

HUMAN TRAFFICKERS LIKE HALTON'S HOTELS AND HIGHER INCOME

HALTON POLICE SAY TREND EMERGING WHERE HUMAN TRAFFICKERS MAKE USE OF AIRBNBS

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Ontario is a hub for human trafficking and the traffickers are becoming very familiar with Halton.

These were some of the messages that came out of a human trafficking education seminar, which was held at Halton police headquarters on Wednesday, Oct. 16.

The event was presented by Crime Stoppers of Halton and the registered charity Courage for Freedom, and began with a troubling reality check from Halton police Supt.

Kevin Maher. Maher noted that in the last 12 months, 72 separate human trafficking related charges have been laid in Halton and 12 women have been rescued as a result.

"I feel that this speaks to the depth of the problem and the tragic impact, the fact that 12 young women have suffered greatly and have been significantly traumatized here in Halton," said Maher.

"These are 12 women who are sisters, daughters and in some cases even mothers."

Those present heard from two members of the Halton police human trafficking unit.

Det. Const. Lukasz Walczykiewicz and Det. Const. Julie Powers said Halton is an attractive place for human traffickers, specifically those involved in the sex trade, be-

cause multiple highways pass through Halton and there are many hotels and motels along these highways for them to operate out of.

Walczykiewicz said there is also a higher income level in Halton, which means the traffickers can charge more for their victim's services.

Powers described human trafficking as modern day slavery, noting the relationship between the trafficker and the victim is one of pure exploitation.

Victims, she said, are manipulated into a life of forced prostitution and controlled with threats and often violence.

The officers said there are four stages in the recruitment of a person by traffickers: Luring, grooming, coercion and exploitation.

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- Halton police Supt. Kevin Maher

there is no equation for how long each stage takes, noting some victims he has dealt with went through these stages in months while others took just days.

He said luring is when a trafficker assesses, tests, collects information on a potential victim and works to make them feel special.

Previously, Walczykiewicz said, the traffickers would attend schools,

shelters, malls or parties to find vulnerable people.

He says now social media, and even dating sites, play a much larger role.

Grooming follows.

"These traffickers, what they are selling is the dream of each individual, each victim. They collect info, find out what their vulnerabilities are, what their goals in life are," said Walczykiewicz.

"They're selling the dream, the condo, a lavish lifestyle, the vacationing, which at the end of the day never comes to be. The only person who benefits from the situation is the trafficker."

In the coercion stage, Walczykiewicz said, the trafficker may begin things like desensitizing the victim to sex acts and then rewarding them afterward. He said the trafficker may suddenly stop showering the victim with attention, at which point the victim tries to get back in his good graces by doing whatever he says. The officer said exploitation and potentially confinement, isolation, abuse and threats follow. Powers said many victims are actually branded with the traffickers' name or nickname.

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