

# OKLAHOMA COUNTY VITAL SIGNS

volume 1, edition 3

CREATE AWARENESS.  
SUPPORT VICTIMS' NEEDS.  
REPORT WHAT YOU SEE AND  
INFLUENCE THE CONDITION OF ALL.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
SPECIAL EDITION



DEDICATED TO AND IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION OF MARK ELAM  
DIRECTOR OF OATH - OKLAHOMANS AGAINST TRAFFICKING HUMANS.

Only through Mark's vision and leadership has our community become aware of this issue.

“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF  
THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS  
**CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.**  
INDEED, IT IS THE  
**ONLY THING**  
THAT EVER HAS.”



— MARGARET MEAD



“WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST ISSUE OF VITAL SIGNS. THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE TOPIC OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING. IN SOME WAYS, THIS IS A NEW AND EMERGING PROBLEM. IN OTHERS, IT IS AS OLD AS METHUSELAH. I BELIEVE IT IS AN OFFENSE TO THE SENSE OF PERSONAL LIBERTY AND FREEDOMS THAT WE, AS AMERICANS, ENJOY. YET, IT EXISTS HERE AND NOW.”

Our involvement started nearly two years ago when we were contacted by the local office of the FBI to ask if we could help provide housing and other services to the victims of this horrible crime. We learned over the next few months of the extent of this problem, and the costs associated with providing assistance to victims. Since then, we have worked with others around the state to formulate a response.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” This statement, often attributed to the 18th century statesman Edmund Burke, helps to define the challenge we face. The victims of human trafficking are here in our state and in our communities. It seems though, that we don’t always recognize the crimes that are going on right in front of us. Far too often, they can be invisible.

As our awareness grew, so did our determination to take action. The Board of Directors of United Way of Central Oklahoma has taken steps to address this problem, including sponsoring the recent statewide conference where over 200 people gathered to work towards a coordinated response. We will continue to be involved, both directly and through our Partner Agencies.

While we know this issue is disturbing, we hope that you will take the time to study the material we have provided. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us by email at [vitalsigns@unitedwayokc.org](mailto:vitalsigns@unitedwayokc.org), or call the United Way staff at 523-3532.

Sincerely,



EDMUND O. MARTIN

Chairman of the Board of Directors, United Way of Central Oklahoma  
Chairman of the Board, Ackerman McQueen



## TYPICAL VICTIM STORY

Written by Kim Weems, FBI Victim Specialist, Oklahoma City Division

Every story is different, but many children are pulled into the world of trafficking, or forced prostitution, in similar ways. Whether they have run away or been thrown out of their home, these children, boys and girls of all ages, often find themselves vulnerable and alone. Not knowing where to go or how to ask for help, these kids begin wandering the streets. Imagine being one of these children after a night with no shelter, no food and afraid to fall asleep. Traffickers, or pimps, make it their business to know how to talk to that child and see her desperation. Often a child is simply walking down the street when a car pulls up next to her and the man inside offers to drive her someplace warm and buy her a meal. Maybe her instinct is to say no but there's a woman in the car too which makes her feel safe enough to take the risk. She doesn't realize that this woman is being trafficked herself and it's part of her job to help recruit new girls. They listen to her and sympathize and tell some of their own sad tales so she knows they understand how she feels. They buy her something to eat and give her a safe place to sleep. But, within a day or two, the pimp tells her she needs to earn her place there and when she asks what he means, he takes her for a drive. When the car stops, she gets out with her new friend, the woman she started to trust. They walk around and within a few minutes this child has been shown how to approach a "trick" and instructed how to handle the money. What happens next is something she's expected to just figure out. Maybe she's 10 or maybe she's 16, but now she's been "turned out" and she doesn't control anything in her world anymore.

Once in "the life" this girl is told by her pimp that this is the only thing she's good for, nobody cares about her but him, that the police will arrest her and she's the only one who would go to jail. For years, this child may be beaten, assaulted, traded to other pimps and shown again and again that she's nothing more than property; her value as a human being is based only on how much money she brings back to her pimp. For years, she's controlled by another person and deprived of so much: food, sleep, safety, privacy, family, visits to doctors and dentists, an education and any opportunity to live outside of the trafficker's world. By the time she's 18, she's viewed by the world as a prostitute and criminal, not a victim. If she's lucky, sometime within the next ten years she'll have enough life experience and determination to overcome her fear and find a way to leave. Many of these trafficking victims never have the chance.

Understanding the challenges and hardships faced by trafficking victims enables us to come together as a community and advocate on their behalf. We have the ability to identify those resources that will help victims meet their basic needs such as food, temporary shelter, and clothing but we must begin building programs designed to meet the specific needs of victims recovering from the trauma of prostitution. As a community, we can work towards recovering these children and young adults and getting them the services they need to leave the world of trafficking behind.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS THE  
FASTEST GROWING  
CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE.**

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## DIAGNOSIS

Human trafficking is no longer just an international crisis, the United States has become a primary destination for men, women, and children trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation. Oklahoma is one of four states, listed by the US Department of State with the largest concentrations of trafficking survivors receiving federal assistance.<sup>1</sup> Human trafficking is defined as a criminal activity in which people are recruited, harbored, transported, bought, or kidnapped to serve an exploitative purpose, such as sexual slavery, forced labor, or child soldiery.

Human trafficking thrives because conditions allow for high profit at low risk. Estimates of individuals trafficked into the United States range from 14,500 to 17,500 each year<sup>2</sup> to as high as 45,000 to 50,000 each year.<sup>3</sup> An additional number are trafficked within the United States, although domestic trafficking trends are more difficult to estimate. In Oklahoma the two most common forms of human trafficking include forced labor and sex trafficking. Forced Labor is involuntary servitude or modern-day slavery; frequently farm labor.<sup>4</sup> Sex trafficking is forcing or deceiving an individual into prostitution and maintaining them.<sup>4</sup> While foreigners inside and outside of the United States are susceptible to human trafficking, U.S. citizens also fall victim to the crime. Traffickers seek to exploit those who are most vulnerable – the young, the desperate, and the easily manipulated.<sup>5</sup> Oklahoma's central location is believed to play a major role in trafficking cases; with three major highways, I-35, I-40 and I-44, Oklahoma cities are on major human trafficking routes throughout the Midwest.

Nationally and statewide our government is recognizing the crime of human trafficking. This includes the enactment of legislation providing resources to both law enforcement and victim service agencies who are working to better identify and assist trafficking victims and prosecute traffickers.



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1. Trafficking in Persons Report 2003. Rep. U.S. Department of State, June 2003. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/>>.  
2. Trafficking in Persons Report 2004. Rep. U.S. Department of State, June 2004. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/>>.  
3. Trafficking in Persons Report 2001. Rep. U.S. Department of State, June 2001. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2001/>>.  
4. Trafficking in Persons Report 2009. Rep. U.S. Department of State, June 2009. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/>>.  
5. Domestic Human Trafficking, An Internal Issue. Rep. Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, 2008. Print.



The Trafficking of Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) and its 2003, 2005 and 2008 reauthorizations are the first comprehensive federal law in response to human trafficking. The 2005 reauthorization directs the Department of Justice to conduct biennial reporting on human trafficking and was

created in response to the Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS). The HTRS provides data on human trafficking incidents, with the most recent analyses reporting investigations of 1,229 suspected incidents of human trafficking.<sup>6</sup> Oklahoma is one of 42 states that have passed legislation criminalizing human trafficking.<sup>7</sup>

Victims of trafficking are almost always reliant on their trafficker for housing, food and other necessities. Any identifying documentation such as a driver's license or passport is taken from them and their ability to communicate with anyone in the outside world is limited to the people they are forced to serve. A person who is a victim of human trafficking may not identify their personal experience with the global problem of sex trafficking, believing instead that theirs is an individual issue that has resulted from their own choices and behavior. Though social service agencies use terms such as "reintegration" and "restoration," the process of victim aftercare is oftentimes much more complicated. Individuals freed from a human trafficking experience may decide that shame and abuse await them in their home state or country, and elect to reconstruct their lives elsewhere. Because human trafficking victims experience intense emotional trauma from repeated episodes of sexual and mental abuse, they require a supportive environment free of recrimination.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Kyckelhahn, Tracey, Allen J. Beck, Ph.D., and Thomas H. Cohen, Ph.D. Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2007-08. Rep. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009. Print.

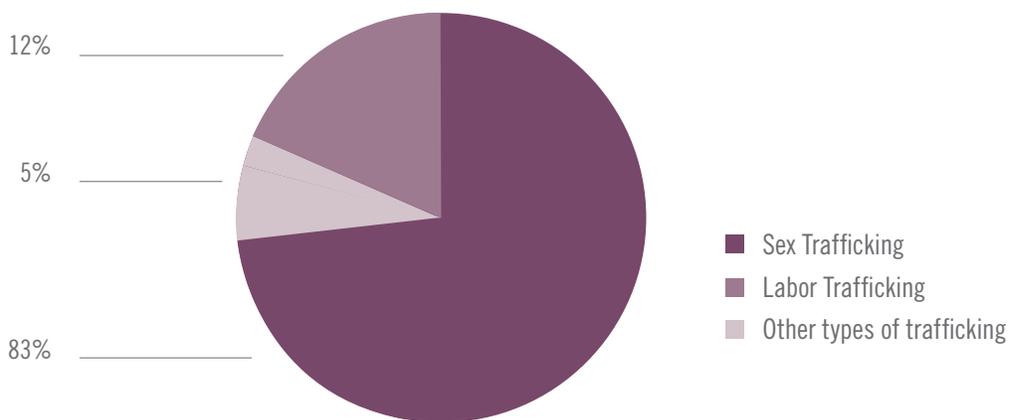
7. Trafficking in Persons Report 2009. Rep. U.S. Department of State, June 2009. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/>>.

8. "Federal Bureau of Investigation - Innocence Lost." FBI - Federal Bureau of Investigation. Web. May 2010. <<http://www.fbi.gov/innolost/innolost.htm>>.

When a victim is identified and rescued, many social services such as housing, counseling, and specialized support are not prepared to meet the special needs of human trafficking victims due to the lack of knowledge of providers. Federal agencies are recognizing and working cases in Oklahoma, but because human trafficking is relatively new to state and local law enforcement many victims of human trafficking are misclassified.

TRAFFICKING VICTIMS TYPICALLY  
**DO NOT SEEK HELP  
BECAUSE THEY FEAR  
THAT THEY OR THEIR FAMILIES  
WILL BE HURT  
BY THEIR TRAFFICKER,  
OR THAT THEY WILL BE DEPORTED.**

### ALLEGED HUMAN TRAFFICKING INCIDENTS IN UNITED STATES, 2007-2008



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Human Trafficking Reporting System, 2007-08.

# AMERICA IS THE NUMBER ONE DESTINATION FOR CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING IN THE WORLD.<sup>10</sup>

## SEX TRAFFICKING

Most victims of sex trafficking into and within the United States are women and children, particularly girls under the age of 18. A majority of domestic victims tend to be runaways or “throwaways”, individuals kicked out or disowned by family, who are recruited on the streets or through the internet. Each time the FBI conducts a nationwide operation through the [Innocence Lost Program] to recover minors from the commercial sex industry, children from Oklahoma are recovered. Of the total alleged sex trafficking incidents reported by HTRS for 2007-2008, 38% involved child sex trafficking and 62% involved adult sex trafficking such as forced prostitution. The FBI program “Stormy Nights” rescued 13 Oklahoma children ages 12 and up in 2004 from a prostitution ring operating at Oklahoma City truck stops.<sup>8</sup> “Stormy Nights” is one of the two largest cases prosecuted in the United States.

## STORMY NIGHTS

The Oklahoma City Division of the FBI’s Innocence Lost Initiative conducted a large-scale child prostitution investigation focused on the interstate prostitution of children at truck stops and through call services nationwide appropriately named, STORMY NIGHTS. Nine federal arrest warrants and three federal search warrants were executed in and around the Oklahoma City area. The case identified a total of 48 pimps, 24 of which exploited juveniles. Sixteen juveniles were recovered as a result of this case. The people used in prostitution were recruited from Oklahoma City and traveled to truck stops and known prostitution areas in Denver, Miami, Houston and Dallas. Nine defendants were charged with sex trafficking of minors and transporting juveniles for use in prostitution. Eight defendants pleaded guilty and a ninth was convicted at trial in 2005.

**WITHIN THE FIRST 48 HOURS OF BEING ON THE STREET,  
ONE IN THREE CHILDREN ARE LURED INTO PROSTITUTION.  
THE AVERAGE AGE A PERSON ENTERS INTO PROSTITUTION IS 12 TO 14.<sup>9</sup>**

9. "Resources on Human Slavery | Love146.org." Home | Love146.org. Web. 3 May 2010. <<http://love146.org/resources/trafficking>>.

10. Oklahomans Against Trafficking of Humans - O.A.T.H. - Home. Web. 5 May 2010. <<http://oathcoalition.org/>>.

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## JOHN PICKLE COMPANY

In 2001, a Tulsa based oil industry parts manufacturer lured 52 skilled laborers from India with promises of high-paying jobs and the chance to stay in the United States indefinitely. However, once they arrived, the workers had their identification and immigration documents confiscated by the company, were crammed into a warehouse dormitory, and only paid between \$1.00 and \$3.17 per hour, while non-Indian employees of the same company were paid approximately \$14.00 per hour for performing the same type of skilled work. The workers were forced to live behind the company gates until escaping in 2002 with the aid of area churches. In 2006, a judge ordered John Pickle Company to pay \$1.24 million to the 52 male victims.

## FORCED LABOR

Labor trafficking victims are forced to work under circumstances to which they did not agree prior to accepting employment.

They are forced to work in poor, unsafe conditions as domestic servants, migrant farm workers, general laborers or employees in restaurants and small retail shops. Most forced labor cases involve immigrants or aliens transported or lured into the United States by traffickers who advertise and promise legitimate paid work in America.<sup>11</sup> Once they arrive, they are beaten and threatened into submission; traffickers often threaten to harm the victim's families back home. Domestic labor trafficked victims, like sex trafficking victims, tend to be recruited from the most vulnerable, often times impoverished, unemployed or underemployed individuals. Of the alleged human trafficking incidents reported by HTRS for 2007-2008, 12% involved labor trafficking.<sup>6</sup> In 2006, an Oklahoma federal court handed down a judgement against John Pickle Company, a Tulsa based manufacturing company, for coercing and improperly treating 52 men who they lured from India. This case is the second of the two largest Human Trafficking cases prosecuted in the United States.

**MORE THAN  
14,500  
INDIVIDUALS ARE TRAFFICKED INTO THE U.S.  
FROM OTHER COUNTRIES  
EACH YEAR.<sup>2</sup>**

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11. Domestic Human Trafficking, An Internal Issue. Rep. Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, 2008. Print.

## PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

MARY MÉLON  
PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER, JOURNAL RECORD

Insider's  
Perspective



Like so many, I gave little thought to the question of human trafficking. I knew it existed, but only in distant lands. I had no idea whatsoever that it might exist here in Oklahoma. That is, until I met a young man who, by many definitions, is a victim of human trafficking and has been exploited by others for financial gain.

My husband met “Henry” at the airport. He had a look about him that said, “I am lost, and I don’t know anyone that can help.” He had traveled to Oklahoma from his home country in Africa in order to be part of an international student exchange program. He didn’t realize until he got here that his ultimate destination, where a job and lodging were waiting for him, was over sixty miles from the airport. My husband was happy to give him a ride, and that is the beginning of our story.

When my husband saw the living conditions and where he would be working he immediately had a very bad feeling about the entire situation. Instinctively he knew this was wrong, but didn’t know what to do for Henry.

Over the next few months, we brought him to Oklahoma City so that he could see more of our state and learn more of our culture. He had been told that America is a land of opportunity; but for Henry, this was not the case. He believed that he was here to learn and gain new job skills; instead, he spent most of his time working a minimum wage, low-skilled job cleaning rooms at a hotel. These were not the skills he had expected to learn, it was another way in which he was trapped in this very remote community.

As part of the student program, Henry paid over \$1,000 just to join the program as well as his travel expenses to get to Oklahoma.

Henry had been “sponsored” by a local businessman. Once here, he found out this sponsorship included working at the sponsor’s hotel and sharing a 2 bedroom-1 bath house with over 12 male and female roommates from various countries as part of the same educational program. Not only did the sponsor own the house where they all lived, he also owned the restaurant and hotel where most of them worked. Most of the students had their passports and visas taken from them when they arrived. We coached Henry and told him to keep his identification-no matter what. After two weeks of hard work Henry was paid a grand total of \$17 after the room and board and other administrative expenses were deducted. Even though he was technically free to leave at any time, he had little money and no transportation. At best, it was economic bondage; at worst, slavery. When he or any of his fellow exchange students would complain, the sponsor would threaten to transfer them to a sister program in another state, or terminate them from the program, leaving them with very limited options.

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In the end, my husband and I helped the young man move to Oklahoma City and go to work for a local hotel, where he worked until his VISA expired. He was able to save enough money to travel home to his family.

I share Henry's story for several reasons, with perhaps the most important being the need to dispel the idea that human trafficking does not exist in the United States or in Oklahoma. Indeed it is a very real, very present social problem lurking in the most inconspicuous places across our country and world. Though many times human trafficking comes in the form of physical abuse, it has other forms as well. In addition, it is important to note that although individuals may enter into these situations willingly, as was the case for Henry, they are certainly not right or acceptable. In the United States, human trafficking is fundamentally unconstitutional, falling under the involuntary servitude and forced labor conditions addressed by the Thirteenth Amendment. Individuals enter into these arrangements under false pretenses for the pursuit of a better life, only to find themselves in abusive conditions and without any of their basic human rights. Citizens need to be aware and willing to intervene and advocate on the behalf of human trafficking victims, and send the message that simply because you have the power and ability to take advantage of another human being does not mean you have the right. I urge anyone who reads this to be a voice for victims of human trafficking who are prohibited from speaking for themselves, and help them escape a life of overwhelming abuse and exploitation.



**THE TWO LARGEST  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING CASES  
PROSECUTED TO DATE IN THE UNITED STATES  
ARE IN OKLAHOMA.**



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FOR: Action

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ADDRESSING: Human Trafficking

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“This is more than a labor rights issue or an issue of unequal development. It is a basic human rights issue because it involves such a massive and harmful form of discrimination.”

- Mary Robinson, former High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations

H.L. Mencken, the 20th century journalist and essayist, once said, “I believe that is it better to tell the truth than a lie. I believe it is better to be free than to be a slave. And I believe it is better to know than be ignorant.”

Such is the case with the issue of human trafficking. Most of us were not aware of this horrible problem, but now that we are, we see evidence of it in many places. None of us benefit directly from it, and may or may not know anyone associated with it. Yet we know that it takes place in our community. We are all likely to meet a victim and not recognize the signs, but we have to face the fact that there are many local children who are at risk of becoming entrapped into a life most of us cannot even imagine.

Each of us is called to respond. Law enforcement must grow in their abilities to recognize the victims of human trafficking, and prosecutors must be willing to vigorously pursue those who profit from these activities. Lawmakers must be willing to toughen the applicable laws, when necessary. Churches and social service agencies must be better able to reach out to the victims in order to help them recover from what they’ve experienced. The news media must report on these circumstances when they occur. Consumers must refuse to do business with companies that have been exposed as using forced labor, such as the case with the oil industry parts manufacturer in Tulsa.

Finally, all of us must develop a greater awareness of this problem and its victims, and be willing to call the authorities when we come face-to-face with someone who might be a victim. If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the National Trafficking Tip Line at 888-373-2888.

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## OKLAHOMANS TAKE ACTION

A Human Trafficking Taskforce was formed in 2009 with the focus of education and relationship building among social services organizations, law enforcement, and the faith community. The taskforce is working together on establishing policies and procedures in order to build the collaboration and cooperation needed from all entities currently involved and new partners as the taskforce continues to grow. Some social service agencies currently involved include; Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, YWCA and United Way of Central Oklahoma. For a full list of participants please visit [oathcoaliton.org](http://oathcoaliton.org). Other major cities with similar human trafficking needs and program development cite a strong taskforce as their best asset to address the various issues surrounding human trafficking.



Senate Bill 956 was signed into law on June 5, 2010. The bill will align state law with the Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act, granting state law enforcement greater leeway to pursue human trafficking activities. The bill also provides for tougher punishment of human traffickers, who could face up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. The penalty increases to ten years in prison and a fine of up to \$20,000

when victims are 18 or younger. Previous Oklahoma law only enhanced the penalties when victims were 14 or younger. Additionally, the new law allows law enforcement to seize "any vehicle or conveyance used in any manner to facilitate or participate in the commission of any human trafficking offense."

The Salvation Army Central Oklahoma Area Command is planning to incorporate human trafficking programming into their operations over the next few years. With plans for the new facility, Salvation Army has begun prioritizing program development in order to best support human trafficking survivors.

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## BEST IN PRACTICE

Founded in 2007 by Dr. David Batstone, Mark Wexler and Dr. Kique Bazan, the Not for Sale Campaign is a California-based non-profit corporation. The campaign works to link law enforcement, business leaders, universities, government officials, social service organizations, and faith-based groups to develop and coordinate effective actions on behalf of the 200,000 people currently living in slavery within the United States and the 27 million victims worldwide. In 2010 the Not for Sale Campaign (NFSC) debuted its “Stop Paying for Slavery” Tour which focuses on ending slavery in supply chains. In March, Manpower Inc., a \$16 billion company and world leader in the employment services industry, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NFSC and joined the fight against human trafficking and forced labor.



Since receiving their first victim in early 2007, The Salvation Army Florida Division has received more than 33 male and female human trafficking victims in the Florida area from the United States as well as foreign nations. The Salvation Army Florida Division offers shelter, food, clothing and services to victims of sexual and labor exploitation while partnering with World Relief who provides case management.



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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS THE  
SECOND MOST LUCRATIVE CRIME  
**WORLDWIDE**  
BEHIND DRUG TRAFFICKING.

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