
HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN VENTURA COUNTY

A Report by the
Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking
August 2016



Katie Rhodes, *Forever Found, Author*
with Karli Cox, Children and Family Services, Survey Designer

Executive Summary

Human trafficking—the exploitation of a person for sex or labor through the use of force, fraud, or coercion—is the second largest criminal industry worldwide and the fastest growing. The crime of human trafficking is a tragic reality in Ventura County. People are being bought and sold in hotels lining the 101 Freeway, home brothels, massage parlors, “traphouses” disguised as party houses, and other locations yet to be discovered. Victims have been children and adults, male and female, citizens and undocumented people. Although human trafficking is not a new crime in Ventura County, most information on cases prior to 2014 is anecdotal; human trafficking cases were largely unidentified or misfiled as prostitution or domestic violence.

The Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking was formed in January 2015 as the first formal response to human trafficking in Ventura County. In this report, member agencies of the Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking have provided both case data and statements regarding their perception of the prevalence of human trafficking within Ventura County in order to create the beginning of a public record on this crime.

“[Human trafficking is] definitely here. We’ve identified it. If we don’t combat it, it’s going to just fester; it’s going to be like a cancer because the pimps are going to know that they can operate in the county that’s not going to enforce those human trafficking laws.”

~ Mike Munn, Investigator, District Attorney’s Office

Nine member agencies representing law enforcement, social services, and nonprofits participated in a prevalence survey recording cases of victims encountered from January 2014 to April 2016. Over that period, there were fifty-seven victims identified in Ventura County. The majority of victims were adult females exploited in sex trafficking. With the exception of one agency which conducts specific outreach to women in the sex industry, the victims were identified by service providers who were not actively looking for human trafficking cases but recognized the signs of exploitation during contact with a vulnerable person. Rarely did victims self-identify. Only six traffickers were known to be arrested, much less punished for their crimes.

Notable efforts are being made against human trafficking in Ventura County. Multiple public service agencies have been trained on the signs of both labor and sex trafficking. Collaboration between the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office and the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office resulted in the first sentencing of a human trafficker in May, 2016. However, there remains little to no *consistent* or *coordinated* prevention education, service provider training, proactive investigations, and dedicated services for victims within Ventura County. Intentional efforts are needed to help human trafficking victims in our community lest they remain overlooked and undercounted.

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VCCAHT Steering Committee Members

California Highway Patrol • Coalition for Family Harmony • Federal Bureau of Investigation
Forever Found • Homeland Security Investigations • Interface Children and Family Services
Operation Grace • Oxnard Police Department • Ventura County Behavioral Health
Ventura County Children and Family Services • Ventura County District Attorney's Office
Ventura County Probation Department • Ventura County Sheriff's Office
Ventura Police Department • Women of Substance & Men of Honor
Youth With A Mission

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Introduction

Human trafficking—the exploitation of a person for sex or labor through the use of force, fraud, or coercion—is the second largest criminal industry worldwide and the fastest growing (US Dept. of Health & Human Services, 2006). Human trafficking is an economic crime because it creates an illegal, untaxed industry for sex and labor, depriving people of their workplace rights. It is more significantly a human rights crime because it deprives a person of her or his freedom; it turns a person into a product. The crime of human trafficking is a tragic reality in Ventura County. People are being bought and sold in hotels lining the 101 Freeway, home brothels, massage parlors, “traphouses” disguised as party houses, and other locations yet to be discovered. Victims have been children and adults, male and female, citizens and undocumented people. (Forever Found, 2016). Member agencies of the Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking have provided both case data and statements regarding their perception of the prevalence of human trafficking within Ventura County in order to create the beginning of a public record on this crime.

Federal definition of human trafficking:

Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.

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. (Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2000)

In many local cases, human trafficking has been misidentified as other crimes: prostitution, child abuse, intimate partner violence, unsafe working conditions, etc. In fact, the breadth of the federal definition recognizes many kinds of trafficking, from a parent selling her child to feed a drug addiction to a transnational gang network recruiting laborers from rural Mexico into debt bondage disguised as fieldwork. Traffickers usually prey on the most vulnerable: people experiencing homelessness, runaways, children in the child welfare system, people who are undocumented, and females with a history of sexual abuse. During their exploitation, victims of both sex and labor trafficking repeatedly undergo severe trauma at the hands of their traffickers (as well as their buyers), experiencing extreme violence, humiliation, sexually transmitted diseases, forced abortions, and other atrocities (Clawson, H. J.; Lloyd, 2011; Task Force on the Trafficking of Women and Girls, 2014; Walker, K. & California Child Welfare Council, 2013). A special report by the Child Welfare Council found that “68 percent of victims of Commercial Exploitation of Children suffered from chronic health problems and post-traumatic stress disorder” and likened the experience of victims to experiences of “hostages, prisoners of war, or concentration camp inmates” (Walker, K. & California Child Welfare Council, 2013). Many women in the sex industry entered as minors under the control of a trafficker (Farley, 2012). After turning eighteen, these young victims suffer from the myth that prostitution is a “choice” and often receive jail time instead of victim services (Walker, K. & California Child Welfare Council). Victims of both sex and labor trafficking have a substantial and long-term need for social, emotional, medical, and legal services.

Nationwide and Statewide Prevalence

Reliable, large-scale statistics remain rare in the new field of anti-trafficking work, but numerous stories from law enforcement and social service professionals confirm that the problem is occurring consistently within the United States (Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Office of the Attorney General of California, 2012; Polaris Project, 2014; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2006; United States Department of State, 2015). The National Human Trafficking Hotline reports 24,156 cases nationwide from the end of 2007 to date (Polaris Project, 2016). Identified victims are from almost every region in the world, but the top three countries of origin are the United States, Mexico, and the Philippines (US Department of State, 2015). On a statewide level, California is both a destination and transit state for trafficking due to its large population, coastal access, transnational borders, and numerous transit centers (Office of the Attorney General of California, 2012). The National Human Trafficking Hotline reports 3,479 high indicator cases of trafficking in California from 2008-2015 (Polaris Project, 2015). Sadly, three out of thirteen high intensity child prostitutions areas are in California: San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).

Risk Factors

Cases of human trafficking are often misidentified as prostitution, unsafe labor, or domestic violence. Populations particularly at risk include people experiencing homelessness, child abuse victims, children in the child welfare system, domestic violence victims, people who are undocumented, and people in the sex industry. These populations are largely uncouncted with a few exceptions in Ventura County:

- 1,417 adults and children experiencing homelessness countywide in 2015 (Point in Time Homeless Count)
- 906 children in the Child Welfare System at a point in time in February, 2016 (Ventura County Children & Family Services)
- 7,324 calls to Ventura County law enforcement for assistance with domestic violence cases in 2014 (Office of the Attorney General of California)

DATA POINTS

-In 2014, Homeland Security, the FBI, and Department of Justice initiated 2,905 investigations into human trafficking. (US Department of State, 2015).

- Between 2011 and 2012, nine anti-trafficking task forces in the state of California identified 1,277 victims, 72% of whom were United States citizens (Office of the Attorney General of California, 2012).

-A prevalence study by the Santa Barbara County Human Trafficking Task Force revealed 45 confirmed victims of child sex trafficking from 2012-2014 (O'Brien, K. M., Larson, K. S., Felix, E., & Riker-Rheinschild, 2015).

- The Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force has helped over 450 victims from 2004-2014 (OCHITTF, 2015).

-In 2016, a 5-day law enforcement operation in Los Angeles recovered 12 minor and 6 adult victims of sex trafficking, arrested 6 "pimps," and booked 115 people for solicitation (Los Angeles Times, 2016).

-76 minor sex trafficking victims were being supervised by the specialized STAR Court, 56 of whom had been in contact with Children and Family Services (California Child Welfare Council, 2013).

Human Trafficking in Ventura County

Historic Context

Human trafficking is not a new crime in Ventura County. In 1990 the federal government filed an indictment against a Somis farmer for extortion and slavery of over 300 farmworkers lured from rural Mexico. At the time, the Ventura County case was the largest such prosecution in United States history (Los Angeles Times, 1990). Yet, most information on human trafficking in Ventura County prior to 2014 is anecdotal. No one was formally tracking human trafficking cases, which were largely unidentified or misfiled. Many times trafficking victims reached out to Los Angeles County for services. The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) in Los Angeles reports receiving sixteen calls in 2014-2015 from trafficking victims in the cities of Camarillo, Oxnard, Simi Valley, Port Hueneme, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura. The majority of cases were labor trafficking of immigrants. At the time of writing, CAST was providing long-term legal services to a group of thirty-three male agricultural workers who were labor trafficked in Ventura County (CAST Hotline, 2015 and 2016).

Although CAST's records denote primarily labor trafficking, service providers within Ventura County cite more encounters with sex trafficking victims. For example, at any given time, 60% of female youth residing in Ventura County Juvenile Facilities are estimated to have been commercially sexually exploited (Tia Cochran Otis, former Clinic Director of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Clinic at the Probation Juvenile Facilities, 2015). Notably, Ventura County's first sentencing on the charge of human trafficking (rather than "pimping") was delivered to Philip Lowe in May of 2016 for sex trafficking of just such a vulnerable young girl. Lowe was arrested by the Ventura County Sheriff's Office in 2014 for trafficking a 15-year-old runaway girl. He forced her to exchange sex acts for money in hotels throughout the state, including hotels in Ventura. He is also suspected of forcing

LOCAL CASES

- 2013: A fifteen-year old girl was allegedly brought from Los Angeles to a residence in Oxnard where she was sold for sex. She was rescued through an anonymous tip (KEYT News).

- 2013: Two seventeen year old high school girls were forced by their aunt and uncle to prostitute out of their house. Victims were freed by Oxnard Police Department vice detectives. (Detective James Langford, Oxnard Police, 2014)

- 2013: A California man recruited a 16-year-old girl from Maryland online. He trafficked her along the California Coast, including Ventura. The trafficker received 38 years to life in the first human trafficking conviction in Santa Barbara County (Noozhawk, 2013).

- 2013: An Oakland man sex trafficked a 16-year-old girl in Ventura, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles Counties for a month before she was able to call police (San Gabriel Valley Tribune, 2013).

- 2012: Oxnard Police was alerted to two home brothels in two houses across from each other downtown Oxnard. Two girls were at one house and a third girl was at the second house. Ten to twenty "clients" visited each brothel daily. (Detective James Langford, Oxnard Police, 2014)

two adult women into prostitution. The trafficker was sentenced to 10 years and 8 months in prison for sex trafficking of a minor (The Ventura County Star, 2016). The sentencing signifies a shift in Ventura County's awareness of human trafficking occurring within its borders and willingness to pursue justice.

The Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking

The Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking (VCCAHT) was founded in January of 2015 with the mission: "To combat human trafficking in Ventura County by partnering to prevent, prosecute, properly identify victims, and provide victim services." It is a tiered network built on a sixteen-member Steering Committee, sub-groups, and community members. Member agencies include law enforcement, social services, and nonprofits (See Appendix A for a list of Steering Committee members.) During detailed discussions ranging from prevention work to translation services, VCCAHT realized that there was no formal record or statement regarding the prevalence of human trafficking in Ventura County. In Spring 2016, VCCAHT members completed a prevalence survey on incidences of human trafficking accompanied by statements from agency representatives as to their perception of local prevalence.

Prevalence Survey: Design and Methods

The survey collected cases of human trafficking—as defined by the federal definition—occurring from January 2014–April 2016. Cases were specially coded in order to keep victims' information confidential but also to prevent duplicate entries. Nine agencies representing law enforcement, social services, and nonprofits participated in the prevalence survey. (See Appendix B for a list.) Thirteen agencies provided oral or written statements to augment survey results. Representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Homeland Security Investigations were unable to contribute a public statement due to security restrictions. The California Highway Patrol also declined to make a public statement as their local office has never identified a case of human trafficking.

LOCAL CASES

- 2012: A 17-year old girl was located at a hotel in Ventura. The girl was a missing person from Oakland and reported that she had been sex trafficked across several states intermittently from the age of 14 (Detective David Ruggiero, Ventura Police Department, 2014).

- 2012: Victims were forced to farm illegal marijuana groves managed by armed gangs in the Los Padres National Forest (Thousand Oaks Acorn, 2012).

- 2011: A rear residence in Oxnard was "managed" as a brothel by an armed man. One to two different women were shuttled there weekly from Los Angeles and forcibly prostituted to 15-25 purchasers per day. (Detective James Langford, Oxnard Police, 2014)

- 2011: Two armed sex traffickers operated a multi-city operation out of home brothels in Oxnard and Pacoima. One man was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for pimping (Oxnard Police Dept., 2011).

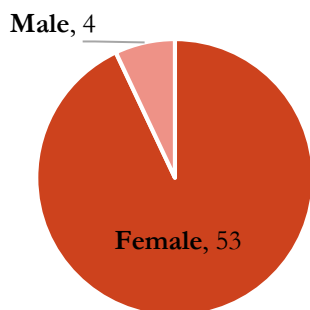
- 2011: A 14-year-old girl listed as missing in San Diego was found in a Ventura hotel room with an adult male purchaser. She was sex trafficked in Santa Barbara and Ventura and in online advertising. (Detective David Ruggiero, Ventura Police Dept., 2014).

Prevalence Survey: Results

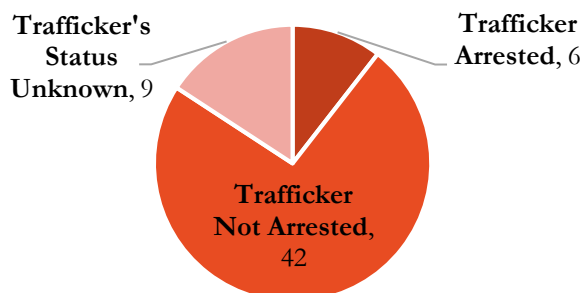
A **total of fifty-seven victims** were identified between January 2014 and April 2016: 28 in 2014, 20 in 2015, and 9 in the first quarter of 2016. The overwhelming number were identified by the professional judgement of service providers with only two cases of self-disclosure. Most victims were currently being trafficked; however, twelve were identified as having been trafficked in the past but were not in their trafficking situation at the moment of identification. Victims were overwhelmingly female and mostly adults; 95% were sex trafficking cases. The majority of victims were Asian and were largely identified by one agency conducting specific outreach to women in the sex industry. At least eleven (19%) of the victims had current or historic involvement with the child welfare system, and thirteen (23%) disclosed a history of child abuse. At least thirteen (23%) victims had substance abuse problems, and many were homeless or in temporary substance recovery programs. The trafficker was known to have been arrested in only six cases (10.5%).

Agencies came into contact with victims through: law enforcement investigations, juvenile facility placements, referrals from victims' friends, referrals from other organizations, a domestic violence hotline, and placement with children and family services. Depending on the case, agencies listed a variety of resources provided to victims: food, temporary housing, language interpretation, medical assistance, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, independent living skills, mentoring, advocacy, legal services, and victim compensation. Most agencies were only able to provide a few of the services on this list, pointing to the essential need for collaboration.

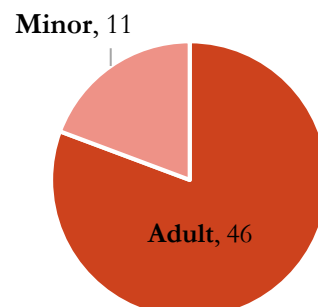
Gender of Victims



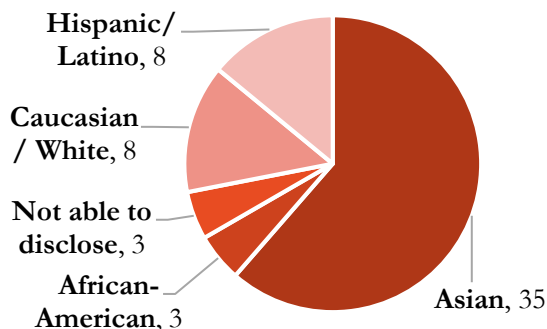
Trafficker Outcome



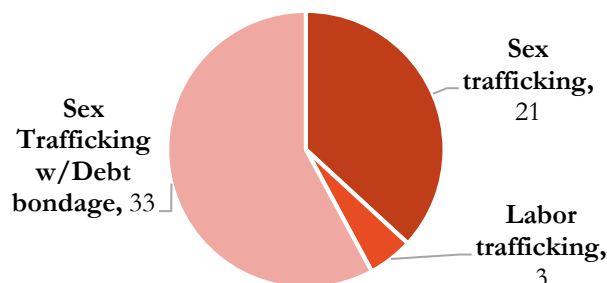
Age Range of Victims



Ethnicity of Victims



Type of Trafficking



Professional Perceptions

Representatives from thirteen key law enforcement, social service, and nonprofits lent their voices to this report to publicly share that their agencies have faced victims of human trafficking.

**The Coalition for Family Harmony • Forever Found
Interface Children & Family Services • Operation Grace • Oxnard Police Department
Ventura County Children & Family Services • Ventura County District Attorney's Office
Ventura County Probation Department • Ventura County Sheriff's Office
Ventura Police Department • Women of Substance & Men of Honor
Youth With A Mission**

When providing their statements, representatives were asked: “What is your perception of the prevalence of human trafficking in Ventura County?” All thirteen representatives stated that they had no doubt that human trafficking is occurring in Ventura County. None of the representatives had concrete data as to prevalence other than the cases their agency have encountered. However, they know human trafficking exists because their agencies have met victims “in passing” during their daily roles of serving other vulnerable populations. The majority of Members’ experiences with human trafficking victims was limited to sex trafficking victims as opposed to labor trafficking victims. Sex trafficking victims were depicted as being prostituted in massage parlors, home brothels, and low-cost hotels. However, representatives strongly believe that human trafficking is under-identified. The gap between occurrence and identification is attributed to the hidden nature of the crime coupled with the lack of proactive outreach and investigations. Traffickers use force, fraud, and coercion to entrap and intimidate their victims who are thus unlikely to self-identify to law enforcement and social service professionals.

“I couldn’t give a percentage or statistics. I think what I can say is that we have a thriving commercial sex industry here. We know there’s plenty of online escort services and new ads posted every day. We know that there are plenty of customers feeding the industry. We know that we have run across some victims while we’re not putting much time or corrective resources into it. ... Anywhere you have a sample somewhere else where they’ve done proactive investigations and found trafficking victims, I think our percentage of trafficking victims among that population is going to be similar. There’s no reason to think otherwise.”

~ Dave Ruggiero, Detective, Ventura Police Department

“My perception is that what we know is literally a fraction of what’s going on if you take into account residential brothels, gangs, backpage, labor trafficking, ... massage parlors.”

~ Shar Busch, Community Volunteer, Operation Grace

“...I personally believe that it exists in our county and takes on many forms including places such as massage parlors, strip clubs, agricultural areas, hotels, motels, residential brothels, group homes, restaurants, etc. But I believe we will not know the true scope of its existence until the awareness and training needed to identify victims is

made available throughout the entire county as well as the county allocating funds to form a multi-agency law enforcement task force which can be proactive in locating victims in our county.”

~April DePretis, Youth With A Mission

“... I would say [prevalence] is very high. Although we are a small community, I think that we still have a high level of child abuse and neglect in our community. We have foster youth in our community. Statistics show that foster youth are specifically targeted for exploitation because of their trauma histories and the dynamics of being in foster care. As long as our community continues to have youth in foster care, we will have the potential for human trafficking.”

~ Laura Magallenes, Youth Services Manager, Children and Family Services

“It’s here. It’s here. Obviously, you have the enforcement of Orange County pushing in L.A. County, pushing them up to Ventura. And up north, they’re conducting enforcement and investigations where they push them down here.”

~ Mike Munn, Investigator, District Attorney’s Office

“I did not know that they were trafficking victims when I met them. I do know that they were trauma victims, and in working with their trauma, it came out what they were actually being forced into and what they’re participating in—through a series of classes that we have, through a series of one-on-one meetings with a chaplain.”

~ Rosalinda Vint, President, Women of Substance and Men of Honor

“After first learning the warning signs ... we see consistent red flags coming through when assessing, in particular, our female youth coming through the facility. Prevalence across the county: the more that we are educating, the more people are coming forward with concerns ... I don’t know about exact numbers and things like that, but I do know that it’s been consistent concern since we started educating our providers.”

~ Tia Cochran-Otis, Clinic Director at the Juvenile Facility, Ventura County Behavioral Health

“My feeling is human trafficking is more widely prevalent than what is documented and verified. I suspect many of our youth in placement have been targeted for the sex industry. Further, we have many clients who work in the agriculture industry and are likely targeted as well. Cases of domestic violence is another area of concern. With additional education and training on how to draw information regarding human trafficking from our clients, we’ll likely show an increase in the numbers here in Ventura County.”

~ Patricia Olivares, Chief Deputy Probation Officer, Ventura County Probation Department

Several representatives noted that human trafficking had likely been occurring in Ventura County long before their agency’s awareness but was misidentified or unseen. Most agencies’ initial experiences working with human trafficking victims were recent, dating from 2011 onward.

“...I think human trafficking cases weren’t being identified properly. They might have just thought it was a prostitution case, but after getting [trained about human

trafficking], they're running with it. ... I wouldn't say that they knew it was there prior and didn't do anything about it."

~ Mike Munn, Investigator, District Attorney's Office

"We learned about specifically sex trafficking in July of 2014. ... It's really been since then that we started to identify youth. Prior to that, we really didn't know what to look for, and we can look back and see that we had youth come through with some of those warning signs that we missed in the past."

~ Tia Cochran-Otis, Clinic Director at the Juvenile Facility, Ventura County Behavioral Health

"As a department, we are just formally starting a formal screening process with this population. In terms of the dynamics of human trafficking, we have many youth who go AWOL. We have many youth who are during the periods of AWOL who are engaging in high-risk behaviors, who are engaging in survival sex, who are engaging in sexual promiscuity through internet sites, through being potentially groomed. We absolutely know that it is happened and are only now beginning to utilize ... a formal screening tool."

~ Laura Magallenes, Program Manager, Children and Family Services

"I [believe] that I was the first one to ever make a human trafficking arrest for our agency. I know they've dealt with pimping related investigations in the past, but that was before 'human trafficking' was even really a word. I don't think that the agency really has much more experience in addition to what I've done with the agency."

~ James Langford, Oxnard Police Department

Again and again, representatives shared their view that there are human trafficking victims in Ventura County who continue to be victimized because no one is proactively looking for them. The victims who are currently being identified are passing briefly through the system under other guises: a chronic runaway in a group home, a domestic violence victim, a willing sex worker, a juvenile delinquent, a drug addict, or an employee in a low-end job. Throughout their statements, representatives added details about the trauma histories, poverty, and other vulnerabilities which attracted traffickers to their prey. They described the vulnerability of runaway girls on the street, the disempowerment resulting from childhood sexual abuse which lured girls into the lie of "empowered" prostitution, the fear of people who are undocumented, and the confusion of people who do not speak English.

"...here in Ventura County we have a large ... population of migrant agricultural workers, especially in the community of Oxnard. And because of language barriers and a variety of other factors, these are some underserved populations. I think they are definitely at the greatest risk of being subjected to either labor or sex trafficking. These individuals are less likely to know their rights or to ask for help or to reach out for help regarding human trafficking, which puts them at greater risk."

~ Nicholle Gonzalez-Seitz, Director of Family Violence Intervention, Interface

"Well, the majority of [victims] since they're residential brothels, they were all either Central or South American females that were poor, or had little to no money—were

here strictly to make money. The other [United States citizens] were making a lot more money, but all the money was going towards the pimp, and the girls were able to keep none, but they came from various backgrounds—some with caring parents, others with not so caring parents. ... It's been a wide range."

~ James Langford, Detective, Oxnard Police Department

"No one asks to be brought into this life. There's a lot of variables, obviously, when you're investigating these types of cases, and [victims] could be from the foster care system, runaways. When these kids are out there on streets and these predators ... the pimps ... exploit them by tapping into the situation that they're in, whether they're a runaway or they need food, clothing, shelter."

~ Mike Munn, Investigator, District Attorney's Office

"...a large percentage are involved somewhere in foster care or the child welfare system. In addition to that... I've personally come across kids who maybe are now with a different family member, but didn't have stable home environments. ... any kind of runaway or homeless kid is obviously [at risk]."

~ Shannon Sergey, Founder, Forever Found

"It is absolutely sexual exploitation. Our population have a history of trauma. Many of them have a history specifically related to sexual abuse, and so I think that lends to their risk for sexual exploitation. They have issues of abandonment. They have issues of experiences of being unstable, moving placements. I think all of that lends to ... their victimization and being manipulated into a situation of sexual trafficking because it is what they know. It is what they are used to. I don't think they recognize the signs of it being exploitation."

~ Laura Magallanes, Program Manager, Child Welfare Services

"I know oftentimes, especially when it comes to the eighteen and nineteen-year-olds, we want to say that they're adults, but really these are traumatized young adults who possibly were forced into this prior to turning eighteen, nineteen, twenty, so they have not processed it properly in understanding that they are traumatized. Any type of forced labor or forced sexual encounter is trafficking. ... We cannot name it 'prostitution.'"

~ Rosalinda Vint, President, Women of Substance, Men of Honor

Recent Anti-Trafficking Work

Searching for and serving trafficking victims has historically been peripheral work for most county agencies. The formation of VCCAHT in January 2015 was the first formal collaboration against human trafficking in the county. Here are a few public accomplishments of this partnership.

Training and Awareness

- A joint collaboration with Youth With A Mission, the Ventura County District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office and Chiefs of Police on SB1193 Human Trafficking posters which were posted in nearly every city in the county.

- In 2015, Forever Found presented thirteen trainings on human trafficking for government agency staff, nonprofit staff and the general public.
- Ventura County Behavioral Health provided training to all Youth & Family Clinics on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).
- Ventura County Board of Supervisors signed a Human Trafficking Resolution.
- Many VCCAHT members trained their staff on signs of human trafficking and/or provided trainings to the larger community.

Investigations and Community Outreach

- Ventura Police Department identified and trained a team for proactive vice investigations in a collateral capacity as well as training patrol officers on the signs of trafficking.
- A joint collaboration with Ventura County Behavioral Health, Ventura Police Department, Safe Harbor MDIC, a CSEC survivor, and Ventura County Probation Department brought one-time informational programming to the youth at the Juvenile Facility.
- Two VCCAHT agencies continue ongoing, discreet outreach to women in the sex industry.
- The Ventura County District Attorney has assigned a full-time investigator to human trafficking cases as of August 1, 2016.

Victim Services

- Children & Family Services is working with the PACT Grant to create specialized services for child sex trafficking victims, including creating a new position for a CSEC Coordinator.
- Interface Children and Family Services received a grant which will create a Coordinator position for case management of adult victims along with expanding victim services.
- The Ventura County District Attorney's Office signed the first certification for a specialized T-Visa for a human trafficking victim.
- Ventura County Behavioral Health developed a collaboration with Women of Substance & Men of Honor to provide group treatment to the female population at the Juvenile Facility, specifically addressing sexual trauma.
- Forever Found created and launched a trafficking survivor mentor program which has matched nine high risk or confirmed victims in its first year.
- The Ventura County Medical Center - Santa Paula Clinic has designated hours and staff time specifically to serve the specialized populations of both labor and sex trafficking victims.

Recommendations

The consensus of the Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking is that human trafficking victims in Ventura County are overlooked and undercounted. Human trafficking victims in Ventura County have primarily been identified as a by-product of law enforcement investigating other crimes or social service staff serving victims of other traumas. The very definition of the crime explains why it is so terribly rare for victims to self-identify: traffickers use force, fraud, and coercion to exploit their victims. The repercussions for victims are severe: extensive psychological trauma symptoms, lack of socialization, poverty, physical illness and injury, deprivation of education, and debilitating shame. VCCAHT agencies recognize the need for collaborative services to serve these

victims who have experienced uniquely complex trauma. In light of the cases and experiences presented in this report, VCCAHT asks county leaders to prioritize the recommendations below in order to prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, properly identify victims, and provide victim services in Ventura County.

- **Education system:** The adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially poignant in this context. Middle-school and high-school students should be taught not only safety but also not to become exploiters. Curriculum and/or presentations on the topics of teen dating violence, cybersafety, personal boundaries, personal safety, empathy, etc. should be mandatory in schools.
- **Law enforcement:** There is only one (newly assigned) full-time law enforcement officer dedicated to human trafficking cases in Ventura County. Instead, these cases are a “collateral” assignment for a handful of officers—prohibiting them from initiating investigations and following up on complex, multi-site cases. Law enforcement needs not only to be specially trained but also to have hours set aside for these investigations.
- **Multi-Lingual services:** It is imperative to remember that traffickers target vulnerable populations, which often include non-English speakers. Ventura County demographics indicate that services for human trafficking victims should be available in Spanish as well as English. There is also a need for Mandarin and Mixtecan language services.
- **Training social service providers and first responders:** Just as social service providers and first responders are trained in mandated reporting of other types of abuse, so should they be trained to recognize the signs of both labor and sex trafficking. Education is also key to shifting the prevailing perspective from “criminal” and “delinquent” to “victim” and “vulnerable.”
- **Housing and Basic Needs:** The County currently has no beds specifically designated for trafficking victims. This is a particular problem for male sex trafficking victims, male and female labor trafficking victims, and families who have been labor trafficked as they are not good candidates for existing shelter beds (i.e. domestic violence or homeless shelters). Additionally, although victims are eligible for Crime Victim Compensation to fund mental health services, the County currently lacks specialized mental health providers for this population along with a mandated referral protocol.

Ventura County is a beautiful area offering a high quality of life to many of its residents. Let’s ensure that we extend that quality of life to *all* residents by caring for the most vulnerable people in our community. Consistent and coordinated anti-trafficking collaboration is the key to helping human trafficking *victims* become human trafficking *survivors* in Ventura County.

Contact Information

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Appendix A

Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking Steering Committee Member Agencies

- California Highway Patrol
- Coalition for Family Harmony
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Forever Found
- Homeland Security Investigations
- Interface Children and Family Services
- Operation Grace
- Oxnard Police Department
- Ventura County Behavioral Health
- Ventura County Children and Family Services
- Ventura County District Attorney's Office
- Ventura County Probation Department
- Ventura County Sheriff's Office
- Ventura Police Department
- Women of Substance & Men of Honor
- Youth With A Mission

Appendix B

Prevalence Survey Participants

- Coalition for Family Harmony
- Forever Found
- Homeland Security Investigations
- Interface Children and Family Services
- Oxnard Police Department
- Ventura County Children and Family Services
- Ventura County District Attorney's Office
- Ventura County Probation Department
- Youth With A Mission

Appendix C

Interview Participants

Agency	Person Interviewed	Job Title
Coalition for Family Harmony	Noel Stalcup	Housing Services Manager
Forever Found	Shannon Sergey	Founder and President
Interface Children and Family Services	Nicholle Gonzalez-Seitz	Director of Family Violence Intervention
Operation Grace	Shar Busch	Community Volunteer
Oxnard Police Department	James Langford	Detective
Ventura County Behavioral Health	Tia Cochran-Otis	Clinic Administrator, Juvenile Facility
Ventura County Children and Family Services	Laura Magallanes	Program Manager
Ventura County District Attorney's Office	Mike Munn	Investigator
Ventura County Probation Department	Patricia Olivares	Chief Deputy Probation Officer
Ventura County Sheriff's Office	Judith Porter*	Detective
Ventura Police Department	David Ruggiero	Detective Corporal
Women of Substance, Men of Honor	Rosalinda Vint	President
Youth With A Mission	April DePretis	n/a

*Provided written rather than oral statement.

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