

Educating Our Way Out of Human Trafficking

Educators from all levels are just beginning to embrace their role to prevent and identify human trafficking and prepare tomorrow's anti-trafficking professionals. Worldwide, there are exciting but currently sporadic examples where education and anti-trafficking intersect. These promising developments demonstrate some of the many ways in which education can be a powerful force to prevent and identify human trafficking. Additionally, these examples may spark new ideas for teachers and other professionals in the education field to also develop anti-trafficking interventions.

Vigilance in Schools

School officials, law enforcement, nurses and teachers can learn how to recognize the potential signs of human trafficking among their students. Training helps educators learn about red flags and from whom to seek help as well as provides a heightened understanding of a trafficked person's circumstances, fears, and challenges. In particular, individuals who are already trained to report signs of child abuse could also expand their understanding to recognize human trafficking indicators. In some cases, supportive and inquisitive teachers have uncovered child domestic servitude, where students were going to school by day but then cooking and cleaning in a home against their will throughout the night. In the Philippines, the Department of Education hosted anti-trafficking education events in schools nationwide and provided training for staff and parents alike on red flags that may indicate trafficking is occurring and how to talk to students about trafficking and their safety.

Shift in Attitude

Schools have long offered a forum for influencing attitudes across a generation. Some projects aim to reduce demand for child commercial sexual exploitation and focus on men as the consumers. Some projects focus on girls' self-esteem, empowerment, education and job opportunities and create awareness about the risks of commercial sexual exploitation. Other programs focus on boys and their

attitudes toward women and girls. Student organizing groups are working to include human trafficking in their work to dispel myths and misconceptions about immigrant communities in the United States. In many European countries, school officials are fighting back against a recruitment scheme where boys, dubbed "loverboys," befriend and romance girls at school as a ruse to later deliver them to a sex trafficker. My Dangerous Loverboy, a UK NGO, offers an education resource pack for teachers to cover positive and negative relationships, peer pressure and commercial sexual exploitation.

Link to History

Efforts are underway to incorporate modern slavery lessons into traditional history curricula taught in later primary and secondary schools. Such integration is appealing because it brings history alive to students by connecting history to present day. For example, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center located in the United States presents the world's first museum-quality, permanent exhibition on human trafficking alongside exhibits detailing America's historical slave trade. They are developing a school curriculum and schools currently visit the museum on field trips. NGOs such as Anti-Slavery International also have resources for teachers, including how to integrate modern slavery into the current curriculum.



Alternatives to Child Labor

Poverty, lack of robust child labor policies and laws, and poor educational facilities contribute to exploitative and forced child labor that endangers children's physical and psychological health. Child labor, in turn, continues the cycle of poverty, where uneducated children continue to lack access to skilled and profitable employment as adults. For that reason, improving children's access to quality education prevents human trafficking. In Rwanda, Winrock International is improving formal education while also providing programs for children who have missed school due to child labor. Simultaneously, the program introduces farmers to strategies that increase agricultural productivity so that child labor is unnecessary. In India, the long-running Mid-Day Meal Scheme guarantees a meal to children attending school. For parents who send their children out to search for work or are economically vulnerable to recruiters, the program offers an alternative by providing a nutritious meal, education, and safety from recruiters as well as dangerous and exploitative labor.

Skills for the Future

A trafficked person often prioritizes job skills training, language training and education among their top needs because these critical services lead to employment and a more secure future. Many reintegration programs work with educational institutions, job skills centers and corporations to help trafficked persons access these opportunities. Trafficked persons have even undertaken specialized studies to later directly assist other trafficked persons. El Refugio de la Niñez in Guatemala employs educators in addition to social workers, psychologists and lawyers to assist returning unaccompanied children. Made by Survivors partners with shelters for trafficked persons to provide job skills training, business development and an immediate consumer market for jewelry, bags and other gifts that they make. The Youth Career Initiative of the International Business Leaders Forum connects trafficked persons in Mexico with six-month job training programs in the hotel industry.

Tomorrow's Professionals

Worldwide, students within higher education at universities, graduate schools and law schools are

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demanding courses on human trafficking. These courses offer students a way to get beyond general public awareness to explore the root causes and potential solutions to modern slavery; students will carry this knowledge into their future professions. Increasing anti-trafficking coursework within higher education offers a corresponding increase in published scholarship, research, clinical work, symposia and additional dialogue on human trafficking. This contributes to the development and advancement of the global community against trafficking. The University of São Paulo partnered with the International Labour Organization to map human trafficking in Brazil and cross-reference the data with demographics information to help the government develop intervention strategies. In addition, a U.S.-Mexico partnership among the NGO Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, the law school at Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, and the University of Michigan Law School's Human Trafficking Clinic is establishing a legal clinic in Zacatecas that will provide students with practical experience representing and advocating for trafficked persons.

These examples provide just a glimpse at some of the promising human trafficking interventions within the field of education and the potential for growth in the global anti-trafficking community. Mindful of these developments and the opportunity for expanded knowledge and skills, the Global Freedom Center includes education as a core program area. We aim to give education professionals the tools they need to integrate anti-trafficking into their daily work, network the existing practitioners so that promising practices are shared and replicated, and applaud and support their groundbreaking work.