

Show Some Love!

Last month, the Woodland Police Department (WPD), Yolo County District Attorney's Office, and Empower Yolo co-sponsored the screening of an award-winning documentary film, *California's Forgotten Children*. This impactful film has been shown across the country and in the United States Congress to bring awareness to child trafficking. The film features the experience of a diverse group of survivors who broke free from being victimized by the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In the film, each survivor tells they have now dedicated their lives to helping children to avoid that fate. Genelle Lopez, a member of the Volunteers in Policing (ViP), helped at the screening. She said that everyone should take the time to see the film to learn about this growing trend in crime that targets our children.

Human trafficking is among the world's fastest growing criminal enterprises, according to the Office of the California Attorney General. It is a form of modern-day slavery that profits from the debasement of people. One common misperception is that human trafficking requires movement across borders. In reality, it involves controlling a person through force, fraud, or coercion to exploit the victims for forced labor or sexual exploitation. Inducing a minor into commercial sex is considered human trafficking regardless of the presence coercion. A trafficker, also known as a pimp, is anyone who profits from the selling of a person to a buyer. Traffickers target vulnerable children and adults and lure them into sex trafficking using physical and psychological manipulation. Yolo County is not immune to issues of labor and sex trafficking. Since 2013, the WPD, Yolo County District Attorney's Office, advocates, and others have collaborated in an effort to raise awareness, provide services to survivors, and prosecute offenders.



ViP Jasmin Flores studied this area of criminal justice in her degree program at Sacramento State. Experienced in counseling while working as a detention officer at the Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility, she has seen the effect of this type of trauma on youth. Often, traffickers will create a seemingly loving or caring relationship with their victim in order to establish trust and allegiance. Any child may be vulnerable to such a person who promises to meet their emotional and physical needs. This manipulative relationship is used to ensure the victim will remain loyal to the exploiter even in the face of severe abuse, which deepens the effect of the trauma. Yolo County has a coordinated community response so that when victims are identified services and support can start immediately. In addition to staff at the Juvenile Detention Facility, Empower Yolo works in partnership with the WPD, the Yolo County Office of Education, and other agencies to provide support to trauma affected youth victimized by this criminal activity.

There are many indicators of human trafficking such as: inconsistent or lack of identification, dramatic personality change, disengagement from social groups, bruises or other signs of physical abuse, appearance of being tired or overworked, and the presence of unfamiliar older adults. If you do suspect trafficking contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or by texting 233733.

No one system, agency, or individual is capable of stopping human trafficking alone. In order to successfully combat this epidemic, agencies, as well as individuals, must create strategic partnerships to respond to the issue on all levels. As ViPs, we can help the WPD to stop the trafficking of our children. When providing school or traffic calming patrol or at a community service event, remember to hand out “badges” to the children and start a friendly conversation. This act alone helps the WPD to leave the door open to these vulnerable children. Always have the WPD “badges” and contact information refrigerator magnets to give to youth, along with a friendly smile. That will open a relationship with the WPD and share some love with possibly one of California’s forgotten children.