

Human trafficking – a concern for girls on the streets

By Kathryn Reed

While people coming across the border illegally in the back of truck, then sold for slave labor is often the image people conjure when they hear the phrase “human trafficking,” it is not the only kind.

Young girls lured into prostitution to be part of a stable for some pimp are also victims of human trafficking.



Janice Dean, victims’ rights advocate with the FBI, and Minerva Shelton, an FBI agent, spent 90 minutes last week talking to a group of about 40 people about this issue. While they are out of the Sacramento office, their jurisdiction covers Lake Tahoe.

Girls as young as 11 have been found on the streets turning tricks. The average age is 14.

While the problem is more acute in Sacramento, South Lake Tahoe is not immune from this type of crime.

Frustration, though, from those sitting in the El Dorado County courtroom in South Lake was vented at the end of the talk. Lawyers, CASA volunteers, law enforcement, assistant district attorneys – all lamented that the system is failing the girls.

The FBI’s solution is to lock them up. The two speakers said this is the only choice because the girls tend to run when placed in a home. A group home far from civilization – the streets – is the only alternative, and those are rare.

“We know the perps are bringing the girls here,” Shelton said.

Hotel managers sometimes turn the other way, choosing to accept the cash for a room instead of calling the cops if they see young girls with guys clearly not their father.

An officer in the back of the room asked the FBI if there was a database where they could enter information about a suspicious stop – when there is no legal reason to detain the adult driver, but something seems fishy. The FBI said nothing is being used by everyone, but the officer could contact them.

“What I’ve seen in Sacramento is we are not talking to each other. We say we’re on the same team, but we don’t talk,” Shelton said.

Wendy David, a CASA volunteer, vented her frustration with no one doing anything to help these girls become responsible, functioning adults.

“My experience is these girls are sexually exploited at a young age and then they are treated like a criminal,” David said.

Judge Suzanne Kingsbury relayed how she’s had cases where the girls said the allure of the lifestyle got them started in the dead-end business.

Dean said statistics show many of the girls who end up on the streets have run from home where they had been sexually abused. They may end up in a foster home or group home, but run again – back to their “daddy” – what they call their pimp.

“We need to focus on the runaways. We need to focus on why they are running away; then we might be able to prevent them from being lured into prostitution,” Shelton said. “Once they are into prostitution, it’s very hard to get them out.”

More information about human trafficking is on the FBI’s website.