

# January is National Human Trafficking & Slavery Awareness Month

There are many questions and misinformation surrounding human trafficking. “What does trafficking mean?” “Is it close to home or abroad?” “Who are the victims?” And, “Can I actually do something to help?”

To summarize, the different kinds of human trafficking include sex trafficking, forced labor, and slavery. All forms of trafficking are either forced or coerced. Labor trafficking and slavery involves individuals who are compelled to work or provide services. Sex trafficking is when extortion is used by means of force, fraud, or coercion to engage adults in commercial sex (escort services, pornography, illicit massage businesses, brothels, prostitution) or when minors are compelled to perform commercial sex acts whether or not the use of force, fraud, or coercion is used.

Trafficking is very prevalent in the United States. Over 10,600 sex and labor trafficking survivors in 2017 contacted the National Human Trafficking Hotline, with more than 7,200 of those cases being classified as sex trafficking. A total of 3,126 survivors were considered minors, while 1,956 were adults, per the report. About 5,500 of the survivors’ ages were unknown.<sup>1</sup> In Louisiana since 2007, there have been 2,224 total calls resulting in 671 cases and the identification of 944 victims.<sup>2</sup>

Victims of human trafficking can be young children, teenagers, men and women of any nationality. They can be U.S. citizens or immigrants, and they can be found in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Victims are not just female, in fact, one report suggests that as many as half of sex trafficking victims and survivors could be male. LGBTQ boys and young men are seen as particularly vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>3</sup> For a quick reference regarding myths and misinformation about human trafficking, follow this link.

## What Are Some Reasons Trafficking Continues and How Can I Make a Difference?

A human trafficking victim may develop a mindset of fear, distrust, denial, and conflicting loyalties. Foreign victims of trafficking are often troubled that they may be deported or jailed and, therefore, they may distrust authority figures, particularly law enforcement and government officials who could potentially assist them. Similarly, sex trafficking victims who are U.S. citizens or LPRs (lawful permanent resident) may be convinced and conditioned to believe that if they report their traffickers to the police, the police will jail the victim for prostitution while the traffickers, pimps, or johns go free. They are made to fear that if they escape their servitude and initiate investigations against their trafficker, the trafficker and his/her associates will harm the victims, the victims’ family members, or others. Conditioning creates hopelessness making it virtually impossible for victims to break from their captors.

This is why it is important to say something if there is the slightest inclination that a person may be a victim.

Everyone can play a role in identifying victims of human trafficking. An informed community member could also be a victim’s only link to freedom. It is important to be vigilant and to “look beneath the surface” in situations that don’t seem quite right. This link provides good information to identify and aid possible victims.

Many victims suffer serious health issues. This is why it is particularly helpful for those in medical fields to be acutely aware of signs that may point to trafficking. Medical issues that may indicate trafficking can be found at this link.

## The Good News

The number of cases of human trafficking reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline is projected to jump about 25% in 2018 compared to 2017. From January to September 2018, the National Hotline addressed about 8,700 cases of reported human trafficking, compared to nearly 7,000 over the first three quarters of 2017. Though it sounds counterintuitive to think this is good news, it reflects the trend of more victims being reached. “The significant increase in cases we’re handling this year is a reflection of the more targeted and better-informed efforts to raise awareness about the true nature of human trafficking in the United States,” said Caroline Diemar, Director of the National Human Trafficking Hotline. “We’re also reaching more survivors more effectively. Through new text and chat services that allow discreet communication through their phones, survivors are creating safety plans with our Hotline Advocates and getting connected to help more than ever before.”<sup>4</sup>

NOTE: The National Human Trafficking Hotline is a 24/7, confidential, and multilingual lifeline that provides support and a variety of options for survivors of human trafficking to get connected to help and stay safe. Through a network of nearly 4,000 partner service providers and trusted law enforcement, trained Hotline Advocates take tips of suspected human trafficking from community members and help survivors build plans so they can safely leave their situations or get the help they need to rebuild their lives. The National Hotline can communicate via phone in more than 200 languages through a translation service, as well as text, chat, email, and webform in English and Spanish. The National Hotline is operated by Polaris and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other donors.

People can be connected to help or report a tip of suspected human trafficking by calling the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, texting “BeFree” (233733), or chatting at [www.humantraffickinghotline.org/visit](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org/visit) disclaimer page.

<sup>1</sup> ABC15.com

<sup>2</sup> [humantraffickinghotline.org/state/louisiana](http://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/louisiana)

<sup>3</sup> An ECPAT-USA discussion paper about the lack of recognition of the commercial sexual exploitation of boys in the United States

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/success-story/hotline2018>

