Project R.E.V.E.A.L: Reaching and Empowering Trafficking Victims through Education, Advocacy, and Legislation
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Who We Are:
The North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCCASA) is a state-wide, membership-based coalition that was founded in 1986 to combat sexual violence through education, collaboration, and advocacy. In 2004, NCCASA united with the NC Attorney General's Office and several other organizations to form the North Carolina Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NCCAHT). NCCAHT is composed of professionals from multiple fields dedicated to raising awareness about trafficking, supporting efforts to prosecute traffickers, and identifying and assisting victims. Since NCCAHT is largely unfunded, NCCASA agreed to house the group’s website, continue training professionals and community members on the issue of human trafficking and to supervise the part time coordinator that is funded through a project with the Pitt County Sheriff’s Office with a grant they received in 2012 from the Governor’s Crime Commission.

Today, NCCASA trains law enforcement agencies, service providers, non-profit groups and businesses across the state to identify trafficking and help combat it through their own disciplines. Through its partnerships with these organizations, NCCASA has expanded collaborations with these different groups to help fill existing gaps in services available to trafficking survivors. Through Office for Victims of Crime and NC Governor’s Crime Commission grant projects, NCCASA is also responsible for distributing grant funding to direct service providers, offering referrals and emergency services, and advocating for legislative reform.

Involvement as a Coalition:
NCCASA first became involved in the still-nascent anti-trafficking movement in 2003, when the North Carolina State Highway Patrol asked us to help evaluate an unusual case that we later identified as human trafficking. In 2004, when two more major trafficking cases emerged, we were asked to help officers understand trafficking and locate appropriate services for victims. As a state-wide coalition, we were able to involve the different groups needed to develop a comprehensive approach to this newly identified problem. NCCASA soon began to partner with these groups in offering services based on the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s “Four P’s”: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnerships.

Prevention Programs:
Educating populations vulnerable to trafficking is a critical component of prevention. NCCASA’s Project REVEAL educates and provides outreach to particularly vulnerable populations of children, focusing on developing positive self-images and age-appropriate, healthy views of gender roles and sexuality. We have also trained vulnerable girls about the realities of prostitution and the techniques that traffickers might use to recruit them. Because many pimps in North Carolina exploit children’s vulnerabilities by posing as loving boyfriends or caretakers, our prevention curriculum also teaches previously abused or neglected girls to develop a healthy understanding of love free of abuse and exploitation.
It is also important to offer alternatives and outreach to populations vulnerable to involvement in trafficking, whether as perpetrators or victims. Recently, NCCASA began to offer resources for mentorships, internships, and constructive after-school activities that build self-esteem and offer paths to life success. We have also begun to plan large-scale public events that offer these resources to parents and youth in particularly vulnerable areas.

Through our Project Connect volunteer coordination program, we have also enlisted and trained volunteers from numerous disciplines to help us expand our prevention work into more workplaces and organizations.

To prevent trafficking, we must also address the availability and demand for trafficked people. The majority of sex traffickers and purchasers are male, so last year we provided training for the Engaging Men and Boys Project that NCCASA leads. This project educates men and boys as part of prevention. The Project strives to reduce male participation in sexual violence which includes sex trafficking and similar forms of gender-based oppression by addressing unhealthy gender norms and instilling healthy, respectful models of masculinity. The first class of boys just graduated from the Project’s nine-month curriculum. Our ongoing goal in this area is to involve men in changing other men’s attitudes about commercial sex and the meaning of masculinity. These projects only reach local populations today, but we hope to expand them across the state to reduce demand in this and the next generation.

**Protecting Survivors:**
As NCCASA became more involved in the movement, we began receiving calls from law enforcement and victim for direct services that we generally do not offer. We met this need by creating a streamlined referral process. As part of this process, we developed a comprehensive resource and referral guide to help law enforcement and our hotline advocates place victims with appropriate services in their areas.

As part of this move to expand access to services, we along with other NCCAHT members began in 2007 to establish Rapid Response Teams (RRT’s) in Pitt County and other communities across the state. These teams function as streamlined community task forces that provide prompt access to emergency food, shelter, and case management services to victims for the first 72 hours after they are identified or rescued. To help victims with intermediate and longer term services, direct service providers participate on each team.

To establish these teams, we raised awareness among community stakeholders, developed policies and structures for each team, and trained team members how to operate. To maximize teams’ efficiency, we partnered with the NC Justice Academy and Carolina Women’s Center to establish an executive committee. By 2010, we had established a few RRT’s in large cities around the state, and more communities expressed interest. Today, there are seven teams in operation and two more in development. We are now expediting our set-up process by offering anti-trafficking training materials, sample team protocols, and sample policy manuals. We hope this will expand the reach of this program by allowing communities to set up teams on their own and use our direct assistance only as needed.

Building collaborations with service providers has also been important to help expand victim services. In 2008, we were funded through Office for Victims of Crime to provide services to foreign, pre-certified victims willing to cooperate with law enforcement. NCCASA was able to partner with agencies such as Legal Aid of NC and The Salvation Army of Raleigh for case management services for human trafficking victims. Through this collaboration, NCCASA, Legal Aid and The Salvation Army were able to offer these victims access to housing, food, shelter, medical and dental care, mental health services, child care, ESL and vocational courses, and translation and interpretation services. This collaboration was critical for
enabling a coordinated, state-wide response to victims’ needs for timely and culturally appropriate services.

As a coalition, we knew that it would be critical to support social service providers, shelters, and rape crisis agencies that directly assist victims. By partnering with these direct service providers, many of which are members of our coalition, we have been able to fund providers through the grant funds we receive. We have also been able to help providers develop rules specific to trafficking survivors and make appropriate referrals for survivors.

To ensure that providers have the tools to do quality direct services, we train them and serve as a resource for referrals and information. We used the 2011 Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking project through the NC Governor’s Crime Commission to offer in-depth, twenty-hour trainings to help providers use best practices in treating the unique needs of human trafficking victims. We also partnered with the Child Advocacy Centers of NC to build a training curriculum on child victimization for profit to help multidisciplinary teams (MDT) identify and assist victims. We then partnered with the Executive Directors of these centers to conduct four regional trainings, receive their feedback, and improve our curriculum based on that feedback. We are continuing to train child advocacy centers, hospital staff, law enforcement, and other members of their MDTs across the state.

As part of administering the Office of Victims of Crime grant, we trained providers across the state to use best practices for case management, safety plans, and advocacy. We also documented and approved reimbursements requests from direct service providers for our clients. Then conducted routine record audits to ensure that these grant funds helped as many victims as possible and that services were provided in an appropriate and timely manner. To address common misconceptions about survivors’ choices, we also offer survivor simulation exercises to help first responders and providers understand the challenges survivors face in accessing help.

We have faced challenges with referrals when victims, particularly minors and male victims, are eligible for only limited services. In addition, traffickers commonly recruit victims from homeless shelters and other systems such as foster care, so we cannot rely on these existing resources for many placements. To address these limitations and shortages, we continue work with our partners to advocate for legislation to fund and expand trauma-sensitive shelters.

Funding these intensive programs is also a major challenge. We have addressed this in part by expanding our relationships with local businesses, ranging from fair-trade vendors to major corporations, willing to support our mission through in-kind or financial support.

**Supporting Prosecution:**

Effective prosecution helps hold perpetrators accountable while showing victims that they are believed and valued. Although NCCASA is not directly involved in prosecution, we have collaborated with law enforcement and prosecutors across the state to assist them with their critical work.

In 2004, we partnered with the NC Justice Academy, the US Attorney General’s Office, and other groups to develop multi-disciplinary task forces. These task forces have helped agencies across the state identify and refer trafficking cases. Support from political leadership, including state Sen. Ellie Kinnaird and the Attorney General’s Office, was instrumental in developing these task forces and increasing public support for their work.
Political turnover has posed a challenge to maintaining this support, as new leaders are not always trained or invested in the movement. We have addressed this by continually involving newly elected and appointed officials in the movement, for example by inviting new Senators and Department Secretaries to participate in our informational and networking programs. Continuing to discuss the issues, build relationships, and push for new legislation has helped maintain our momentum and the buy-in of state legislators. This directly benefited the movement in 2012, when Senator Kinnard’s support enabled us to continue the task force, and again in 2013, when Senator Goolsby led the North Carolina legislature passed the Safe Harbor Act.

As part of our collaborations with law enforcement, NCCASA has trained officers and prosecutors on the unique issues involved in trafficking cases to ensure that they understand and respect victims’ experiences. In 2010, we partnered with the NC Justice Academy to develop video training tools for its new Human Trafficking Training Module. We also helped them push for this topic to be required for new officers. This is now the most popular module; since January of 2012, over 8,000 current and new officers have participated in this two-hour training as part of their Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET).

We still have challenges in getting all of the officers who handle trafficking cases to receive this training. The trainings have not yet reached all street-level officers responsible for making arrest determinations. While officers who have completed BLET often elect to take the course, they are not required to do so, and their course is twice as long as that for new officers. In addition, far fewer officers take the Sexual Assault Training Module, so they may not fully understand that aspect of sex trafficking (and some labor trafficking) cases.

In addition, law enforcement officers are typically very busy and work with limited institutional resources. To ensure that all officers receive the latest information on best practices and lessons from other cases around the country, we have participated in local agencies’ multi-disciplinary conferences. Offering survivor-centered perspectives in these conferences has proven effective in helping officers understand victim behavior and reevaluate their traditional views of culpability and victimization in sex trafficking cases.

Through this dialogue with law enforcement, we learned that officers frequently faced challenges in maintaining boundaries and avoiding burnout while building relationships, gathering evidence, and assisting victims in these protracted cases. We helped address this challenge by assisting officers with referring victims to outside resources. This has allowed more officers to focus on their primary duties without being more involved than necessary in offering additional social services.

We faced another challenge when we found that some officers and prosecutors misunderstanding other’s roles and decisions on trafficking cases. This posed barriers to developing inter-agency collaborations that increase the effectiveness of prosecutions. To address this, we collaborated with the NC Conference of District Attorneys and AEQuitas to help these professionals understand each other, collaborate throughout the prosecution of each case, and build the strongest cases possible to increase the chances of successful prosecution.

In 2011, we received the Governor’s Crime Commission Grant to help identify and provide services in a nearby county with several trafficking cases. Using these funds, we were able to train that county’s officers, social service providers, and attorneys on techniques critical to effective case-building. We partnered with a prominent forensic pediatrician who lived in the area to understand many of the most difficult issues, such as forensic interviewing techniques, victims’ mindsets, non-compliance and other counter-intuitive victim behaviors, and the mindset of a perpetrator.
To expand awareness and training efforts, we used some of this grant to build a curriculum specific to Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) and fund the first DMST Conference in the Fall of 2012. This conference trained law enforcement, prosecutors and social service providers to identify trafficking victims and use best practices in handling trafficking cases. We focused on reaching individuals from multiple disciplines to help them make contacts and begin collaborations they that could then continue on their own after the conference ended.

The DMST Conference also featured a survivor-run speaker panel trained professionals on credible, effective interventions. By relying on survivors to offer their own perspectives and recommendations, we demonstrated the importance of their constructive input. Rather than re-traumatize survivors by asking them to recite the details of their abuse, this approach also increased survivor empowerment by demonstrating how survivors can rebuild their lives and become involved in advocacy.

This event was successful largely because of help from local partners who offered affordable but large venue spaces, food donations, and encouragement for their employees and members to attend. As a result of these local partnerships, we were able to accommodate this large-scale training with an extremely limited budget and reach over three hundred community members from numerous different professions.

We have been fortunate to be able to contribute to prosecution efforts. However, we still face ongoing challenges in improving how the criminal justice system responds to incidences of trafficking. Currently, city and county agencies are de-incentivized from vigorously detecting and prosecuting trafficking due to public reporting requirements and media attention. It has been our experience that when an area receives attention for its new cases, the public and nearby agencies assume that that particular area is problematic. We are still working to address this by explaining in our outreach and trainings that higher numbers of reports in an area do not indicate that any one area is a problem. Instead, these reports show that the agencies involved are doing their jobs of identifying and eradicating this state-wide problem within their communities.

In addition, because the recognition of trafficking is still a relatively recent development, there are not yet enough agencies that provide tailored services to meet victims’ needs. As a result, victims may be placed in organizations such as detention centers that may not be equipped to treat them appropriately and may even re-traumatize them through confinement and stigma. NCCASA and its law enforcement partners still have work to do to figure out how to avoid these problems, for example by training detention centers on best practices for victims or expanding alternative placements.

Finally, our state faces challenges in prosecution because some legal professionals do not fully support prosecuting traffickers and purchasers or treating victims as such under the law. We have pushed for improved laws, but even the innovative new Safe Harbor Act requires careful monitoring to ensure it is applied effectively. We have trained many judges and attorneys, but we still need to increase public pressure and accountability for elected judges and prosecutors. North Carolina does not have a Court Watch group to do this, so we will need to develop one or find other ways to increase the number of successful prosecutions.

**Partnerships:**
Partnerships have been critical to our successes in increasing victim services and prevention efforts. All of our programs depend heavily on collaborations with our member agencies, outside agency partners, and business partners willing to help with fundraising. These partners have helped us expand the reach of our anti-trafficking programs, address barriers within their systems, and reduce the gaps in services to victims. Although interdisciplinary collaborations can be challenging, we believe it is very beneficial to
focus our resources on equipping numerous actors to respond to trafficking in communities around the state.