

# Students raise awareness about sex trafficking in Middle TN

Reported by Jennifer Herron - email

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NASHVILLE, TN (WSMV) -

Sex trafficking may seem like a crime that only happens in other countries far away, but it unfortunately happens every day in Middle Tennessee, so a group of students is working to do something about it.

The teenagers are part of a statewide mission to help save girls just like themselves.

It began as a class project, but the topic hit a nerve for many.

"We started off our campaign by doing a survey, and we did it during lunch. We asked them if they knew that sex trafficking was happening in our state or community. And half the people didn't even know what sex trafficking was or even that it was happening in our community," said Mackenzie Morgan, a student at Station Camp High School.

But with the help of a national anti-trafficking organization, posters and a huge billboard over downtown Nashville got the message out.

And the numbers are shocking. More than 100 cases of sex trafficking have been reported in Davidson County since 2011.

Social networks are often an open door for predators to create a relationship, show some affection and enticing things like clothes, food or whatever their victim may need. With that one little connection, the victim gets hooked.

"Nashville, in particular, has three major interstates that run through: 24, 65 and 40. You will find those girls moving among all of those interstates on a routine basis," said Estie Harris, with the Women's Fund.

Sex trafficking has been a low risk/high reward crime for years.

"You could make \$1,000 or \$1,500 a night off a 14-year-old girl," said Margie Quin, with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. "Three years ago, it was a Class A misdemeanor. So you don't even serve a year to sell a 14-year-old girl in the state of Tennessee three years ago. But now, it is a Class A and B felony, which are the highest felonies in the state of Tennessee."

As for help, these students are no longer focused on a grade in class. They've raised \$11,000 and plan on doing more fundraisers for victims this fall.

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