



Human trafficking event shines spotlight on the new slavery

Nicole O'Reilly

May 1, 2011

Two men from Toronto went to a party in a nearby small town, where they met a young, vulnerable woman, flattered her and convinced her to leave with them.

The trio then travelled to Kingston, where another young woman, Dee, and some others were trying to run an escort service. The men dumped their new find on Dee's doorstep, brandishing guns and threats, and told Dee she'd better train the young woman to be a prostitute.

Instead, Dee got help and the young woman was on a bus home before the men came back later that night.

Most trafficked people aren't so lucky. Dee herself wasn't so lucky.

"I felt so good about that, but I couldn't save myself," Dee told a crowd at the Salvation Army Mountain Citadel Saturday afternoon.

She shared her life story of childhood abuse, addiction, prostitution and eventually salvation. She was a victim, now she's a survivor, she said.

Dee was one of several speakers at the Human Trafficking Awareness Day event, which examined the prevalence of this modern form of slavery.

Canada's Criminal Code was amended in 2005 to include human trafficking. And since then there have only been seven convictions — all domestic cases and most for sex trafficking.

But experts agree there are hundreds of thousands of victims out there.

The crime can basically be described as the exploitation of a person for sexual services or labour, said Ottawa RCMP Constable Brenda Whitterton.

The world needs to change the way it thinks of prostitution, said veteran investigative journalist Victor Malarek, who recently released the book *The Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It*.

The problem isn't the women — they're coerced, desperate, fed drugs, abused, he said. The problem is the men, "the johns," who want to believe prostitution is "the world's oldest profession," when it's really the "world's oldest oppression."

These men are CEOs, politicians, actors, fathers, brothers, even men of the cloth, Malarek said.

When he first began investigating the global sex trafficking trade, he believed that legalizing prostitution might help the women. But he said he's since realized that would only mean "legalizing mass rape."

There can be no empowerment of women when the john holds the money and the power, Malarek said. It is inherently violent.

Young women and girls remain the largest known group of human trafficking victims in Canada, but they're not the only ones.

RCMP Constable Lepa Jankovic said she expected to be helping women when she began investigating human trafficking, but what she found, instead, were men enslaved in forced labour.

Jankovic is the lead investigator for the largest human trafficking case in Canadian history — alleged to be a human trafficking ring between Hungary and Hamilton.

A group of Hungarian Romas — believed to be loosely related to each other — face multiple charges of human trafficking, fraud, conspiracy and being part of a criminal organization. There are 19 alleged victims who claim they were recruited from Hungary to work in construction, only to be coerced into handing over all documentation, falsely claiming refugee status, working without pay and living in slavelike conditions.

Bail has been denied in eight cases, including that of alleged leader Ferenc Domotor Sr., 49. A bail review for his son, also named Ferenc Domotor, is scheduled for later this month and there are four wanted parties at large. No trial dates have been set.

Jankovic said it galls her when people ask why victims don't just walk away.

"Those are fighting words," she told the crowd, explaining that human trafficking victims are scared, threatened, don't know the language or area and many don't trust police.

Salvation Army area commander Glenda Davis said the event was planned to rid people of the ignorant belief that human trafficking doesn't exist in our backyards and to encourage them to be on the lookout for those being victimized.

noreilly@thespec.com

905-526-3199

This article is for personal use only courtesy of TheSpec.com - a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.
