

Working to combat sex trafficking in EDC

By Jeffrey McKay

Sex trafficking is a topic that has received much attention over the past few years, both locally and nationally. You may hear it discussed in the news or on social media using terms such as human trafficking, domestic minor sex trafficking, online sexual exploitation, or commercial sexual exploitation. No matter what description is used, the reality is there are youth in our county who are victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of traffickers and pimps.

Since 2014, the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) has worked with our County partners and local youth serving organizations to combat and address the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in El Dorado County. This has been accomplished through the establishment of the county's CSEC Task Force, a multidisciplinary team that includes members from the Probation Department; District Attorney's Office; Sheriff's Department; the Placerville and South Lake Tahoe police departments; El Dorado County Office of Education; county counsel; Court Appointed Special Advocates of El Dorado County; and HHSA's Behavioral Health, Public Health and Child Protective Services.

The outcomes for youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation can be tragic if intensive services and systems of support are not put in place to serve the complex needs of these victims. The primary goal of the CSEC Task Force is to ensure that county youth who are victims of sexual exploitation or domestic minor sex trafficking are kept safe and receive the services they need.

As the CSEC program coordinator for HHSA, one of the questions

I am most often asked is: "How can I get involved and help?" The best ways to help reduce CSEC and human trafficking are to become aware of the issues, educate yourself on the signs of human trafficking and CSEC, and tell someone if you suspect anyone you know is being trafficked or exploited.

The Polaris Project is a great resource for information on human trafficking. Additionally, the county **Welfare Director Associations of California's website** is a great starting place for information on CSEC. These resources can serve as a starting point for the conversation on how to best serve youth in our communities who are victims of either human trafficking or sexual exploitation.

Remember, no child can consent to sex and children who are forced into prostitution or exploitation are victims of horrific crimes with life-long effects. While the issues of human trafficking and CSEC are greater than any of us individually, there is nothing we cannot overcome together as informed and engaged citizens of El Dorado County.

If you know a youth who you suspect is being trafficked or exploited, call the El Dorado County Child Protective Services 24-hour hotline on the West Slope at 530.642.7100, in Tahoe at 530.573.3201, the National Trafficking Hotline at 888.373.7888, or 911.

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