

COMMENTS ON TRAFFICKERS AND VICTIMS

What kind of person would take another's soul like that and damage them to such a degree? To look at a human being and say, 'I don't care who you are. You are a product for me to sell and make money.' What kind of person does that?

—DEDE WALLACE,
STAFFORD COUNTY
RESIDENT AND VICTIM
ASSISTANCE SPECIALIST
WITH HOMELAND SECURITY
INVESTIGATIONS

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[Traffickers] will get a tattoo gun and tattoo their mark on them, right there in the hotel room. It's like marking cattle to them, these girls are a possession. They mark 'em, they brand 'em.

—SGT. GORDON RIDINGS,
SPOTSYLVANIA
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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I look at it like this, 99 percent of the time, these women don't have a choice. I've only met maybe one or two women that were independent, and I don't really think of it as a choice, either. One of them was a school bus driver, and I think she was just trying to keep the lights on.

—DETECTIVE ROB GRELLA,
STAFFORD SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Human trafficking is real, it is out there, it is in your communities, and it can happen to anybody.

—SUSAN YOUNG,
A TECHNICAL ADVISER
WITH JUST ASK.
HER DAUGHTER WAS LURED
INTO SEX TRAFFICKING BY
A GANG MEMBER.

THE SERIES

MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

SUNDAY: Sex trafficking in the Fredericksburg area.

MONDAY: Victims tell their stories.

TUESDAY: Local resources to combat human trafficking.

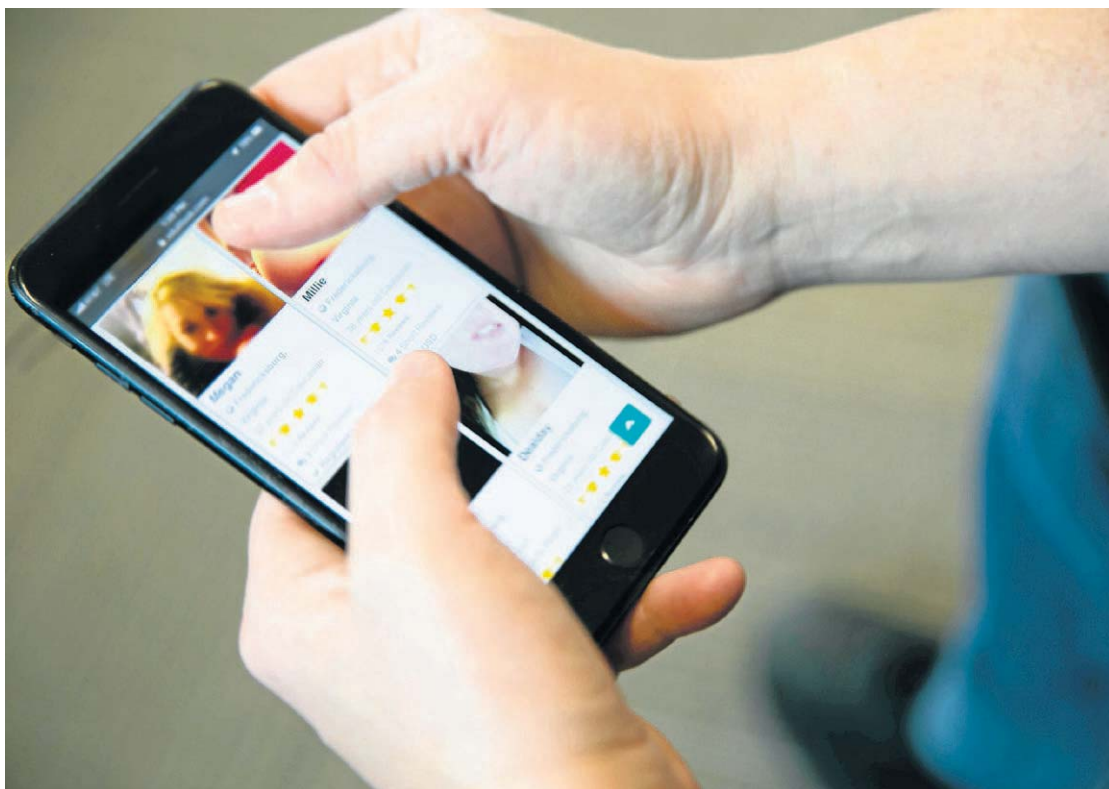


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE MORONES / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

One local law enforcement official said finding an escort is as easy as ordering a pizza.

'I CAN ORDER A PIZZA AND A PROSTITUTE'

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

During a recent forum on human trafficking, DeDe Wallace got the attention of the 110 people in the room when she asked about those who trade sex for money.

"If I said I work with prostitutes, how many of you would be here?" wondered Wallace, a Stafford County resident and victim assistance specialist with Homeland Security Investigations.

Wallace then explained the difference between the oldest profession in the world and human trafficking, one of the fastest-growing crime categories in the United States.

"If you're a prostitute, it's because something happened, and your body is your commodity," she said. "You stop being a prostitute and become a human-trafficking victim when somebody controls you, when you can't make the decision."

Human trafficking involves transporting people from one country or area to another for forced labor or sexual exploitation. The most common type is when adults are forced to provide sex in exchange for money, food or drugs—or when minors are involved in sex acts.

The Fredericksburg, GWFC Mary Ball and King George women's clubs hosted the recent forum, which was attended by at least two women, plus the mother of a third, who had been lured into sex trafficking.

One was Amy, a single mother who needed money for her baby's medical needs. Another was Marie, a graduate of Stafford County schools who wasn't on the agenda, but attended to network with local advocates. Her heroin addiction led to trafficking, and for two



HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 describes human trafficking as involuntary servitude, slavery or practices similar to slavery, debt bondage and forced labor, according to the U.S. State Department.

years, she was sold for sex at Fredericksburg-area hotels.

The third was a ninth-grader, living in a well-to-do home in the shadow of the nation's capitol, when she was targeted by a member of the MS-13 gang.

Each was manipulated into believing she would be taken care of or loved.

All were broken into submission when the so-called protection morphed into brutal domination. The men became pimps who put photos of the women and descriptions of the services they could provide on raunchy

websites that advertise escorts.

The pimps arranged the encounters and pocketed the money. If the women didn't comply, the pimps beat them, denied them drugs and food or threatened to harm their loved ones.

"I was told, if I don't do what I'm supposed to be doing, I won't get back to my baby," said Amy, a quiet woman in her 30s who recounted events from a decade ago. "That was more powerful than the violence, and there was a lot of violence."

STATERANKS SIXTH

Reports of human trafficking are on the rise across the country because either the problem—or awareness of it—is growing, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Because it's often mixed with other crimes, such as selling drugs or guns, human trafficking can be hard to identify, investigate and prosecute, according to the Virginia Department of Criminal

SEE TRAFFICKING, A10

VIRGINIA'S LAWS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING AMONG TOUGHEST IN THE UNITED STATES

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

In 2003, Washington became the first state to make human trafficking a crime, and since then, every state in the nation has put in place laws and penalties against those who want to profit from forced labor or what the National Conference of State Legislatures calls “sexual servitude.”

Human trafficking is also a federal crime. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 is the cornerstone of legislation and established several methods of prosecuting traffickers, preventing human trafficking and protecting victims and survivors.

In terms of state laws, Virginia has some of the “toughest in the United States,” said Capt. Liz Scott of the

Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office. Anyone who takes or detains people against their will and forces them into prostitution or unlawful sexual intercourse can be charged with a Class 4 felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison and \$100,000 in fines. The punishment is twice as severe if the acts involve minors.

Virginia laws targeting sex and labor trafficking include

violations for those who take money from sex acts as well as the “earnings” of those performing the acts; the abduction and kidnapping of potential victims; or transporting people for such purposes.

But when it comes to those who purchase the services of those who are trafficked, “the law quite frankly is a slap on the wrist,” said Detective Rob Grela with the

Stafford Sheriff's Office.

“It's a misdemeanor,” Grela said about those engaged with prostitutes. “If you continue to do it, you're probably gonna get some jail time, but the majority of time, you're gonna get fines and fees. It's more embarrassing to the guy because his wife or girlfriend might find out.”

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com

TRAFFICKING

► FROM A1

Justice Service. While some of its victims are brought to America illegally from foreign countries, they're not the only ones recruited for the purpose of selling sex.

“Traffickers are increasingly targeting more young people, ages 14 to 16 years old,” Bill Woolf, executive director of Just Ask Prevention Project, said at the women's club session. Just Ask is a McLean-based organization focused on educating others on human trafficking. “Think about that. One of five kids will be approached by a trafficker in some point in their lives.”

An April 2018 report by the Human Trafficking Institute in Northern Virginia looked at every human trafficking case handled by federal courts in 2017—all 783 criminal and civil cases. Virginia ranked sixth with 33 cases, 74 defendants and 401 federal charges.



Michelle Trampe, executive director of the Central Virginia Justice Initiative, speaks at a recent forum focused on human trafficking hosted by area women's clubs.

MIKE MORONES / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

residents from Northern Virginia to the Tidewater area, was tied to the Fredericksburg region.

Investigators uncovered 58 victims who'd been prostituted across at least seven states—and suspected more, but stopped because the case got so big. It included an overdose death in a Spotsylvania County hotel, a baby kidnapped and taken across state lines and “traumatized victims we're still working with,” Wallace said.

The ringleader was a Fredericksburg resident, Robert E. Bonner Jr., who targeted single mothers and drug addicts he recruited from internet sites by promising a better life, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. He got those who weren't already on drugs hooked, then made them perform sex acts to get their next fix.

Bonner, then 34 and known as “Ace,” was sentenced to 30 years in prison after his July 2015 guilty plea.

“Traffickers can be anybody who wants to make money,” said Wallace, a mother and grandmother who worked locally as a victims' advocate before getting a job with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. “We're slowly starting to realize anybody can be a bad guy.”

Likewise, anybody can be a victim.

Suzie Smith, president of the GFWC Mary Ball club, arranged the panel of speakers and specifically asked for Susan Young, mother of the ninth-grade victim. Young serves as a technical adviser for Just Ask and “does not look like someone who could lose control of her family's welfare to the likes of MS-13,” Smith said.

“She looked like us.”

EASY TO ORDER

Rob Grela Jr., a detective with the Stafford Sheriff's Office, grew up in Stafford and has worked in law enforcement more than 20 years. He first encountered human trafficking eight years ago, as part of his work with the special investigations unit.

He knew Interstate 95 was a convenient corridor for gang activity and moving drugs and guns. It's been no different with those trafficking women from one hotel room to an-

other, right off I-95 exits.

“It's been a real eye-opener for me,” he said. “I never thought what I see on a daily basis is out there in terms of human trafficking and prostitution.”



NATIONAL VS. STATEWIDE

The National Human Trafficking Hotline received 195,215 calls between 2012 and 2017 about 45,308 cases of human trafficking. During the same time in Virginia, there were 4,409 calls and 1,120 cases.

Back in the day, prostitutes worked the corner or hopped from one tractor-trailer to another at a local truck stop, Grela said. Social media has changed the game, fueling the need for girls who are available at the drop of a text.

Modern technology also has made it easier for clients to stay invisible. They don't have to cruise around red-light districts, but can pick up their phone, scan the offerings and arrange a meeting.

“It's sad to say, but I can order a pizza and a prostitute in 5 minutes,” Grela said.

Customers typically meet women at local motels as



HOTLINE FOR HELP

National Human Trafficking Hotline: 888/373-7888. TTY: 711. Text: 233733. It's operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and in more than 200 languages.

pimps wait nearby. Business is transacted, money is collected, and the cycle repeats itself.

“We're living in a different world these days,” said Meg Bohmke, a member of the Stafford Board of Supervisors who has attended three sessions on human trafficking. “It has been going on all these years, and the average person does not realize that it's here.”

'SEX SLAVES' FOR HEROIN

Grela used to think that arresting the women involved in prostitution would make the problem go away, but as he learned their backgrounds, he heard about the fear, force and intimidation used. He met a woman who is partially deaf after a pimp's beating; another was permanently disfigured.

“I knew girls that hid in closets and watched [the pimps] rape a girl with a shotgun or scalp a girl because she said something,” said Marie, the Stafford woman.

Officials in Spotsylvania County, who have pursued human trafficking cases this year, hear from their federal counterparts about traffickers who also sell drugs, Scott said.

“They are finding drug addicts, females who are kind of made to be sex slaves for their heroin,” she said.

Scott also has heard about prostitute deaths, particularly in the Winchester area. Their bosses may have thought they were snitching and gave them dirty heroin, she said.

“It's a very dangerous game, and these guys don't care,” Grela said. “They're that heartless. They have wives and children at home, and this money is paying their [lifestyle]. They could care less if they're putting your daughter or my daughter on the street to make that happen.”

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com



SEX VS. FORCED LABOR

Eight of 10 suspected cases of human trafficking in the U.S. involve those forced into sex. Half of sex-trafficking victims are 17 or younger, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

New York was tops, followed by Texas, Florida, California and Pennsylvania.

The report looked only at cases in the federal system, not those filed in various state courts. Human trafficking cases often cross city, county and state lines and are tough to tackle with limited manpower, said Capt. Liz Scott of the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office. Her office has two people who work on human trafficking cases as part of other duties.

“These are not cut-and-dried cases,” she said. “They're lengthy cases with a lot of parties involved.”

'TRAUMATIZED VICTIMS'

The largest sex trafficking case ever discovered in the Eastern District of Virginia, an area that includes 6 million



SMUGGLED VS. TRAFFICKED

A smuggled person voluntarily crosses an international border while a trafficked person can be victimized in his or her own country and doesn't have to be moved across borders—only forced into servitude.

Our street gangs have been using prostitution and human trafficking as a form of income for at least 10 or 15 years.

It's become a very lucrative business, and it has less chance of them getting caught. If you get pulled over, and you have no drugs, guns or anything illegal in your car, but you have your prostitute with you, it's just a man and a woman driving down the road.

—DETECTIVE BUTCH ALLISON, SPOTSYLVANIA SHERIFF'S OFFICE

We feel relieved and fortunate when we don't know family members personally affected. However, just like the conversations that sprang from the “Me Too” movement, if you open up a sincere dialog, you will find others, even those close to you, who have personal stories of abuse and trafficking. My family has told me that co-workers confided such stories to them since I started getting us all involved.

—SUZIE SMITH, PRESIDENT OF GFWC MARY BALL WOMAN'S CLUB

‘YOU ARE A DOG, YOU’RE THEIR PRODUCT’

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR



ISTOCKPHOTO

BROKEN DOWN BY ABUSE, DRUGS AND THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU

It’s been six years since Marie was arrested and removed from the world of sex trafficking, but a pair of men’s dress socks takes her back in an instant.

“That’s what they would leave on, their socks,” she said about customers who dressed professionally, then opened their wallets when it was time to pay and revealed photos of their families. “To this day, I can’t stand business socks.”

Marie is the middle name of a 29-year-old who grew up in Stafford County, graduated from Colonial Forge High School and spent two years being “owned by somebody” who sold her for sex.

After being charged with prostitution and drug possession in 2013, Marie broke her drug habit while in jail, spent several years in recovery programs and is now attending college. She’d like to work with recovering addicts or anyone who needs help, if she can get a job with the felonies on her record.

Marie shared her story of heroin addiction with Attorney General Mark Herring and at a 2016 town hall sponsored by the Stafford Sheriff’s Office. She was agreeable to being named and photographed for this story, but her parents, who still live in Stafford, thought better of it.

Marie lived elsewhere after her stint in jail, and her parents don’t want her former customers to know she’s back in town.

With long brown hair and a firm handshake, Marie comes across as outgoing and self-assured. It’s hard to picture her in the grip of a drug dealer, who marketed X-rated pictures of her on escort sites

SEE MARIE, A10

One was sold for sex against her will after getting involved with a well-mannered young man who turned out to be a gang member. Another needed money for her child’s medical treatments, and a third craved her next drug fix. All three women were promised love, care or protection, then each was drawn into human trafficking, a kind of modern-day slavery that moves people from one area to another and forces them into labor or sexual exploitation. Two of them attended a recent forum on the subject, offered by women’s clubs in the Fredericksburg area, and the third’s story was shared by her mother. Because charges are pending or prison sentences are underway against men who “pimped out” two of the survivors, the women are not identified by their full names.



MIKE MORONES / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Susan Young, mother of a human trafficking victim, speaks at a forum on the topic hosted by the Fredericksburg, GFWC Mary Ball and King George women’s clubs in January.

‘LITTLE DID WE KNOW ... GANG WAS BRAINWASHING HER’

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

It all seemed so harmless in the beginning. Some teenage girls went to a movie at the mall, where a nice-looking, well-mannered young man introduced himself to one of them.

The two exchanged phone numbers and Facebook information. They started an online friendship. The girl’s mother, Susan Young, had no reason to be concerned. “After all, how much trouble can you get into over a text?”

Young, who serves as a technical adviser with Just Ask Prevention Project, a McLean-based organization focused on educating others about human trafficking, was about to find out.

She eventually learned her

MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

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daughter, Courtney, was being lured into sex trafficking. That nice young man turned out to be a 20-year-old with a criminal record, a member of the MS-13 gang. He had targeted Courtney when she was a rising ninth-grader, about to enter high school.

Under his influence, Courtney transitioned from distant to rebellious and deceitful. She pulled away from her childhood friends, and her grades dropped.

When her parents tried to talk with her or suggested

she see a counselor, Courtney “interpreted our advice as dictating how to run her life,” her mother said. “Little did we know that a gang was brainwashing her, telling her that if her family really loved her, they’d accept who she was.”

Courtney eventually was bullied by other MS-13 members at school—and then gang-raped, all on camera. She was told the video would be shown to her parents if

SEE GANGS, A10



ISTOCKPHOTO

'I WAS THE PRODUCT,' SHE SAYS OF BEING RAPED AND BEATEN

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

With her dark blonde hair pulled in a ponytail, the woman who identified herself as "Amy" sat at the table in front of the crowd and seemed painfully uncomfortable in the spotlight.

When it was her turn to talk, she described in gripping detail how she answered an ad at a strip club because she desperately needed money to care for her medically needy baby. Her second night there, a man "who played himself off as a successful businessman, an average-looking white guy," approached and seemed to have the answer to all her troubles.

She told him about being a single mom and living alone in Florida, without anyone to help with the bills. He said he'd be her manager, book private parties and make sure she was OK. She'd make more money that way, he said, and when she had earned enough for her and her child, she could just walk away from it.

"The way he explained it made it seem legitimate, and I believed him. I fell for it," she said. "This was all part of his plan."

So was the part about "breaking in the product."

"I was the product," and the breaking-in period consisted of 12 hours of nonstop raping and beating. "It was very methodical, very intentional to break down my will as a human being, to break down my right to even say no or to think that I was even a person anymore. By the time I was able to leave, there wasn't even a thought in my head of saying no to my trafficker."

The longer it went on, the more she blamed herself for the sex acts that followed. She'd lost her dignity and self-esteem, but agreed to the demands—the parties, the exploitation, being booked for weekends at a time—because her trafficker held over her head the one thing she couldn't afford to lose.

"I was told, if I don't do what

I'm supposed to be doing, I won't get back to my baby," she said. "That was more powerful than the violence, and there was a lot of violence. But there was nothing more powerful than my love for my child and my need to protect her."

Amy didn't say much about how she got away from her trafficker because charges are pending. She lives in the Fredericksburg area and has spoken to groups like the women's club about human trafficking.

"We were all devastated by Amy," said Suzie Smith, president of the GFWC Mary Ball Woman's Club. "She admitted to behavior that makes us shake our heads in disapproval. But by the end of her story, it was clear that she lost control of the situation almost immediately to men who have mastered their methods of domination and personal destruction."

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com

GANGS

► FROM A1

she didn't do as she was told. Gang members convinced her that her family couldn't possibly love her after that, given the way she'd disgraced herself.

Courtney ended up being sold for sex on afternoons after school. She'd tell her parents she was staying for a club or activity, then be taken to a house where eight to 10 men waited.

Twice, she was "snatched by the gang," her mother said, and the second time, police discovered she was about to be sold to an out-of-state gang member for \$2,000.

"This enraged me," her mother told the group.

After Courtney was returned home and then hospitalized, an MS-13 member approached Young in the grocery store—making it clear the gang was watching the family's comings and goings. "He said if they couldn't get the older daughter, they'd take the 3-year-old."

The Youngs are recovering from the devastation that hit their family more

Little did we know that a gang was brainwashing her, telling her that if her family really loved her, they'd accept who she was.

—SUSAN YOUNG

than six years ago, but they'll never forget the impact human trafficking had on them and their four children.

"How do you put four little souls back together?" she asked the crowd.

Bill Woolf, executive director of Just Ask, said the story gets him every time he hears it. He spent more than 15 years as a detective in Northern Virginia and learned about human trafficking as he worked on gang cases.

"I'm here to tell you that, unfortunately, Susan's story is not an isolated incident," Woolf said. "These were the types of cases we worked over and over again."

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com



MIKE MORONES / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Susan Young, mother of a human trafficking victim, hugs a fellow panelist after speaking at the forum.

MARIE

► FROM A1

under the name "Lexus."

She was already hooked on heroin when she met the dealer, who went by "Cyrus." She needed a fix so badly, she agreed to whatever he proposed.

"All I had was him," she said. "He made it seem almost godly, the way he said he would take care of me."

Most importantly at the time, he kept her supplied in heroin so she wouldn't get "dope sick," the debilitating withdrawal symptoms that users describe as the worse thing on earth. As part of her conditioning, he kept the drugs away from her long enough for her to get a taste of the sickness—and the realization she wanted no part of it.

"I remember times, I would sit



in the corner, and I would rock, and I would be begging him for it. And he would say, 'You have to wait until I'm ready to give it to you,' " she said. "It's just like a dog that's told to sit until I give you the treat. They can run away if they want to, but they're not going to because they know

who feeds them, who takes care of them.

"You are a dog, you're their product," she said.

For two years, Marie had sex with customers in hotels in the Fredericksburg area as well as in Charlottesville. She was one of two women sold for sex by Cyrus and another man, named Mike, who handled the money.

The initial agreement had been for Cyrus to get 75 percent of what Marie made selling her body, but she used whatever she earned to buy more drugs. She had one set of clothes—a red tank top and a pair of jeans—and spent her days in lingerie.

"They would make different appointments, and the men were just like a constant cycle," she said. "You would be absolutely appalled."

One man told her to dress in pigtails because he wanted

someone who looked like she was 11. It was common for the men who bought and sold her to get violent. Multiple times a day, she shot up heroin or cocaine, which her pimp gave her so she'd stay awake through the night.

She knows people wonder why she didn't just run away, remove herself from the terrible situation—and looking back, she asks herself the same thing.

"It's so hard to explain to somebody that's never been in it, but they break you down to the point you have no part of you left," she said. "There's only what they say and what you do."

When she first encountered Detective Rob Grella with the Stafford Sheriff's Office, she hated him. He was a threat. He could cut off her supply of drugs and throw her into withdrawal.

She disappeared after an initial contact with police, and

Grella went looking for her.

"He actually went to my parents and said, 'If we don't find a way to get her out of this, she's going to be dead. I don't doubt that within the next month, I'll be drawing a chalk line around your daughter,'" Marie said.

Jail saved her. She suffered through the dope sickness she dreaded most, then pledged to never get caught in the mess again.

"She's a great girl. She's my pride-and-joy story," said Grella, who's offered to speak to prospective employers about what she's overcome. "As an addict, it's hard enough, but then to be brought into that lifestyle, it's even double what she's trying to get out from under."

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com

'THIS CRIME DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE'

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

The Central Virginia Justice Initiative offers the following signs of human trafficking:

- Evidence of being controlled
- Inability to leave job
- Signs of physical abuse
- Fear or depression
- Not speaking on own behalf/non-English speaking
- No passport or other forms of identification or documentation

WHO ARE VICTIMS?

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services says the following are victims of human trafficking:

- Runaway or homeless youth
- Foreign nationals
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth
- Victims of abuse or domestic violence
- Those in poverty or debt
- Oppressed and marginalized groups
- Those desperate for education, jobs and better opportunities
- People displaced as a result of disaster or civil unrest

MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

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PHOTOS BY PETER CIHELKA / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Michele Trampe of the Central Virginia Justice Initiative gives a training session on human trafficking to staff and volunteers of Empowerhouse, which helps victims of domestic violence.

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

When people talk about who's likely to be lured into human trafficking—and then regularly sold for sex against their will—the discussion focuses on the vulnerable.

Runaways, foster children aging out of the system, the homeless, victims of abuse or violence, the poor and the oppressed often top the list.

But Bill Woolf, who leads a Northern Virginia organization focused on fighting human trafficking, recently told a Fredericksburg audience there's a much bigger sector at risk.

"We've done the research, and we've learned that lack of information is the primary vulnerability that leads our youth to be lured into this," said Woolf, executive director of the Just Ask Prevention Project.

The leader of a Spotsylvania County group with a similar focus put it another way.

"It can happen to your kids," said Michele Trampe, executive director of the Central Virginia Justice Initiative. "It just takes somebody exploiting the vulnerability."



Trampe says many human trafficking victims she has worked with are local residents and graduates of area schools.

SEE TRAFFICKING, A10

TRAFFICKING

► FROM A1

Girls between 12 and 14 are the targeted age of traffickers, Trampe said. And if they happen to be in a home where there's already some abuse or neglect—or even if they have low self-esteem—traffickers can seize an opportunity.

“Maybe they need somebody who pays a lot of attention to them, and [the traffickers] tell them everything they want to hear, they make all kinds of promises,” she said.

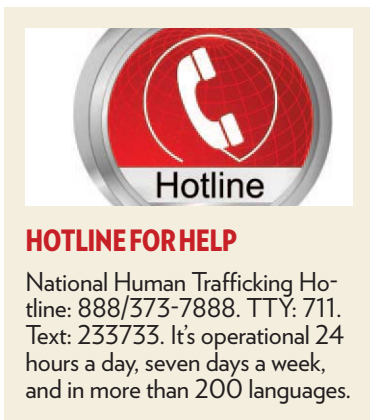
Trampe has learned more than she could have imagined about the dark world of exploitation. Six years ago, she asked for a meeting with Capt. Jeff Pearce of the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office and expected him to tell her the problem was limited to the big cities.

Instead, Trampe learned of the “force, fraud and coercion” traffickers use to keep their victims under control, and she felt a divine calling to do something.

The wife of Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors member Paul Trampe answered the summons. She retired from 30-plus years in accounting and finance, started the faith-based organization and recruited about 40 like-minded volunteers.

First on the group's list of strategies is making people aware that trafficking—the act of moving people from one country or place to another for forced labor or sexual exploitation—doesn't just happen overseas. Some of the victims she's worked with are local residents, graduates of neighborhood schools.

Volunteers offer “Human



Trafficking 101” classes in which they offer tips on tricks used by traffickers, including recognizing the way a manipulator gets his hold on teenage girls or young women.

“He is convincing his victim that he's the only who cares about her,” Trampe said. “It's the psychological stuff, that ‘If you love me, you'll do this for me.’ That's always manipulative. It doesn't matter whose mouth it's coming from.”

The Central Virginia Justice Initiative also tries to change the “prejudices we have as a society,” Trampe said. Often, people see prostitutes and believe the women are selling themselves because that's what they want to do.

“They don't see the pimp or the gang or even sometimes family members, boyfriends or girlfriends, who are really forcing them into it,” she said.

Her faith-based group regularly speaks to church congregations or other community groups. It also offers movies about the issue, appropriate for different age groups. Anyone interested in a speaker can call 866/620-2889, Ext. 1, or email justicecva@gmail.com.

Woolf's organization created a curriculum to educate high school students about the threats of trafficking and how teens and adults can respond. He cited the case of Courtney, the daughter of his organization's technical adviser Susan Young.

While Courtney was being lured into the sex trade by members of the MS-13 gang, she approached almost two dozen school staff, but she couldn't bring herself to divulge what was happening. His group picked the name “Just Ask” in reference to such situations, and he encourages adults who see signs of trouble to ask teens what's happening to them.

“If educators had been trained to properly respond, maybe that exploitation never would have happened or maybe it wouldn't have been so severe,” Woolf said.

Meg Bohmke, a member of the Stafford Board of Supervisors, has attended three training sessions on trafficking and believes education is the key, both for young people and their parents. She's heard about girls lured into the sex trade by the offer of the latest purse or shoes and cautions parents to be mindful of what their kids are doing and where they're going.

Turning a blind eye to the issue, by thinking it doesn't happen here, won't help.

“People were not aware of the opioid epidemic until it affected someone in their family or somebody they knew,” Bohmke said. “I know people say it [happens to] people falling through the cracks, but what I continue to learn is that this crime does not discriminate.”

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425
cdyson@freelancestar.com

MARCH 9 EVENT ADDRESSES ISSUE

The Mine Run chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution will host a session on human trafficking at 10 a.m.,

March 9. The meeting will be held in the fellowship hall of Redeemer Lutheran Church, 5120 Harrison Road in Spotsylvania County.

Speakers include Bill Woolf and Susan Young from the Just Ask Prevention Project and a human trafficking victim.