

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Partners with National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to Assist Sexually Exploited Child Victims of Trafficking

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[WASHINGTON, Aug. 25 /PRNewswire/] – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today announced its partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to educate law enforcement officers, social service providers and health care professionals about the problem of child human trafficking in the United States. Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery, and according to the U.S. Department of State, more than half of human trafficking victims worldwide are children – giving cause for both organizations to address the overwhelming needs of children exposed to sexual exploitation.

The partnership is the latest development in HHS’s Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking national public awareness campaign.

“Child victims of human trafficking face great obstacles in rescue and recovery, often having distinctive medical and psychological needs that must be addressed before the damage becomes irreversible,” said Dr. Wade Horn, HHS assistant secretary for Administration for Children and Families. “Our partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is fundamental in identifying the needs of these children and developing the appropriate courses of action for law enforcement and social service providers to recognize and assist child victims of exploitation.”

Child victims of human trafficking are exploited sexually through prostitution, pornography and the sex tourism industry. Child victims can also be found working in migrant camps on farms, in sweatshops and in other labor settings. Child victims can be toddlers or teenagers, but consistently, children succumb to exploitation under the guise of opportunity – children may believe they are coming to the United States to be united with family, to work in a legitimate job or to attend school. Instead of a better life, victims are thrust into a harsh environment where physical and mental abuse nearly eradicates any hope for survival.

“Joining forces with Health and Human Services on the Rescue & Restore Campaign makes sense,” said Ernie Allen, president of NCMEC. “We train hundreds of law enforcement and other professionals who care for children each month. Every week, our Exploited Child Unit analysts review and handle more than 1,000 reports of child sexual exploitation. Combining our resources to educate these professionals and share information ensures the best potential outcome for the victims – that more children will be identified and get the help they need to restore their lives.”

Educational materials, the first element of the partnership, are being unveiled this week. Brochures, posters and fact sheets are also being created to outline the circumstances under which children are trafficked into the United States and the physical and mental attributes associated with victims of human trafficking. Children who are exploited can receive help through the HHS Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program, which establishes legal responsibility under state law to ensure that unaccompanied minor refugees and entrants receive the full range of assistance, care and services to which all children in the state are required. Through the program, child victims of human trafficking receive intensive case management, education, health care, mental health counseling, legal assistance, independent living skills training, and many other services.

If you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at 1.888.3737.888. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking>.

For more information on NCMEC, a nonprofit working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, please visit <http://www.missingkids.com>.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services