

Clarksville prostitution investigation leads to human trafficking arrests

CLARKSVILLE, TENN. — An undercover investigation by the Clarksville Police Special Operations Unit and District III division targeting prostitution in the Interstate 24 Exit 4 area led to the arrest of a Kentucky woman and Knoxville man, both charged with the human trafficking of a 17-year-old girl.

Rodgers Lee Shealy Jr., 39, and Sasha Gail Young, 28, were both indicted in the May term of the Montgomery County grand jury and arraigned Monday in Judge Mike R. Jones court on charges of human trafficking and several other offenses.

According to their indictment, between Feb. 1 and Feb. 2, Young and Shealy used a 17-year-old girl for sexual servitude and “knowingly recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided or obtained” the teen for the purpose of sexual servitude, the indictment said.

Shealy allegedly possessed material that showed the girl engaged in sexual activity and is charged with soliciting a person to patronize a prostitute.

On March 14, Young allegedly invited an undercover agent to her hotel room off Exit 4 to engage in sexual acts.

Young advertised in the escort section of Backpage.com using the alias “Wynter” and photos of herself. An agent contacted her by text message on the phone number provided in the advertisement and she agreed to perform sexual acts for half an hour for \$120, the warrant said. She told him to meet her at a motel on Holiday Drive and gave him her room number.

While searching her room, police found digital scales, spoons, needles, razor blades and 31 condoms, the warrant said.

Young, of Georgetown, Kentucky, is charged with prostitution, promoting prostitution, three counts of human trafficking for commercial sex acts, three counts of human trafficking, three counts of unlawful drug paraphernalia and simple possession. She is in the Montgomery County Jail on a \$12,000 bond.

Shealy, of Knoxville, is also accused of raping a 22-year-old woman on Feb. 1 and Feb. 2. Shealy allegedly injected her with a brown substance that she believed was heroin to keep her subdued and had non-consensual sexual intercourse with the woman, his warrant said.

Shealy is charged with two counts of promoting prostitution, four counts of human trafficking, trafficking for commercial sex acts, two counts of heroine possession, aggravated rape, two counts of exploitation of a minor, two counts of unlawful drug paraphernalia and two counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He is being held in the Montgomery County Jail on a \$325,000 bond.

Curbing prostitution

Young and Shealy’s human trafficking arrests happened as part of an ongoing joint operation by the Special Operations Unit and District III division that targeted prostitution in the Exit 4 area of Wilma Rudolph Boulevard using the social media website Backpage.com, according to the Clarksville Police Department.

District III Commander Captain Scott Thornton said the online activity has been the focus of their investigation into prostitution and other violent crimes.

“We recognized we were having a problem with Backpage.com advertisement and it leading to prostitution. They were people who would come here for a short amount of time, make money and leave,” Thornton said.

Thornton said the human trafficking report was one of the first he’d been made aware.

Chief Al Ansley said CPD’s fight against prostitution is centered around preventing other violent crimes such as assaults, rapes and robberies from occurring.

“We’ve made over 44 arrests in connection with prostitution,” Ansley said. “We recognize we have a problem, and our officers have done an outstanding job recognizing it.”

Ansley said human trafficking is recognized as a national issue that has sporadically popped up in the city limits.

“We recognize it and do all we can to attack it. We are seeing prostitution moving to the internet. It’s not as prevalent on the street as it was,” he said.

Ansley said in the upcoming budget he is allocating funds to provide more resources to the Alcohol Beverage Control and Vice divisions to combat such issues.

Big issue, often unreported

Derri Smith, executive director of End Slavery Tennessee, said human trafficking is a big problem and women from Clarksville have reached out to the organization for help.

End Slavery is a state organization that battles the issue of human trafficking. Using a training, aftercare and prevention methods, they’ve trained 9,000 volunteers and focused on training community and professionals in Tennessee to identify the trafficking business and seek help for victims.

The organization also provides prevention using therapists and intervention specialists to help survivors of human trafficking not become victims again. They provide long-term aftercare for victims of human traffickers to help them restore their lives over a long period of time.

“Most states don’t really have research done on the problem,” Smith said. “In 2011, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation found 94 minors a month are trafficked in the state, and that’s not including those who are 18 and up.”

Although the numbers in Montgomery County showed between 16-25 human trafficking cases were reported in 2011, Smith said most of the occurrences of human trafficking go unreported.

The study, updated in 2013, showed victims between the ages of nine and 17 are moved from city to city in the state and sold as prostitutes, the report said. Tennessee’s geographical position to Atlanta and the large number of interstates that cross the state are conducive to a traveling business.

Smith, like local law enforcement, said the internet is the where most of the sex business and human trafficking occurs.

“Backpages.com is the number one place traffickers advertise their wares,” she said.

Education about the issue is the top way to combat it, Smith said. End Slavery is a good resource for the state.

“When you look at those reports with the research, it’s broken down county by county,” she said. “But because people aren’t trained, it’s only the tip of the iceberg.”

End Slavery works with survivors, local, state and federal law enforcements, and with local district attorney generals to provide training to recognize victims.

Anyone who is suspicious of human trafficking or a victim themselves can call the End Slavery help line 24/7 at 615-806-6899 ext. 15. The Tennessee Human Tracking Hotline is also available at 1-855-558-6484.