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TRAFFIC

ALERT

AAMVA MEMBERS CAN HELP FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

BY MATT ALDERTON

Sometimes, a phone call isn't just a phone call. Made at the right time, in the right place, it's a lifeline.

Just ask truck driver Kevin Kimmel of Tavares, Florida. On the morning of Jan. 6, 2015, he pulled his rig into the Pilot Travel Center in New Kent County, Virginia, on Rte. 106 near Interstate 64. Fresh from a spate of nighttime deliveries, he was thirsty for sleep. Instead of shuteye, however, what he found was a suspicious RV parked two spots away from him. Its windows were blacked out, and outside was a grisly looking man alternating between the RV and the convenience store that anchored the truck stop.

As he continued watching the vehicle over the course of the next day, Kimmel witnessed numerous men knock on its door, then disappear inside. Things didn't look right. But they didn't necessarily look wrong, either—until he saw a young girl's face framed in one of the RV's windows. It appeared only for a moment, and then disappeared behind a black curtain, as if it had been violently jerked away. Shortly after, the RV began to rock, as if there were a skirmish inside. That's when Kimmel called the police.

"It turns out that this girl—a 20-year-old woman—had been kidnapped and coerced from Clive, Iowa, by a couple who beat

her and starved her," reports Kendis Paris, executive director of Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT), a Denver-based nonprofit that teaches truck drivers like Kimmel to recognize and report instances of human trafficking and exploitation. "This couple had burned her stomach and the soles of her feet and were pimping her out on Craigslist. Those men who were coming to the RV were purchasing her for commercial sex, but thanks to Kevin's call she's now home with her family and that couple has pled guilty to human trafficking in federal court. They face 15 years to life in prison."

Paris established TAT in 2009 because in addition to hotels, motels, malls and other venues of opportunity, human traffickers often find and sell victims at truck stops and rest areas, which puts truck drivers in a good position to stop human trafficking—if only they knew what to look for.

"The trucking industry is basically the eyes and ears of the nation's highways," Paris explains. "Because they way outnumber law enforcement, we recognized that they could be a really valuable source of intelligence if they understood what they were looking at."

Their relationship with commercial drivers and transportation companies across the United States and Canada makes

departments of transportation and motor vehicle agencies ideal partners through which to spread the message.

“Wherever there is an overlap between trucking and law enforcement, there is an opportunity to educate drivers about human trafficking,” Paris says.

‘TRULY REPREHENSIBLE’

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) defines human trafficking as the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.”

Because human trafficking is underreported, reliable numbers are hard to come by. The International Labour Organization (ILO), however, says nearly 21 million people worldwide—three out of every 1,000 people—exist in forced labor. Of these, 4.5 million (22 percent) are victims of forced sexual exploitation and 14.2 million (68 percent) are victims of forced labor exploitation in economic activities such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing.

“To coerce someone into prostitution or involuntary servitude is truly reprehensible,” says Peter T. Edge, executive associate director for ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) team that investigates and prosecutes human trafficking crimes. “It is among the most base of actions to strip another person of their humanity, and that is essentially what these criminals ... are doing: dehumanizing their victims.”

Although dehumanization is big business—the global human trafficking industry is valued at \$32 billion a year, according to ILO—the cost isn’t just financial. “The average life expectancy for a victim [of sex trafficking] is seven years,” Paris says. “For those who come out on the other side, there are physical injuries, neurological problems, reproductive health issues, substance



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THE IOWA MODEL

When he learned the heartbreaking realities of human trafficking, Iowa Department of Transportation Chief of Motor Vehicle Enforcement David Lorenzen contacted TAT to inquire as to how he could help.

“The Motor Vehicle Enforcement unit that I oversee has a real tight connection with the commercial vehicle industry. We conduct about 50,000 commercial vehicle inspections annually and interact with thousands of commercial vehicle drivers on a yearly basis,” Lorenzen says. “Because truck drivers are such a mobile group—they’re constantly moving throughout the state and throughout the country, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day—the Iowa attorney general’s office thought we would be a good agency to partner with to raise awareness around human trafficking in our state. One of the ways they suggested we do that was through Truckers Against Trafficking.”

Two years later, the Iowa DOT isn’t just fighting human trafficking in the Hawkeye State; the program it created is serving as a model for how to do so across North America. Co-created by TAT with Lorenzen

and his colleague, 2014–2015 AAMVA Chair of the Board Mark Lowe, director of Iowa DOT’s Motor Vehicle Division, the “Iowa Motor Vehicle Enforcement Model” has been fully adopted in two states—Iowa and Michigan—and partially adopted in 13 others: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico, Ohio, South Carolina and Virginia. Its key ingredients are:

- Training motor vehicle enforcement and law enforcement officers to recognize human trafficking.
- Stocking weigh stations, ports of entry and rest areas with human trafficking literature.

- Visiting truck stops with human trafficking literature that can be distributed to truckers and used to train truck stop employees.
- Including human trafficking training in mandatory safety compliance meetings within trucking companies.
- Spreading awareness about human trafficking via multiple channels, including Iowa DOT's website and the Iowa State Fair, among others.
- Using influence to spread the word about human trafficking to industry partners, including AAMVA.
- Distributing educational DVDs and wallet cards as part of all motor vehicle enforcement programs for law enforcement, service clubs, motor carriers, etc.
- Using asset forfeiture funds to pay for human trafficking training materials.
- Joining the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) law enforcement network.
- Introducing TAT to state trucking associations.
- Ensuring that every commercial driver's license issued or renewed is accompanied with an educational wallet card.
- Collecting data of interdiction stops that lead to human trafficking investigations.

"Deep down, no matter what occupation you're in, everybody wants to do something that's for the good of mankind," reflects Lorenzen, who says Iowa DOT leverages official TAT training materials to educate officers, truckers, DMV staff and truck stop personnel on human trafficking identification and reporting, the latter of which is accomplished nationwide through a 24-hour toll-free NHTRC hotline. "This is an opportunity for our people to make a difference because it doesn't require a ton of equipment and a ton of training; it's just teaching people to be alert, to look for certain things and to make a phone call when they see those things."

TRAFFICKING JAM

If it can happen in Iowa, human trafficking can happen anywhere—and does, according to Lorenzen. "When you're in the middle of the country in a small rural area, like we are, you tend to think, 'That isn't happening here.' In fact, it is," he says.

"Human trafficking knows no geographic boundaries. It happens everywhere."

Human trafficking may be everywhere. But so are commercial motor vehicles, points out Paris, who says every facet of AAMVA membership—law enforcement, driver services and vehicle services—is well-positioned to help victims of human trafficking.

"Whatever your office and whatever your organization, if you work with

commercial vehicles or motor vehicle enforcement you have a role to play utilizing your specific sphere to get information about human trafficking into the right hands," she says.

Lowe agrees and offers the following insights about AAMVA members' potential contributions:

Law enforcement: Law enforcement is on the front lines of motor vehicle enforcement, according to Lowe, who says officers can leverage their authority on roads to both enforce and educate. "Law enforcement may be encountering vehicles that have victims in them, so their own internal training is really important," he explains, emphasizing that officers can positively impact human trafficking by treating prostitutes as victims instead of criminals, by being visible at rest areas and truck stops, and by honing their investigative skills to recognize human trafficking when they see it—for instance, when a passenger in a stopped vehicle has missing or false identification. "Identity investigations frequently uncover other criminal activities because traffickers often control their victims' identities."

Driver services: If drivers are the eyes and ears of the nation's highways, then those who work in driver services are the voice, telling them where to look and listen. "On the driver services side, we know who the commercial drivers are and we interact with them closely, which makes it easy for us to contact them with information to raise their awareness and generate more leads for law enforcement," Lowe says.

Vehicle services: Their oversight of license plates, vehicle registrations, routing and permitting makes those who handle vehicle services ideal ambassadors to work with motor carriers on group training and education for their drivers. In fact, that's how Kimmel received his training: His employer, Con-way Truckload of Joplin, Missouri, provided it. "With vehicle services we have a lot of reasons and opportunities to interact with motor carriers through our newsletters, carrier meetings, etc.," Lowe says. "That's yet another avenue for us to get the message out."

The famous Russian stage director Konstantin Stanislavsky said it best with his famous quip: "There are no small parts; only small actors." Although he was talking about acting, he could have easily been talking about action, instead.

"We're basically talking about slavery here, and that's not something any of us wants to tolerate," Lowe concludes. "When you realize that, it becomes easy to make the case that somebody should do something about this. The question becomes: Who? Because so much of human trafficking goes on in and around vehicles and roads, the AAMVA membership is an obvious answer." **m**

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) is a national, toll-free hotline that answers calls in more than 200 languages from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. To report a tip, connect with local anti-trafficking resources or request training and technical assistance, call 1-888-373-7888 or text "HELP" to BeFree (233733).