

National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

In 2019 SAFE CARES has served nearly 250 survivors of sex trafficking

January 6, 2020, Austin, TX - In January 2018, The SAFE Alliance launched CARES, a program specifically designed to support youth survivors of sex trafficking and exploitation. In 2019, CARES provided crisis response, advocacy, counseling, case management, and other support services for nearly 250 survivors of sex trafficking in Central Texas, up from 180 people in 2018. The average age of clients served through CARES is about 18 years old, although the program serves survivors of all ages.

January is also human trafficking awareness month, which provides the opportunity to educate the public about the realities of sex trafficking in our community. According to The Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, there are approximately 79,000 minors and youth victims of sex trafficking in Texas.

And new research has shown the intensive connection between homelessness and trafficking. A recent study by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council estimates that approximately 40 percent of youth experiencing homelessness are also victims of trafficking, which roughly translates to 800,000 youth each year in the United States.

Poverty is not just a precursor to trafficking but can be a direct outcome of sex trafficking that, if not alleviated, can potentially tether an individual to a life of commercial sex work and a lifetime of abuse. Everyone deserves to live sustainably and with dignity.

Given this information, SAFE CARES continues to make huge improvements to the way that we serve survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. To start, we have a new Director of our CARES program, Allison Franklin, who is a leading activist and policy change maker on how best to serve survivors of trafficking – and particularly those survivors facing homelessness.

A survivor herself, Franklin describes her story:

Traffickers prey on the weak, yet poverty is not the sole catalyst. I was gang trafficked domestically for nearly a decade, yet had lived a relatively privileged middle class life, including acquiring some formal university education, prior to my trafficking experience. I can attest to the absolute depravity that CSE/ST victims experience while in captivity, and upon exiting “the life.” Every dime I made my trafficker took, and I literally escaped with the clothes on back. Worse yet, I had acquired multiple felonies while under the oppression of my trafficker, making it extremely difficult to obtain employment, housing, and financial aid; there were also numerous other barriers that limited my economic agency. Poverty is not just a precursor to trafficking but can be a direct outcome of sex trafficking that, if not alleviated, can potentially tether an individual to a life of commercial sex work and a lifetime of abuse. Everyone deserves to live sustainably and with dignity.

About SAFE

At SAFE, we strive to provide safety, stability, and healing for children, adults, and families that have experienced violence and abuse. We do this by providing shelter and housing, support services, and prevention programs to stop the cycle of violence. Learn more at safeaustin.org.

Franklin says, "At SAFE CARES, we have an opportunity to meet our client's right where they are at, in their own humanity, often times in their darkness moments. It is an absolute honor to hold space for our clients as they heal and to walk with them toward empowerment."

We also moved our drop-in center to a larger location generously provided by Seton Healthcare. The drop-in center now has extended hours and a homey feel for CARES staff to meet with survivors.

"This welcoming space where survivors can and get a meal, meet with a case manager or therapist, and meet other survivors going through similar trauma is so important," Franklin said.

If you or someone you know may be a victim of trafficking, please contact our SAFEline by phone at 512.267.SAFE (7233), by text at 737.888.7233, or by online chat at safeaustin.org/chat.

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