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Human trafficking if the focus of meeting in Ames

October 26, 2011 By [Pat Curtis](#)

Law enforcement officers, social workers and others who work with homeless children are among those gathering in Ames today to discuss the crime of human trafficking. Teresa Downing, an Iowa State assistant professor of sociology, serves on the board of directors for the [Network Against Human Trafficking](#) (NAHT).

She says human trafficking in Iowa usually involves homeless teens engaging in “survival sex” – which is sex for money, food, drugs or a place to live. “In the adult entertainment industry, for example, some strip club owners will try to get youth who are down and out, don’t really have a place to go and need money... they’ll try to bring them into the clubs when they turn 18 or so,” Downing said.

Research from the NAHT shows, since 2005, more than 125 victims of labor and sex trafficking have been identified in Iowa. Downing believes the actual number of victims is much higher as many cases go unidentified or unreported. She adds homeless and runaway youths are highly vulnerable to being trafficked.

Downing believes more could be done to keep young people from becoming involved in the pornography or strip club industries. “I don’t think Iowans can keep turning a blind eye to both of these industries and how

they endanger children. I think Iowans need to be much more aware of the situation of homeless youth in our state,” Downing said. She wants victims to know they can get help.

“We have laws in place to protect them and help them gain access to the services and legal resources they need in order to restore their lives,” Downing said. The first Iowa Conference on Human Trafficking in I.S.U.’s Memorial Union runs today from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

One of the keynote speakers is Bonnie Campbell, a former attorney general of Iowa whose work has addressed trafficking in Iowa and internationally.

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