

LCSTTF Continues to Raise Awareness

submitted by Marlys Wisch

Despite the chaos of 2020, the Lake County Sex Trafficking Task Force has continued its efforts to raise awareness about trafficking activity in our area. We have experienced some changes in personnel. While some have stepped away from the Task Force, we have also welcomed new members to our team. We are not immune to the challenges this year has mounted, and we have had to think outside of the box as many others have had to with the limitations of in-person gatherings. Due to these limitations, it may seem as if we have disappeared, but we assure you we are still strong and fighting.

We are pleased to announce that our creative team has developed an alternative Candlelight Vigil for 2021. This January, public gatherings will still be limited. We will still remember those who have been lost due to the dark world of sex trafficking. Instead of gathering together in person this year, we will be providing candlesticks to the entire community. These candlesticks represent the support and love we have for those who have died while struggling in the trafficking world (also referred to as "being in the life"), as well as those who have and are surviving despite this trauma.

Many may be under the misconception that sex trafficking occurs in third world countries or only the biggest urban cities, but this is false. The truth is that sex trafficking exists everywhere, including our neighborhood. There were 2,525 reported victims of sex trafficking in Minnesota in the year of 2017, and 96% of these

victims were American.* Another misconception is that trafficking occurs via kidnapping. However, exploitation is more often the result of long-term deception. Many trafficking survivors refer to their pimps and exploiters as their boyfriend or romantic partner.* They manipulate a relationship built upon fear and coercion. Anyone and everyone is vulnerable to this deception, including our neighbors, colleagues and family members.

The candlesticks will then be displayed in our windows throughout the county as a beacon of support and safety. Those who choose to share the light will be sending a message to the community that their house, place of business or organization is a safe place for those struggling in the life, while also publicizing their commitment to fight trafficking in our community. We stress the need to unite as a community and shine our beacons of hope and love together. Anyone who is willing and ready to support the victims and survivors of sex trafficking can pick up their own candlelight in the basket at North Shore Horizons on January 7th. The next step is simple, display the candlelight in a window for all to see, and proudly share the story of the candle with anyone who inquires.

Please follow more activities on Facebook at: @DuluthTraffickingAwareness
*Minnesota Office of Justice Programs & Minnesota Statistical Analysis Center. 2019. Human Trafficking in Minnesota: A Report to the Minnesota Legislature.

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