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RCMP officer says missing Kings County youth could have links to human trafficking

Sara Ericsson (sara.ericsson@kingscountynews.ca)
(<https://web.archive.org/web/20180903092807/mailto:sara.ericsson@kingscountynews.ca>)
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 Kings District RCMP Cst. Kelli Gaudet is a familiar face to many in the community, and has delivered presentations informing the public on various issues relating to crime. She gave a presentation on human trafficking May 16 at the Berwick Baptist Church.

Kings District RCMP Cst. Kelli Gaudet is a familiar face to many in the community, and has delivered presentations informing the public on various issues relating to crime. She gave a presentation on human trafficking May 16 at the Berwick Baptist Church. - Kirk Starratt

RCMP Cst. Kelli Gaudet gave a presentation on the threats trafficking poses for Kings County youth

BERWICK – “It’s a modern-day form of slavery that’s affecting our youth in Kings County.”

These words and many more were spoken by Kings District RCMP Cst. Kelli Gaudet as part of her presentation on human trafficking and the threat it poses at home in Kings County.

A crowd of nearly 50 people gathered at the Berwick Baptist Church gasped frequently as Gaudet discussed the issue, giving real-life examples of what can happen when people become involved against their will.

She also mentioned the several recent missing persons reports involving female youths, and their probable connection to the problem.

“There’s a connection – that can’t be denied. Anyone can be trafficked, and it’s happening right here,” she said.

Read more:

- ‘He owned me’: Kings County woman talks escaping human trafficking in Toronto
(<https://web.archive.org/web/20180903092807/http://www.kingscountynews.ca/news/he-owned-me-kings-county-woman-talks-escaping-human-trafficking-in-toronto-209064/>)
- Lack of identity, support leads to ‘textbook’ human trafficking victims
(<https://web.archive.org/web/20180903092807/http://www.kingscountynews.ca/news/lack-of-identity-support-leads-to-textbook-human-trafficking-victims-209077/>)

‘Against their will’: Gaudet

As Gaudet asked the audience to identify human trafficking, several people responded with examples of humans being forced to carry out sexual acts against their will in different countries.

People expressed their surprise as Gaudet described human trafficking within a Canadian context, emphasizing it has become a domestic issue that involves youths being trafficking across the country.

She said even the RCMP were unaware of the crime’s scale until the last decade, when metaphorical blindfolds were lifted as victims came forward. And now, while awareness is growing, so too is the issue.

“The problem is here, at home, and is not slowing down. It’s gathering speed, becoming even more frequent as those involved realize the amount of money they can make and how hard it is to be caught doing it,” said Gaudet.

No chance to escape

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Gaudet reaffirmed how large a threat human trafficking poses to youths aged 13 to 30, describing how every aspect of the victim's life is controlled – their phone, their identification – and leaves them no way of getting out, or being spotted by police.

"This is never, ever a choice. I cannot emphasize that enough," she said.

She emphasized progress that's been made through initiatives like the RCMP's Project Northern Lights in which they rent hotel rooms, book time with someone being trafficked, and meet with the victim discreetly to let them know what their options are.

It's a project Gaudet said includes paying the victim to ensure their pimp is not tipped off, and they remain safe.

"Sometimes we cannot help them right then, but they might call us down the road. Letting them know we can help is an important first step," she said.

Feelings of fear, shame follow victims

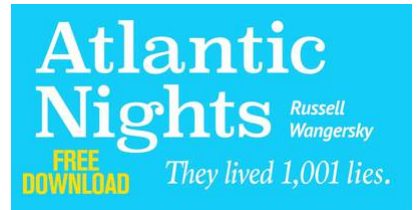
Gaudet's presentation also touched on reasons most victims never reach out to police when they're being trafficked.

These reasons, which often include the victim believing they are in love with their trafficker or feeling a sense of loyalty to them, are often rooted in fear, according to Gaudet, who added victims also often feel ashamed of what they've been forced to do.

"She now has to come back into society with no education and no self-esteem, with no one around her who understands what happened," she said.

"This person has been torn down to their lowest possible level."

She described her goal at each presentation has been to increase awareness -- something she said is among the RCMP's best tools in combatting this problem, stating, "the more people know about this, the more it will prevent our girls and boys from getting in with this."



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Updated Aug 28, 2018 at 2:40 p.m.

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