

Human Trafficking Prevention Strategy: Filling Gaps in Vulnerable Areas of the  
Community

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Thank you Chairman Laughlin for the invitation to join the Majority Senate Policy Committee hearing today. As someone on the front lines of human trafficking I appreciate the Committee's concern and attention of the topic of Human Trafficking Prevention. My name is Brad Ortenzi, I serve with ZOE International as the Eastern USA Regional Director. I am also privileged to be the Coordinator of both Lancaster and Berks County District Attorney's Human Trafficking Task Forces. I am also a retired police detective from Lancaster County.

Today I'll be sharing the prevention strategy we've implemented and the prevention gaps we've identified in South East Pennsylvania. In Lancaster and Berks County's we've found some unique Prevention and Awareness strategies that are working well. Some of these strategies are in their infancy and more will be added in 2024, but we are encouraged so far with our progress.

My organization, ZOE international has had to be creative in the past 20 years in crafting some prevention projects and strategies. ZOE International is global – we operate in 5 countries (Thailand, Japan, Mexico, Australia and here in the US). Here in the US we are in Los Angeles and SE Pennsylvania. Using what we've learned in 20 years of anti-trafficking work, we are able to take prevention strategies that are working in the countries we serve and apply a working model commensurate to Pennsylvania. My first 5 years with ZOE were working and living in Thailand as the Director of Child Rescue in where we engaged with US Federal Law Enforcement, Royal Thai Police and Thai Social Services to create task forces and prevention strategies.

In Los Angeles, ZOE International has a home for trafficked girls and we also have an advocate/mentorship program that consists of 80 girls that have already been rescued from human trafficking. Sadly, the average age of these girls is 15. Working with my colleagues in Los Angeles, ZOE has crafted prevention curriculums that has extrapolated the data and research from the experiences of the girls we work with and created prevention programs using that information. Here in Pennsylvania we've taken this data and have targeted our prevention campaigns and towards these gaps we've identified and I'll be listing.

Because the task forces in Berks and Lancaster Counties are run by the District Attorney's offices, there's trusted relationships already established with the county agencies, giving us an open door for training. These are the organizations that deal with those most vulnerable to human trafficking. This is the low hanging fruit for prevention. Agencies, such as children and youth, juvenile probation, adult probation, behavior health, law-enforcement, prison etc.

Our goal is to arm these agencies with information they need to look for and find key indicators of possible human trafficking. Because victims of human trafficking rarely self-disclose, its very possible these agencies could have clients as victims of human trafficking in their day to day activities and not know it. Our prevention training uses members of the task force that consist of law enforcement, advocates and occasionally district attorney's. Using task force members enhances the relationships between the

task force and county agencies, fostering easy communication back to the task force when there's a human trafficking tip or question of possible trafficking.

Looking through the lens of county structures and organizations, we've been able to identify some human trafficking prevention gaps and fill those gaps with ZOE advocates. Our first example is in Lancaster county when children in youth caseworker find a child that is vulnerable to trafficking - in layman's terms: these are the children have had indicators that score high on Children and Youth's human trafficking assessment forms - ZOE International is able to partner a trained advocate with this child for mentorship. A large part of this mentorship is "relationship based prevention." This mentorship is in addition to the already in place Children and Youth's processes. This is an added layer of protection for the vulnerable child and another person in the children's life that cares.

What we didn't want to do in these situations when highly vulnerable children were identified was put another program in front of them. Instead we offer a relational based mentorship that teaches them 'one on one' how to keep safe from trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In our second example of a prevention gap involves the county Child Advocacy Centers. When Children and Youth assess that a child may have been trafficked or scores high on their assessment form, a forensic interview is conducted at the country's Child Advocacy Center. The problem is that often times, even if the child is being trafficked they don't disclose abuse. Because of the trauma bond, most victims of human trafficking, both adult and child, won't disclose they are being exploited. Knowing this propensity, we are able to offer a ZOE advocate after the forensic interview as a mentor to the child. This is the relationship based prevention I discussed earlier. Not a program but a relationship.

While working with the Child Advocacy Centers we found that majority of the forensic interviews that were being conducted for possible human trafficking we coming from children that were located in children's shelters and the Lancaster County Youth Intervention Center. The suspected trafficking concerns were not coming from the shelters, but that the children we staying at the shelters when the assessments were conducted. To address this problem, we crafted a curriculum that addresses this special at-risk and vulnerable population to educate on human trafficking and online safety. This is relational based prevention.

Our next human trafficking prevention void we've found has been with female inmates released from prison and reentering society. This information has come from both the law enforcement stings and interviews with trafficked women. Traffickers know the vulnerability of women recently released from prison and use this to lure or recruit into sex work. To attempt to fill this void, ZOE has crafted a curriculum specifically for this vulnerability and working with Lancaster County Prison we will begin a quarterly program to educate the female inmates on human trafficking in hopes to increase awareness of the trafficker's ploys upon their release.

Lastly, the final gap we are endeavoring to fill is prevention in schools. We as a task force have been invited into a few schools to teach prevention to faculty during in-service days and on a rare occasion some student events. Our goal is to get a prevention and education based curriculum in front of all students.

On behalf of ZOE International we appreciate the opportunity to share our endeavors and welcome any questions.