

## Brentwood women face reality of state human trafficking

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**Community Educator Karen Karpinski of End Slavery Tennessee spoke to Brentwood Women's Club about the devastating effects of human trafficking in Tennessee.** *Photo by Kerri Bartlett*

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Last week, the Brentwood Women's Group sat silently in shock while representatives of End Slavery Tennessee spoke about atrocities inflicted upon young women in Tennessee who had been "sold" into slavery. "It's a depressing topic," said Liz Martin, president of the Brentwood Women's Club. "But if we don't talk about it and spread awareness, nothing will be done." Representatives from End Slavery Tennessee spoke recently at the club's meeting held at the Brentwood Public Library in order to raise awareness during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. About 94 young girls are being trafficked in Tennessee per month. Karen Karpinski, End Slavery Tennessee Community Educator, told the group. Girls between the ages of 12 and 14 are particularly vulnerable, especially runaways who are approached by a trafficker on average about 48 hours after being away from home. Because of Tennessee's geographic location among interstates that connect to over five major cities, it has become a central spot for the human trafficking of young girls and women for sexual exploits, according to Karpinski. She also said that numbers have risen in recent years based on statistics at the center. "I think that trafficking has always been around, but people are becoming more aware of the problem, and it's beginning to reach the public eye." End Slavery Tennessee provides a safe place for girls and young women to receive help and avenues to heal after experiencing prolonged traumatic experiences such as rape, violence and being held in captivity. "Some people ask, why can't they just run away, get away, but it's more complex than that," she explained. "There is physical and psychological manipulation that keeps girls in captivity. The biological need to connect with others is very strong. Some attachment is better than no attachment. The brain does incredible things in order to survive." The center provides counseling and community services that help girls and young women recover from the devastating trauma. They partner with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, local law enforcement and other community supports on a daily basis with a mission to rescue and help girls return to wholeness. "When a girl gets a chance to leave her trafficker, the key to her successful restoration is having options, resources and support. That's what we do—make freedom possible," said Derri Smith, executive director of End Slavery Tennessee. According to reports from End Slavery Tennessee, the TBI reports that the extent of human trafficking in Tennessee is "shocking;" traffickers target typical youth vulnerabilities; and the average victim is dead in seven years. "People think that it's just runaways or vulnerable ethnic groups who are targeted, but it's actually white, American girls throughout the U.S. that make up the largest number of

girls trafficked,” Karpinski said. “Upper class girls are not immuned because they can fall for an older boyfriend who romances them.” What is the remedy for the problem? “Learn more about human trafficking. Tell your neighbors and church, and report anything suspicious to the Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline at 855-558-6484,” Karpinski said. For more information visit [www.endslaverytn.org](http://www.endslaverytn.org).

Posted on: 10/10/2013

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