafficking victims that enter their facilities, and additional professional networks and contacts within their local community and the state of the Georgia.

I have organized and led these workshops (on a smaller geographic scale) for mental health professionals and at-risk youth service providers in the past. Attendance is best secured when workshops
are offered on both weekdays and weekends (to reach professionals with varying work schedules) and when a personal relationship with the organizations in question is built. Rather than simply sending invitations to recruit organizational partners and their employees, the first portion of the summer will be spent engaged in marketing and outreach, advertising to community members the upcoming educational events and visiting in person when necessary.

Expected Outcomes

The results of a statewide anti-human trafficking educational campaign can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. The number of reported trafficking cases in each of the areas visited and in the state as a whole is expected to rise; anti-trafficking organizations will form industry-specific relationships across the state and workshop efficient victim recognition methods; and all statistical data gathered will be made available to activist and academic circles within Georgia and across the country.

Attendees will be trained in reporting concerns to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (run by the Polaris Project) and to local law enforcement. The number of trafficking cases reported in the areas visited is expected to increase and, as most awareness of trafficking in the United States is of sex trafficking, the number of reported labor trafficking cases is expected to rise more significantly than the number of sex trafficking cases. In addition to increasing information, awareness, and reported cases of trafficking in Georgia, these workshops will allow for networking and information sharing to be developed at the local and state level. Collective awareness is more efficient at separating victims from dangerous situations and the community as a whole will be better protected against human trafficking.

All of the data on reported cases will be accessible through the Polaris Project’s monthly and annual reports on national calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. These public reports break down tips to the hotline by state, type of trafficking, victim demographics, and whether or not law enforcement is alerted. The Polaris Project’s database on human trafficking calls is the largest source of information on domestic trafficking in the United States, and it used by activists, academics, politicians, and service providers to better understand and address human trafficking. Comparative studies to the first half of the year (before the trainings took place) and to past years and past growth rates will be possible and accessible due to these reports.

In addition to a rise in the number of reported cases and more expansive information on trafficking in Georgia, these workshops will allow for networking and information sharing to be expanded at the local, regional and state level. While it is rare enough for both the hospitals and homeless shelters in one area to be educated on recognizing human trafficking, it is even more infrequent for information to be shared between the two on the kinds of trafficking that are being seen in the community and any specific information to be watchful of.

Future Impact and Sustainability

The training of coworkers by workshop attendees and the increase in community information sharing will extend the impact of this project far beyond this summer. The construction of these workshops will ensure that trafficking awareness continues to grow as community networks are enlarged and strengthened. Rescue from and prevention of trafficking will be more likely in each of the areas visited as key community members receive violence-reducing education. Additionally, the local and state data trends that result from this project will inform future educational campaigns. If particular industries, professionals, or regions report at higher rates than the others, preventative education can be approached with this new information in hand.

The data collected by the Polaris Project will support and be supported by this project. For a long time, human trafficking has been a misunderstood issue in the United States, and it is only within the last ten years that regional data has been collected and analyzed. The local and statewide data trends that result from this project will inform future local and state educational campaigns. If particular industries, professionals, or regions report at higher rates than the others, preventative education can be approached with this new information in hand. Academic groups will also be able to use this information in future planning and analysis. As our academic understanding of human trafficking as a form of violence and criminal activity grows, so too our community responses need to adapt and strengthen. This project will be in direct support of that community awareness and collective response.