



Family & Youth Initiatives

Empowering Families, Providing Hope

Quarterly Newsletter

SUMMER 2021

FYI starts S.T.O.P. to raise human trafficking awareness

FYI has started a new initiative that perfectly ties into all of our programs ... raising awareness of the immorality of human trafficking.

Ohio is No. 5 in the nation for incidences of human trafficking. We all have to do something about it!

FYI will focus on the preventative side of this tragedy, to stop it before it happens. The name of our new initiative against this evil, immoral industry is Safeguarding Those Oppressed by Predators (S.T.O.P.).

"If we can protect one student from being trafficked, it will be worth it ... whether it's stopping them from being picked up or them recognizing a friend in danger. It's about preventing and reducing trauma for children, and FYI is focused on protecting those we serve," said Nikki Stefanow, FYI's Executive Director. "Another part of this awareness is also making parents aware of what red flags to look for in their children and their friends, and making people aware of what human trafficking isn't. Some people think it's a white van that comes up and steals kids. That's not what happens most of the time. Mostly it is someone the child knows and trusts who trafficks them. We aren't recognizing it's happening in our own backyard."

According to DoSomething.org, it is a \$150 billion per year industry which has an estimated 20-40 million victims internationally caught in its evil web. Becoming known as modern-day slavery, one in four human trafficking victims are children and the average age of a child victim is 12 to 14. It has to S.T.O.P.!

"(Victims) are right here in our middle schools and high schools, right under our noses. We're just not seeing it," said FYI board member Ryan Wallace, referring to human trafficking victims.

FYI is in 45 schools in six counties with our Real Life Teen Choices and Mentoring programs, and therefore is already on the frontlines and positioned to help. Both are teaching life and decision-making skills, curriculums in which human trafficking awareness fits well. Want to help? Call us at (937) 845-0403.

THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO HELP FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- Create safe spaces for open conversations.
- Organize a hygiene or clothing drive for local agencies.
- Host an event to raise community awareness and encourage ongoing talks.
- Connect with your local Human Trafficking Coalition.
- Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888) if you see red flags of human trafficking like:
 - The person appearing disconnected from family, friends and social circles
 - The person appearing fearful, timid or submissive
 - The person showing signs of having been denied food, sleep, medical care
 - The person seeming not to be in control of where they go, who they talk to
 - The person living in unsuitable conditions
 - The person lacking personal possessions or living in unsuitable conditions



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New Rave Review honors families that are doing things right

FYI's first Rave Review event is drawing ... rave reviews.

This is a new series of quarterly celebrations created to honor students, parents and volunteers who have excelled within our programs. The event, which includes an educational element, is hosted by a local church which gets volunteers to assist FYI in loving, praising and rewarding the honorees. Our next Rave Review is June 24 at Medway Church.

"It was nice to hear how those we honored are growing, and I believe they were encouraged by the recognition," said Executive Director Nikki Stefanow.

The first Rave Review was held March 18 at Lawrenceville Church of God, with a March Madness basketball theme. Six from our Mentoring Program & Parenting Network were honored.

"The goal of the event was to create a common ground where our clients could be praised and encouraged to keep taking the right steps and making good decisions to change and enrich their circumstances and relationships," said Julie Driskill, FYI's Mentoring Program Co-Director. "By hosting these events at churches we hope to connect and engage more volunteers. I believe that happened."

"I thought it was really significant for the ones who were able to be there," said Lawrenceville Pastor Alan Cain. "When you sandwich help with praise, it can be very effective."

If your church would like to participate in the future, call us at (937) 834-0403.



- **SAVE THE DATE!** Harvesting Hope is Sept. 23. For more, see **Page 4**

Mentoring Program expands to SOI

FYI firmly believes in the power of partnership. This often lead to more partnerships, allowing FYI to serve a wider range of students and families than we ever could alone. A great example of that is the new expansion of our Mentoring Program into Springfield's School Of Innovation (SOI).

SOI is Springfield City Schools' project-based learning center that utilizes a hands-on experiential education model to provide and hone vital training in a non-traditional setting.

FYI was introduced to the SOI by Joe Hunter, Director of the Clark County Juvenile Detention Center. FYI met Hunter when starting a Mentoring Program initiative at the JDC nearly two years ago, which has continued despite the pandemic.

"He understands how important our program is and how far we have come in helping reduce the recidivism rate of juvenile offenders," said Mentoring Program Co-Director Bryan Moore. "Many of the released juvenile offenders attend the SOI, and this connection provided an opportunity for the Mentoring Program to follow up with those released offenders we had been working with."

Continued follow-up opportunities is just one advantage of FYI's new SOI presence. Andrea Whitacre, a guidance counselor at SOI who's been working with the Mentoring Program, has already seen impact during our initial weeks there.

"The kids who are meeting with them are excited that they have someone interested in them as individuals," she said. "Probably all of them could use mentors. It looks like the approach that they are taking and the program are working. You have to build the relationship, and that's sometimes where it's hard."

She pointed out the reception of the recent introduction of the PATH curriculum that the Mentoring Program has used for years in other county schools. Moore agrees there's been a good start, but cautioned that there is a lot more work to do.

"We are still in the early stages of planting the seed at the School of Innovation," he said. "If we are able to provide a summer program, we can influence those mentees in a positive way by keeping them from at-risk behaviors in the summer."



COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS!

There are always so many things happening within the FYI family to be thankful for. We could probably fill an entire newsletter page with our thankfulness. So without lessening the value of any FYI blessing, we want to single out some events of the past three months that have us humbly Counting Our Blessings.

* The Just Serve volunteer team has been instrumental in our renovations efforts. We could not have made the progress we have without them!

* April was a busy month of FYI presentations out in the community. Executive Director Nikki Stefanow presented at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church and Lawrenceville Community Church and represented FYI at Nehemiah Foundation's Grace In The Greenhouse spring event. Real Life Teen Choices Director Rebecca Swearingen also gave talks to the New Carlisle and Huber Heights rotaries on human trafficking as part of our S.T.O.P. human trafficking awareness initiative.

* May's Giving Tuesday event at Rudy's Smokehouse restaurant in Springfield was another big success. FYI participated for the second straight year, raising \$155. Rudy's donated 50 percent of all meals purchased using FYI's coupon. A special thanks to The Nehemiah Foundation, which hosts this fundraiser annually.

* The recent two-day rummage sale, precipitated by our recent office remodeling and spring warehouse cleaning, raised over \$2,700. Thanks to all who helped!

Parenting Network certified to help keep kids safe in car seats

A properly installed vehicle child restraint can literally mean the difference between life and death. But does every parent know how to properly secure their car seat so that its fully designed protection is utilized?

That's where FYI's Parenting Network comes in. We can help parents make sure everything is working safely and optimally.

Staff from the Parenting Network recently participated in a Safe Kids Worldwide virtual conference, which provided child passenger safety technicians with up-to-date information on child passenger safety seats, vehicles, LATCH and best practices in youth occupant protection. The LATCH Guidebook is widely used to ensure safe car seat fastening procedures, updated annually and released at this conference. Car seat manufacturers, researchers and industry experts present during the two days.

As a result, we are certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians who are trained to do the inspections, making sure the car seat is installed properly. Anyone can call into our Springfield (937-322-3514) or New Carlisle (937-845-0900) Parenting Network offices to schedule a time to have one of our technicians look at your installed car seat. If it is not properly installed, we will show you how to properly install the car seat.

"If a car seat isn't properly installed and the car is involved in an accident, the car seat may not keep the child as safe as was intended," said Parenting Network Director Amy Brown. "It is very important for parents to follow the instruction manual of the car seat and their automobile for proper installation of the car seat."

Our Parenting Network offers classes covering many topics, including preventing child sexual abuse, safe sleep, stress management and shaken baby syndrome. Our newest class is "Safe Home," which covers a multitude of safety precautions for the home.



Community garden's growing season starts

A recent cold snap pushed the start of the FYI community garden's growing season back a few days, but at least the delay wasn't weeks like the beginning of last year's growing season. For that, FYI Community Garden Director Jim Tipton is thankful.

Near record rainfall in the spring of 2020 halted planting that is traditionally done right after Mother's Day until the ground was dry enough to plant weeks later. This year, the gardeners were able to start planting in mid-May.

"We are in good shape," Jim said. "Everybody was anxious to get going. We know what to plant right off the bat, in case there is another unexpected frost - like cabbage and broccoli. And you can plant seeds that stay in the ground."

"The beginning of the year and end of the year are crucial, but that is part of being a gardener - being flexible," he added. "Timing is also a big key."

Last year's wet spring grounds didn't prevent a successful growing season. We shattered our original 2020 goal by donating 2,063 pounds of fresh produce to area food pantries. This was a major increase over the 1,300 pounds donated in 2019. This year's goal is to equal last year's 2,000 pounds of produce donated to the Park Layne and New Carlisle food pantries.

This winter's program to start growing plants inside produced much better results than in the past.

"Everybody did a lot better this year with the lights, so we have plenty of plants to get going," he said. "That saves a lot of money."

This year's program has at least eight families participating. If you want to join in, call (937) 845-0403.

Real Life extends S.T.O.P. into schools

To find a real-life reason why FYI felt compelled to start its new human trafficking awareness initiative, you need look no further than the impact of our Real Life Teen Choices in-school education program.

FYI's S.T.O.P. initiative (Safeguarding Those Oppressed by Predators) can be stressed in all three of our programs, but Real Life is where it can reach the most potential victims.

The average entry age of a trafficking victim is 12 to 14 years old, and our Real Life program is bringing the message to students in middle and high school in seven counties. During our last non-pandemic school year, we reached nearly 7,500 students, allowing us the opportunity to identify potential victims.

The statistics don't lie. Trafficking cases have tripled over the last year, and our state is fifth in the nation for recorded occurrences. In most cases, the victims know their traffickers personally. Because of this, it is hard to detect and easy to hide. There is a good chance you've met a victim, but are not aware of it.

"The educators have been trained over the last few years on the dangers of this, but it wasn't specifically being shared in the classroom," said FYI Executive Director Nikki Stefanow. "They have been talking about pornography and internet safety for a long time, but now are more intentional about the link between that and human trafficking."

Real Life Director Rebecca Swearingen explained how that is being done.

"The terminology being used is much more intentional now that we have better knowledge and training," she said. "Students are taught to look at privacy settings and report online activity. They are listening."

Results are already being seen.

"We did come across a student who shared information that had several red flags to being trafficked," said Rebecca. "It was reported and the authorities were brought in to ensure the student's safety."

Teachers are being made more aware and identifying red flags through our S.T.O.P. initiative as well. Our schools' teachers make great partners. We are very grateful for their support, and have been delivering thank you gifts this week to them (see photo).

Rebecca has also been extending the awareness beyond the classroom, recently making human trafficking awareness presentations to the rotaries in New Carlisle and Huber Heights.

If you suspect human trafficking, there is a national hotline you can call at 888-373-7888 for resources to help the victim escape.

EASY WAYS TO GIVE TO FYI

FYI is a faith-based, non-profit organization that relies on generous giving which starts with God and comes through our champions. All donations help us positively impact the children and families He brings to us. Here are all the ways you can give:

Of your resources

1. One-time, round-up or monthly set up through our website, www.fyiohio.org.
2. Call us at (937) 845-0403 to donate or ask for info to mail in a donation.
3. Call our office to arrange for an in-kind donation of items. (**For specific items that the Parenting Network accepts, call our office.**)
4. Sign up for the Kroger Community Rewards program at www.kroger.com and designate FYI as your charity. A percentage of your purchases is donated.
5. Sign up for Amazon Smile at www.smile.amazon.com, designate FYI as your charity and we will receive .5 percent of all your Amazon purchases.

Of your time:

1. Just call us and we'll get you set up right away in an area that fits your skills.
2. Become an intern (summer/year-round) or do community service hours with us.



FROM NIKKI'S HEART

Harvesting Hope is Sept. 23 and we need you

The date is set! Mark your calendars! The second annual Harvesting Hope event will be held on Sept. 23, 2021, at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Springfield. Last year's event allowed me to share my heart for this mission and many of you dedicated resources to significantly impact families and children.

Last year, Harvesting Hope raised almost \$25,000 and had 103 in attendance, many of whom had never heard of FYI before! This led to opportunities to pivot programming to continue to meet needs during a pandemic, to bring in more volunteers, and to build new relationships with churches and organizations. This year we are asking God to go beyond that.

We are already in prayer for direction and have started with the initial planning. We have set some lofty "God" goals - to raise \$40,000 to expand the reach to more families and children, have 225 in attendance (with 50% being new to the cause), and grow our Lifechangers Club by 100%. Our Lifechangers have pledged \$50 per month to further advance FYI's mission. But this is not just about raising money. This is about raising awareness of the struggles our families are facing every day and how to empower them. We know that God is faithful and can do more than we can ever imagine, but He requires us to do our part in the process. That's where you come in.

How would you like to be involved in this year's event? There are many ways to do so, including:

- Offer your talents where they can best be used for the event (decorating, auction items, marketing, etc.)
- Host a table at the event. Invite seven of your friends to come and hear how you are making a difference in the community.
- Sponsor a table or help find table sponsors to help offset costs for the evening, so that every gift that evening is invested directly into ministry work.
- If you are on Facebook, please visit the event page and mark that you plan to attend. Feel free to share the event on your personal page, too.

With your active participation comes the satisfaction of knowing you are extending your life-changing impact on someone's life. I can't wait to see how God uses all of us in this. If you have any suggestions or questions, please email me at nikki@fyiohio.org or call me at (937) 845-0403.

Counting It All Joy,
Nikki

INTRODUCING FYI'S NEW ONLINE GIVING PLATFORM CALLED "HARNESS"

FYI has a new, effortless way to support our mission financially without ever writing a single check. Our Harness Giving Platform makes supporting us just a few clicks away:

- * Visit our website, www.FYIOhio.org and click on the donate button at the bottom of the page. Choose one-time, monthly or round-up giving.
- * Texting option: Text "FYIOHIO" to 269-89. A link will be sent to you.
- * Round-up giving: Register your debit or credit card (completely secure), and have purchases rounded up to the next dollar & donated to FYI monthly.
- * Special event giving: Just as it sounds, as events appear on our calendar.

Please consider which option would work best to enable you to support the families and youth in our communities. Also, sign up for our newsletter and updates. You don't want to miss the life changing stories you are helping to create! If you have any questions about giving to FYI, call us at (937) 845-0403.

FYI VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

We have been blessed with a new board member, Beavercreek school counselor Lauren Spencer. She will be bringing her perspective as a wife and mother of two to our mission, along with her passion for helping students navigate the paths of life, especially troubled teens. We asked her a few questions so you can get to know her better:

**What is your background?**

Lauren is a Cedarville University graduate. She was a guidance counselor at Greenon High School for 10 years before moving to her current position as a counselor at Beavercreek High School, where she has been the past two years.

What is your family like? "My family consists of all boys: My husband, Michael; my 9-year-old son Gabe; and my 3-year-old son Mac. We enjoy spending time together at home. We're typically always together, whether it's working on a home improvement project, exploring neighboring bike trails, attending Medway Church on Sundays, or eating dinner together. We also recently discovered that we all like the Star Wars movies."

What are your passions? "I love (to help) the troubled kids. They are my favorite youth to reach. The more problems they have, the more I love them."

Why did you join the FYI team? "I've seen FYI in action through the years and I've been really impressed. I do feel like my goals align with what they want to do."

How do you hope to impact the FYI mission? "I really want to leverage my school connections to expand the FYI programming into other school districts. Another area I can help is using my 'God job' skills at Medway Church where I am tasked with hosting and interacting with their social media contacts. I also want to increase FYI's awareness (in social media). When people see the FYI tree (our logo), I want them to immediately recognize it and know it is FYI and all of what FYI does."