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Jessica Cunha | Apr 18, 2013 - 1:31 PM | 3 | Report a Typo or Correction

Sold into slavery

Human trafficking is on the rise around the world. It's estimated that 27 million people are slaves. And it's happening here

Michelle was only 15 years old when she was forced into prostitution.

She was recruited during a vulnerable time in her life, when her parents were going through a rough patch and she was having a hard time.

"Suddenly, I felt that instead of being needed and wanted, I was alone," said Michelle.

She met some older boys who showed an interest, talked and listened to her. They added her to an instant messaging site where they chatted regularly.

"They were so nice," she said, adding they had a car and good clothes.

One day, Michelle was taken to an apartment and told to do anything the man inside asked of her. Her chaperon would wait.

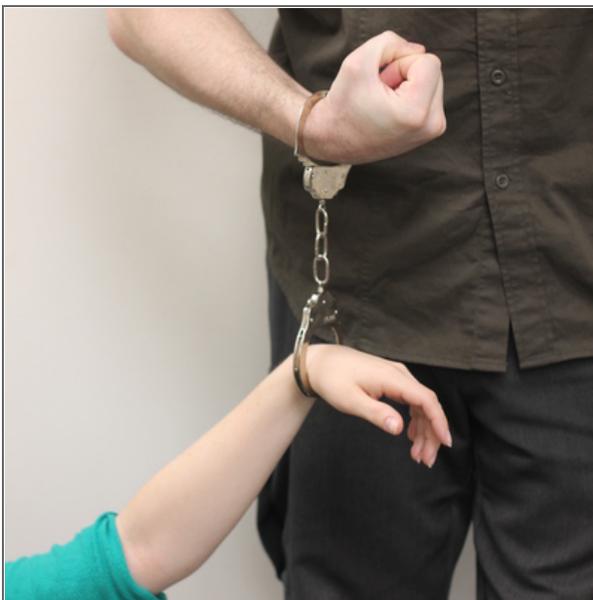
"I had no clue what he was talking about," she said.

But she learned.

She did what the man asked and was handed a wad of cash as she left.

"That was my first lesson," she said.

Michelle's pimp kept her under control by using video as blackmail, physically assaulting her and threatening to go after her younger sister if she tried to escape. Men kept a constant watch on Michelle outside her school, her job and



Sold into slavery. Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing enterprises in the world. Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking Humans (PACT-Ottawa) created Project Protect, a program on domestic and international human trafficking to teach youth how to identify and protect themselves from being exploited. Photo illustration by Jessica Cunha/Metroland

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her home.

Eventually, her parents kicked her out of the house. She lost her legitimate employment and she dropped out of school.

"I hit rock bottom," said Michelle.

In the end she picked up the phone and called Walk With Me, an emergency care organization for victims of human trafficking.

Michelle escaped.

"I'm thankful every day for that," she said.

IT'S HAPPENING HERE

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing enterprises in the world, second only to drug sales and quickly rising.

It is estimated that more than 27 million people worldwide are slaves, with girls between the ages of 12 and 22 the most at risk.

And it's happening here.

"It is very real. It's happening in Ottawa," said Tasha Henderson, education and training co-ordinator for Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking Humans (PACT-Ottawa). "I think a lot of people aren't willing to accept it or don't know about it."

PACT-Ottawa created Project Protect, a program on domestic and international human trafficking to teach youth how to identify and protect themselves from being exploited.

Natalie Fuso and Kari-Ann Clow, victimology students at Algonquin College and PACT-Ottawa volunteers, spoke to Grade 12 students at Holy Trinity Catholic High School in Katimavik earlier this month.

"It's something we are seeing a lot," Clow told the assembled students. "There's an incredible amount of trafficking going on."

Human trafficking is the illegal sale of people for forced labour, organ extraction and prostitution. Victims are kept under the control of their traffickers and exploited.

OTTAWA CASE

Last year, two 15-year-old girls and one 16-year-old female were arrested and charged with recruiting and trafficking other teenagers in Ottawa.

One victim was recruited at the St. Laurent Shopping Centre, others through social media sites, with seven victims under the age of 18, said Clow.

The case is currently before the court.

At a news conference last year, Ottawa police Staff Sgt. John McGetrick said the victims were forced into prostitution. Three individual reports in late May and early June triggered the investigation.

It is alleged that a number of girls between the ages of 13 and 17 were lured to an address in south Ottawa and subsequently driven to other locations for the purposes of prostitution. McGetrick said the ages of both the victims and the suspects made this a "disturbing and shocking" case.

According to PACT-Ottawa, the average age of recruitment into the sex trade in Canada is 14.

"With two recent high profile cases of youth domestic trafficking and recruitment in Ottawa, this issue is gaining more attention," said Christina Harrison Baird, chairwoman and director of policy and legal affairs for PACT-Ottawa. "We know that crime prevention through education is a major element in the fight against human trafficking."

Currently, there are 77 trafficking cases before Canadian

combined." The 2011 annual report published by Walk With Me Canada Victim Services highlights the alarming numbers in human trafficking both domestically and internationally.

• Human trafficking has estimated profits of \$32 billion annually.

• Approximately 27 million people worldwide are slaves, with girls ages 12 to 22 the most at risk.

• Eighty per cent of people trafficked are women and children; 70 per cent are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

• Every 60 seconds, two children are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Walk With Me has helped numerous people. In 2011, the organization:

• Received 79 domestic crisis calls and four from international victims.

• Had 29 domestic and two international residents in its safe house.

• Provided 2,124 hours of care for domestic victims and 168 internationally.

• Provided first response to 44 people, both male and female. Thirty-six out of the 44 were women.

One-hundred per cent of the women were successful in permanently severing ties with their traffickers.

All of the females eventually told police they had been trafficked. Ninety-four per cent of those cases went to, are, or were before the courts. Human trafficking charges were laid in all completed cases.

CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENTS

Walk With Me founder Timea Nagy and chair of the board of directors Robert Hooper, along with Manitoba MP Joy Smith, also created amendments to the Criminal Code with Bill C-310, which was passed last year.

Canadians who commit human trafficking offenses outside the country can now be prosecuted in Canada. The second amendment provides specific definitions of exploitive conduct, providing courts with clear examples.

"Slavery has not been eradicated in Canada or in the world," said Hooper in his message from the board. "Having said that, many more people know that human trafficking involves the exploitation of people through force, coercion, threat, fraud or deception and may include acts generally defined as human rights abuses.

"Hopefully ... many people have gone from victim to survivor, many others have avoided being trafficked altogether, and hopefully one or two potential traffickers have seen the amendments to the Criminal Code and have thought twice about their activities."

GETTING HELP: IT IS POSSIBLE

Leaving a trafficker can be one of the most difficult and dangerous times in a victim's life.

But it is possible.

"There's a small window when women are



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courts, said Fuso.

THE GAME

The "game" is a term that many pimps use, said Clow. The main goal of the game is to make money, maintain a "stable" of girls and/or boys, and run a tight ship.

"Traffickers do their ground work really well," said Henderson. The primary tools many traffickers are using include Facebook and other social media sites to track and recruit victims.

Any personal information posted online can become a lever to lure young people into the sex trade and keep them there.

Traffickers use a number of methods to control their victims and keep them from seeking help:

- Threatening the victim and his or her family
- Forced drug addiction, tattoos or branding
- Blackmail with recorded video footage
- Instilling a fear of police and authority

Many victims fear asking for help because of acts they were forced to commit.

"A lot of these victims don't want to come forward," said Fuso.

But the police are trained to treat them as victims, not as perpetrators of a crime.

"Their mentality isn't, 'Oh, they committed the crime,'" said Clow. The police want victims to come forward to get help.

WALK WITH ME

Walk With Me Canada Victim Services was created in 2009 by Timea Eva Nagy, a survivor of human trafficking. She was forced into the Toronto sex trade after immigrating to Canada.

The organization, based in Hamilton, Ont., provides first response care for victims and services and support throughout Canada. It also raises awareness and educates on issues of slavery.

Walk With Me created a video, shown to the Grade 12 class. It features King, a pimp, and Michelle, a survivor, both from Ontario who share their personal stories about domestic trafficking.

The video offers both sides of a disturbing story.

King looks for vulnerable girls, those who feel unloved or unwanted.

"Take the king of the jungle," he said. "When he's about to hunt, he doesn't just get out there. He does research.

"He looks, sees which animal is weak, which one's vulnerable ... then he finally makes his move."

King often uses social media as a point of contact.

"You have to sell a dream," said King. "Whatever dream she has, you use it ... once you have that, you have everything."

After bringing a girl into his circle, he lavishes her with attention and material items. The "dream" can take months or years to sell.

Once hooked, he breaks her down with violent outbursts to "keep her on her toes." He tells her he needs money quick and knows a way she can help. After all, she owes him for all the gifts.

"I have product, not girls," said King, who rakes in around \$4 million a year through human trafficking.

One male working under King was caught and charged a fine of \$200,000. "That's a business expense," said King.

"I've never been caught," he added. "Why would I stop?"

BE READY

able to leave or feel empowered to leave," said Tasha Henderson, education and training co-ordinator for Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking Humans (PACT-Ottawa).

Because of the financial aspect to human trafficking, "traffickers have a different interest in getting their traffickers back" than an abusive lover would, said Henderson.

A victim must feel safe in order to leave his or her captor. There are a number of services available to make the relocation as secure as possible.

St. Joe's Women's Centre, located in downtown Ottawa, is the primary support for local victims of human trafficking, said Henderson, with a 24-hour on-call respondent.

"The best thing that (a victim) can do is to contact the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) or Ottawa Police Service and speak to someone about it, or call directly to St. Joes," said Henderson. "We're in a position where we can ... (be) ready when people come forward."

CONTACTS

- **St. Joe's Women's Centre:** call 613-234-7432 or visit stjoeswomenscentre.org
- **Walk With Me Canada Victim Services:** call the 24/7 help line at 647-838-6673, visit walk-with-me.org or email victimcare@walk-with-me.org
- **Kids Help Phone:** call 1-800-668-6868 or visit kidshelpphone.ca
- **Crime Stoppers (anonymous tip line):** call 613-233-8477, toll free at 1-800-222-8477, or text 274637 (CRIMES) with the keyword "tip252"
- **Ottawa Police Service:** call 911 for a crime in progress, call 613-230-6211 for other emergencies

Jessica Cunha

Fuso, a Barrhaven resident, and Clow, who lives in Beacon Hill, discussed ways people may be targeted with the Grade 12 class.

People who are teased and bullied, who have an unstable home life or feel isolated can become a prime target for exploitation.

"People are trafficked and still live at home with their parents," said Clow.

Fuso and Clow created a chart and the students listed what it meant to be a girl or a boy in society's terms. Females, they said, are passive, emotional, care about their appearance, and can be sexual objects. Males are muscular, aggressive, dominant, emotionless and players.

"No one really fits into these boxes," said Fuso. "When people don't fit to these gender stereotypes they can become ... a target.

"People can have an easier time exploiting them."

Canadians are in a position to do preventative work, to be ready when people come forward, said Henderson.

"Think about how we're treating people; we push people back to their trafficker because they come forward and we don't believe them," said Henderson. "We shame them or we blame the victim and it (keeps) them from really seeking the help that they need."

Aside from outreach and education, PACT-Ottawa's Project Protect is also training front line workers through its Train the Trainer program.

"The goal of Train the Trainer is to provide front line service providers in how to support a victim once they come forward," said Henderson, "to create a strong prime line of who sees the victim first and provides resources."

PACT-Ottawa has also teamed with St. Joe's Women's Centre, located in downtown Ottawa, to provide 24/7 assistance for victims of trafficking.

"They have agreed to be the first respondent," said Henderson. "The police and RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) know to refer people their way.

"I would implore (people) just to start conversations about trafficking and not think about it happening just over there, overseas. It's happening in Canada."

With files from Eddie Rwema

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