

How human trafficking tore apart a Halton family

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She drained all her savings, and when we spoke, was facing homelessness.

I've lost everything, she said, her tone unchanging. I've lost my business. I have to leave here because I can't pay the rent. I've lost everything. And nothing has happened. There's been no help. I'm still in the same place I was a year and a half ago, when all of this started.

On June 3, SAVIS and the Halton Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (HCAHT) held a seminar in Burlington to educate people on human trafficking. Notable speakers were there, including a human trafficking survivor and representatives from a number of support centres, as well as members of Halton Police.

During their time, the police answered a number of questions posed by the audience about the specific processes police follow to ensure the safety of women involved.

When someone being trafficked contacts the police, the VICE unit sets up a meeting at a comfortable place, such as a coffee shop. Ryan Christopher, a detective in the Drug and Morality Unit of Halton Police, explained it might take three or four times to get any information.

The first meeting is all about building trust, he told the audience on June 3.

An audience member posed a predicament for the officers to answer: while in this environment, many girls use drugs and some develop addictions. One audience member asked, is this something the police look at?

We never go after the victims and their addictions, Christopher answered.



On June 3, a human trafficking seminar took place in Burlington. Above, Ryan Christopher, a detective in the Drug and Morality Unit of the Halton Police, answers questions posed by audience members regarding the processes in how police handle human trafficking cases.

Photo by Kathryn Boyle

Another audience member asked about the success rate regarding helping girls get out of that situation permanently, and Christopher couldn't give them a straight answer.

How do you measure the success rate? he said. We could arrest the pimp with charges and he could be in jail, but three months later the victim could be on the streets again.

He explained it's all about helping the women or girls

in the situation and getting them what they need, first and foremost.

There isn't a place this doesn't happen, he said about trafficking. It happens everywhere.

Part two of this story will appear in the next edition of The Independent and Free Press on June 22. The full two-part story can be found online at theifp.ca.

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