

Police strengthen focus on human trafficking in Halton

By Nicole O'Reilly
Metroland Media Group

There is a knock on a hotel room door. A young girl answers, expecting to meet a client, but it's Halton Police hu-

man trafficking officers. They saw her ad and were concerned for her safety. They call these "knock and talks."

She tries to tell them a story about why she's there, but it's clearly a cover.

"There is just sometimes where you know something is not right," says Sgt.

Martin Dick.

After a few minutes she breaks down crying. She tells the officers it's her first day after being duped into the sex trade. They were the first knock on her door.

"She told us that immediately prior to us coming through that door she was kneeling at the side of the bed praying that somebody would save her," Dick says.

"Talk about saving somebody from the brink."

This was a year ago. Since then she found an apartment and is now in college. It's a case that stays with Dick, who heads up the two-year-old human trafficking and vice team in

Halton.

Even though they were not able to charge anyone, they saved her— and that is what really matters.

But for every success story, there are more girls out there being manipulated, threatened, coerced into selling sex. In Halton they've rescued girls as young as 14.

"You often think of the girls you didn't manage to get to as well," Dick says, explaining that it takes a mix of compassion, strength and investigative tenacity to be a good human trafficking investigator.

"It's very difficult to go through a hotel door, and there is a girl standing in front of you crying and yet she won't tell you her story, she won't come with you."

In those cases all Dick hopes for is that his team— made of up of three (soon to be four) full-time officers, plus a rotation of officers seconded from other units— gives that girl a glimmer of hope and she maybe seeks

help later.

Halton's human trafficking team works closely with similar units across Ontario, including in Hamilton. He sees them as one big team and doesn't care to keep score of who's laying the

most charges. Although, Halton's numbers are impressive with more than 12 traffickers arrested and more than 100 charges laid.

Human trafficking is considered the second

largest source of illegal money worldwide and one of the fastest growing areas of crime. It's an area of law in Canada that can be difficult to enforce, because to win in court the case rests on the testimony of the victim.

Dick says the public often thinks human trafficking involves bringing girls in from other countries, but in reality most victims are Canadian girls.

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