

Mayor's Human Trafficking Task Force Newsletter



Covid-19 Update on Subcommittee Meetings: In an effort to protect the health and safety of customers and employees, the city of Phoenix continues to limit access to city facilities and discourages participation with in-person community meetings. Because of this, the quarterly Mayor's Human Trafficking Task Force meeting scheduled for July 15th has been cancelled. The Strategic Initiatives team will continue to be available to you by phone or email to provide the support necessary to continue our work of combatting human trafficking in our community!

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Funding

On June 2nd, the Phoenix City Council approved several initiatives to combat the recent rise in domestic violence and human trafficking as part of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding allocated for the "Mitigation and Care for Vulnerable Populations". A four-month comparison (from February to May) showed that dispatched calls for domestic violence increased by 11.5% from 2019 to 2020. Incident reports increased by 31.5% in a single month and domestic violence arrests increased by 27% during comparable periods. Reports of threatening and intimidation increased by nearly 63.6%. As we know in the anti-trafficking community, sex trafficking is often not only heavily linked but often misidentified as domestic violence. This comparison project concluded that increases are very likely related to the societal impacts of Covid-19, considering loss of employment or reduced wages, social isolation, school closures, food insecurity and lack of access to other supportive services.

In conjunction with the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, the Arizona Broadcasters Association and radio/television partners, the City began a campaign to increase awareness of available domestic violence services in the community. In addition to these efforts, a pilot program was approved to provide 10-15 dedicated, court-connected computers for survivors to access an Order of Protection or Injunction Against Harassment at a safe location without having to travel to a court. Approximately \$75,000 of the CARES Act funding has been approved for this project.

To accommodate the increased need for domestic violence and sex trafficking emergency shelter and mobile advocacy services, while also taking steps to mitigate the spread of Covid-19, service providers have had to drastically reduce bed space, increase staff and retrofit personal protection equipment within service spaces. To assist these providers and the clients they serve, approximately \$1M will be allocated to service providers such as Chicanos por La Causa, Chrysalis, DOVES, Shelter without Walls, Sojourner Center and the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence.

To specifically address the needs of sex trafficking survivors, \$250,000 was allocated for Starfish Place to assist with Covid-related expenses such as facilities retrofitting, personal protection protocols and implementation of distance learning capabilities. The Phoenix PD HEAT (Human Exploitation and Trafficking) Unit was allocated \$20,000 specifically for survivors' needs such as emergency hotel rooms and for operations related to trafficking investigations and victim recoveries. Approximately \$40,000 support the Phoenix 1st Step Pop-Up Drop-In Centers which at this time are not able to operate as they previously have, due to Covid-19. Strategic Initiatives staff are currently working with the Arizona State University's Sex Trafficking Intervention and Research office to determine safe and innovative methods for street outreach. Items purchased with these funds will also be distributed amongst other organizations providing direct-service to sex trafficking survivors.

Please join us in welcoming our newest member to the Mayor's Human Trafficking Task Force!



Susan Stodola was sworn-in to the Task Force on June 3rd, 2020. Susan moved to Phoenix in 1984 after growing up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and began her now forty year career, in criminal justice. Susan's first job was as a probation officer in Winnebago County, Illinois (Rockford), for five years, supervising women who were ordered to a sentence of probation, in that county. Susan continued her career as a probation officer and supervisor of officers, for another twenty-three years, with the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department. For the past twelve years, she has worked as a mitigation specialist, employed by Maricopa County and now assigned by the Superior Court, on death penalty cases for the defense, both at the trial and at the post-conviction stage. Susan also works on non-capital cases, as well. Over the past forty years, Susan has worked both with the perpetrators and with the victims of crime, including victims of human trafficking. She is looking forward to working with other members of the task force, and serving on the Victim Services sub-committee.

Law Enforcement Updates

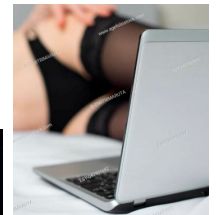
From April 1st to June 30th, the Phoenix Police Department's Human Exploitation and Trafficking unit conducted 26 street enforcement operations and 2 Customer Apprehension Programs targeting sex-buyers. Due to these efforts, 10 sex-trafficked children were recovered and referred for immediate services through the Collaborative. The HEAT Unit reports that during the month of April, neighboring states' more aggressive Covid-related shutdowns resulted in an increase in commercial sex activities in Phoenix' hotspot neighborhoods. Suspected trafficking victims confirmed to detectives that Arizona was considered an ideal location due to more Covid-19 restrictions in their home cities. After personal protective equipment and new sanitation protocols were put into place, the HEAT Unit resumed their normal enforcement activities and the amount of street commercial sex activity has returned to pre-Covid levels.

Victim Services Updates

Members of our Victim Services Subcommittee have reported several troubling updates about how COVID-19 has impacted current and past survivors of sex trafficking. Service providers reported that several survivors who had successfully escaped "The Life" have gone back due to loss of employment and housing insecurity. Commercial sexual exploitation activity has increased both online and on the street level. Similarly to the general population, persons currently being sex trafficked have had less access to medical services, specifically sexual and reproductive health.

Phoenix Starfish Place is currently at capacity, serving 15 mothers and 28 children. Services have been impacted by COVID-19 due to limited face to face contact. Staff have been providing support through providing masks, food boxes, arts and craft bags, and more outdoor areas to social distance and be safe. They continue to engage the families and have connected clients with telehealth and telemedicine. Phoenix Starfish Place is a 2020 recipient of an Arizona Attorney General's \$75,000 grant to enhance the clinical and support services.

"Premium Content"



A rapidly emerging form of sex work has drastically increased due to the ability to generate income while maintaining social distance. Subscription pornography, also known as "premium content" is a very lucrative form of sex work whereby a client can pay a monthly subscription fee, often between \$5-\$50 to have access to all of the photos and videos posted in that month. Popular websites operating in this way include *OnlyFans* and *Snapchat Premium*. This technology is easily accessible to both buyers and the persons selling their content and thereby very vulnerable to potential child sex trafficking victims.

The Strategic Initiatives team will continue to be available to you by phone or email to provide the support necessary to continue our work of combatting human trafficking in our community!

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