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TOP STORY

## Missouri continues work with Truckers Against Trafficking

By Megan Favignano St. Joseph News-Press Updated Jun 4, 2016



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Missouri is about a year into a partnership with an organization that aims to increase awareness of human trafficking.

Truckers Against Trafficking partners with state transportation departments, Highway Patrol units, truck driving companies, truck stops and others to distribute educational materials to truck drivers. The group's materials focus is on domestic sex trafficking.

Scott Marion, Missouri Department of Transportation motor carrier services director, contacted Truckers Against Trafficking for materials to distribute in the state about a year and a half ago. He came across the organization's efforts on several occasions and wanted to get Missouri further involved.

"Truckers are kind of like the ears and eyes of our nation," Marion said. "They're all over the place and many times they're in spots and locations where some of this horrible activity occurs."

Truck drivers in the state can help victims just by knowing what to look for and paying attention, Marion said. The Missouri Truckers Association also had partnered with TAT — one avenue through which Marion learned about Truckers Against Trafficking.

Kylla Lanier, TAT deputy director, said the organization has provided materials to the Missouri State Highway Patrol, MoDOT and Missouri Trucking Association. The informational materials are passed out at rest areas across the state and during events. Love's Travel Stop in St. Joseph has shown Truckers Against Trafficking's training video to its staff as well.

TAT's freedom drivers project, a mobile exhibit, has come through Missouri.

"Families and truckers and whosoever there can walk through it to learn how bad the problem really is," Marion said.

Siobhan Jackson, YWCA sexual assault victim advocate, said it can be difficult to identify victims of trafficking, unless the victim self-identifies. The YWCA shelter is on a list of shelters available to trafficking victims.

Trafficking victims would receive the same YWCA services as other trauma victims they help, Jackson said. But the trafficking component adds an extra layer to what victims need, she said.

Jackson said she doesn't believe St. Joseph sees a lot of human trafficking, adding that it is more likely to be seen in the Kansas City area.

The YWCA advocate is creating a survey she hopes will help her better understand what human trafficking looks like in St. Joseph.

"A lot of times we talk to women and hear their stories and I think there's a lot of red flags for trafficking," Jackson said. "But the victim doesn't know that's trafficking."

Break Every Chain, a coalition in St. Joseph, also has worked with Truckers Against Trafficking, passing out educational materials at truck stops.



Marion said the materials Truckers Against Trafficking distributes can be used by anyone, not just truck drivers.

"Truckers Against Trafficking is so cool because they send me brochures and training videos and wallet cards," Marion said. "They'll send me all of these for free because they get sponsorships. ... This is something I can do without spending taxpayer dollars."

Since partnering with TAT, Marion said MoDOT has worked a booth during human trafficking day in Jefferson City and passed out materials during other events, including safety breaks, during which MoDOT gives items to truck drivers and others at rest areas along the interstate. He is hoping to distribute materials to MoDOT maintenance employees, which make up more than half of the department's 5,000 workers statewide.

“In our own little way, I think we’re trying to spread the news,” Marion said.

He said the statistics related to human trafficking in Missouri and in the U.S. surprised him. Since 2007, The National Human Trafficking Resource Center has received more than 1,600 calls related to human trafficking in Missouri. Also in that time frame, the center’s data showed a total of 328 cases of trafficking.

In 2015, the center showed 67 reported human trafficking cases in Missouri.



Megan Favignano can be reached at [megan.favignano@newspressnow.com](mailto:megan.favignano@newspressnow.com). Follow her on Twitter: @SJNPFavignano.

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Megan Favignano

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