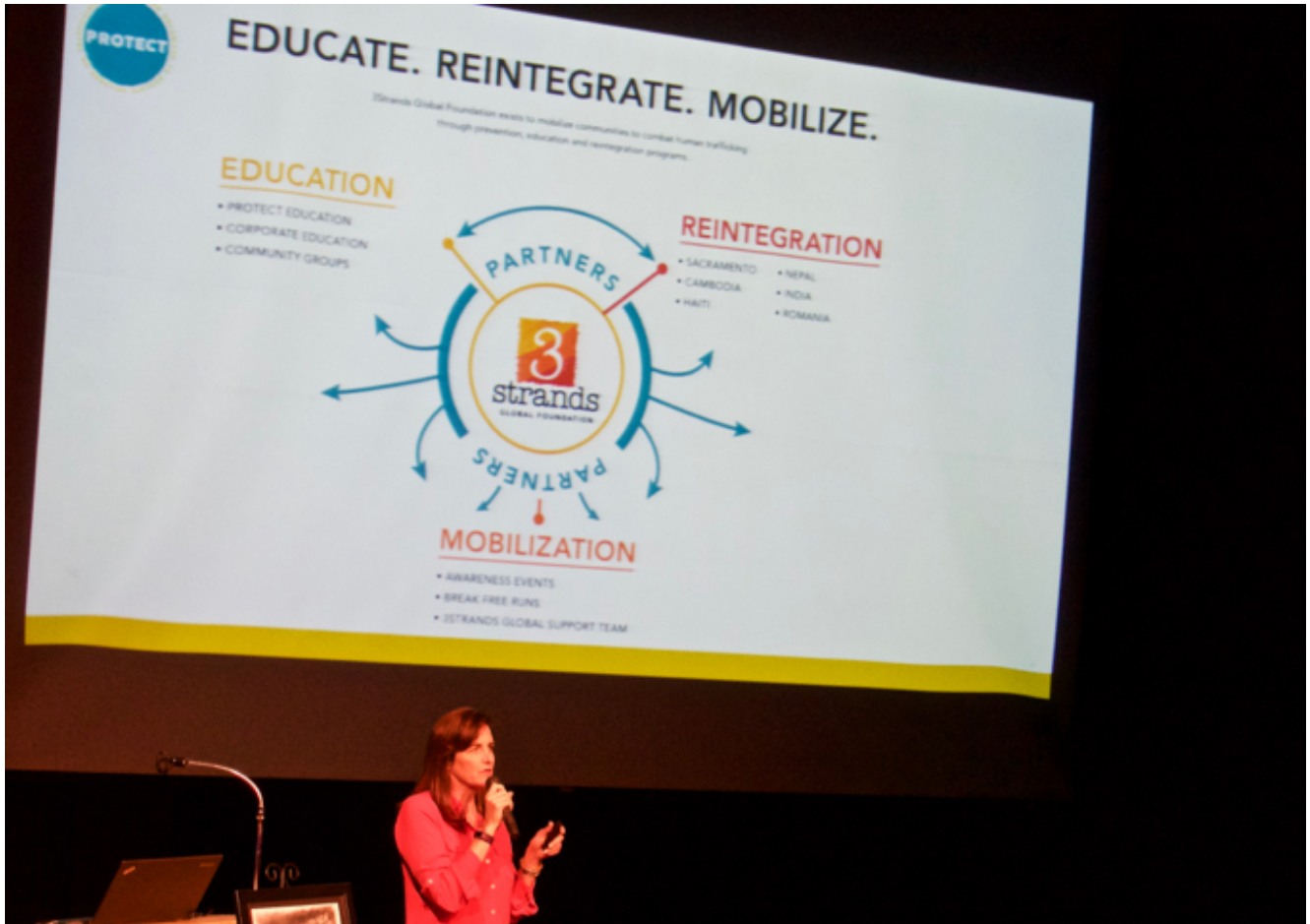


Human trafficking now a topic in schools



Ashlie Bryant, co-founder and president of 3Strands, talks about human trafficking. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

While human trafficking – better known as forced prostitution – has been a subject of several talks in South Lake Tahoe, the extent of the problem locally has not been well documented.

During a presentation last week someone asked how prevalent the problem is in South Lake Tahoe.

The answer: “We don’t have the data.” South Shore law enforcement along with the FBI, which has a local office, is “trying to create it.”

Those working to combat the problem are also working to change the vocabulary. Instead of pimp, trafficker or exploiter is issued. Instead of john, it's buyer. Instead of prostitute, it's exploited victim.

The Jan. 30 get together at Lake Tahoe Community College was put on by PATH – Partners Against Trafficking of Humans. This is a group that was created in 2014 out of Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe.

Predators lurk wherever kids hang out – near schools, ski slopes, malls. Victims don't fit a profile. They come from all socio-economic backgrounds, and every race. While mostly it's girls who are targeted, boys are not immune from being exploited.

A couple of videos were shown with the survivors telling their stories how the nightmare began. Often it's a slightly older man who befriends them and they become a couple. One made \$85 a night in tips as a waitress. The guy said he had a way she would make 10 times that amount in a night. He had her work in a strip club. She was convinced he was good for her, that she was making money for their future.

It leads to her having sex for money. Sometimes she is sold to others.

Often it starts with this guy being so sweet, buying her things, making her feel special, being affectionate and saying he loves her.

It can be hard to get out. Threats are made – such as telling family and friends what she has been doing. Physical abuse may have started.

Much of the evening was a presentation by members of 3Strands Global Foundation, which was created in 2010 after a 17-year-old West Slope girl was trafficked for eight days. Their goal is to rid the world of human trafficking. They want to disrupt

the economy of this business.

One way of doing this is through Assembly Bill 1227 that was signed last year by Gov. Jerry Brown and took effect Jan. 1. It is known as the Human Trafficking Prevention and Education Act.

According to Ashlie Bryant, co-founder and president of 3Strands, the bill requires all California schools to provide curriculum about human trafficking to fifth-, seventh-, ninth-, and 11th-graders. Younger students learn about boundaries; older kids are taught to recognize tactics.

An audience member asked if the curriculum was in Lake Tahoe Unified School District classrooms. No, was the answer. The 3Strands reps said they've gotten push back locally.

"The board's perspective is that we always have to investigate curriculum options before the district brings the information before our students. Although the process may seem cumbersome to the outside eyes, the board wants any information – especially topics that are as difficult as human trafficking – to be fully checked out. We are dealing with children and want to provide the most accurate and appropriately delivered message," LTUSD board President Barbara Bannar told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I did check with (Superintendent) Jim Tarwater and he stated that there was no push back on this topic."

The district said there was a community meeting two years ago to talk to parents and students about the dangers of human trafficking, which 3Strands attended, as well as law enforcement. 3Strands officials have conducted presentations for freshmen at South Tahoe High School each of the last two years and plan to do so again this spring.

One issue with the state law is that it is an unfunded mandate – meaning there is no money to implement it. Plus, there is always the issue that when something is added to the school day, something has to be taken away.

Notes:

Statistics from 3Strands website:

- There are nearly 2 million children worldwide exploited in the global sex trade; each year, as many as 100,000-300,000 American children are at risk of being trafficked for commercial sex in the United States.
- The average age of a trafficking victim in the United States is 11-14.
- There are approximately 20 million victims held in modern slavery globally.
- Human trafficking is a \$150 billion global industry, annually. In the U.S. alone, a \$9.8 billion industry.
- All 50 states in the U.S., and 167 countries have reported incidents of human trafficking.