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Hello, I'm Sue Aboul-hosn with the Florida Department of Children and Families. I'm the Regional Human Trafficking Prevention coordinator for the Central and Suncoast Regions. And today, I'm going to be presenting on labor trafficking and trends and case studies we've seen in Florida and really focusing on the minors.

0:24

A quick overview, we will talk about the TVPA since that's where it all starts from.

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The definitions and terms, fair labor standard acts. Both have some national and Florida statistics.

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A little bit about Florida labor laws, DCF's data and research, domestic and unaccompanied minor cases, what to look for and labor trafficking of minors.

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A little bit about forced criminality as it relates to labor trafficking, the complexity of foreign-born cases, and a couple of Florida prosecuted case examples, if we get to that.

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So the laws regarding trafficking. Back in 2000 internationally, the Palermo Protocol was passed, which was to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking of persons, especially for women and children. That was internationally. On a national level, the Victims of Trafficking and Protection Act was passed in 2000 and is known as the TVPA. And it focused on the protection, prosecution, and prevention for victims. And it was focused when it first passed to increase the US efforts to protect trafficked, foreign national victims, and provide them social services and immigration assistance. In 2005, it was re-authorized has been re-authorized several times now.

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But in 2005, when it was re-authorized, it also added the right to protect domestic victims, US citizen survivors as well, which is great.

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So, how does the TVPA of 2000 definitions. How does it define human trafficking?

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So it breaks it down to sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

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Sex trafficking is a recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act, has not attained 18 years of age. So for minor victims of sex trafficking under the age of 18, you do not need the element of force, fraud, or coercion.

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The term commercial sex act means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

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Labor trafficking, the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

3:00

So if the labor trafficking, minors and adults under the TVPA, the national definition, you do need force, fraud, or coercion for labor trafficking.

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So statistics, everybody wants to see statistics. And, of course, we have them from different organizations. Some of it is overlapping. Some of it is not. But let's see what we know about what's going on in the United States.

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So 2023, the TIP Report just came out, Trafficking in Persons Report. And the Department of Justice grantees, those who received grants from the Department of Justice here in the United States, reported this information. So some of the subsets of that data was nationality.

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So, they report that 60, over 60% of the victims that they've worked with are US. citizens, or at least, legal residents here in the United States, while 30% are foreign nationals.

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And then there was a small fraction of unknown. And the type of trafficking that they were seeing was, again, majority, we could say, is sex trafficking.

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Then, there was labor trafficking, some in both, and then unspecified is the largest area that we see there.

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From the TVPA statistics, this is over a period of six years.

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The types of trafficking that they see. Again, here, majority is labor trafficking, 71%, what was reported through their grantees was labor trafficking, and then 20% sex trafficking.

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And then a small percentage of both. 9% was both. Genders that were reported by their grantees, majority were female, and age where the majority were adults. Only 6% were minors that receive services through the grantees of the TVPA.

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Now, the Office of Victims of Crime also has grants for task forces.

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They fund task forces throughout the United States, and these are statistics that came from their grantees.

5:05

So types of investigations. 91% are sex trafficking. Only 5% were labor, and then 4% were sex and labor.

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It does show that there were 2,330 potential labor trafficking cases, and then 363 potential sex and labor trafficking cases there.

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But as far as arrests were concerned, 24 for labor trafficking, and 51 for combined. And it says that the task forces secured plea bargains, guilty pleas, and guilty by trial in nine labor trafficking cases.

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So we know labor trafficking is underreported throughout the United States.

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So now, let's look what Polaris shows us in Statistics.

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This is that in 2022. It kind of breaks down in Florida, where most of the reports of the Polaris hotline. And remember, the data from Polaris is based on reports at the hotline, and not confirmed cases.

6:01

But as you can see, a majority of the reports came from Miami Dade area. Semester one and semester two really make the first six months of the calendar year, and the second six months of the calendar year. But as you can see some of the higher counties here is Miami Dade, Hillsborough, and Broward.

6:22

And the industries that are reported to have trafficking in them to the Polaris Hotline, and this is based on 2018 data. The major three types of labor trafficking industries that they saw reported from Florida was agricultural work, domestic work, and the traveling sales crews.

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And then the types of combined sex and labor trafficking reported was illicit massage, health and beauty, hotel motel base, and resident-based commercial sex.

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Now, we're going to talk about minor labor trafficking in Florida.

7:00

It's important to remember what the Fair Labor Standards Act states about work restrictions for minors, right. Children under the age of 14 may not work at all.

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14 and 15 may work up to 15 hours per week when school is in session. And no more than three hours a day. And agricultural work, it's a little bit more lenient to the type of work and how many hours they can work. But there still are specifications you should be familiar with.

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Florida labor law honors the federal ones, of course, and then have some more restrictions added.

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But again, maximum hours of work for minors can be eight hours per day when school is not in session, and three hours when it is in session.

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Under age of 16. 16 and 17 have a little bit more freeway - eight hours of work, 30 hours per week and up to six days per week are permitted during the school year.

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Children under the age of 16 cannot work past 7:00 PM.

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You know, between 7:00 PM and 7:00 AM, they cannot work when school is in session. And 16 and 17 are prohibited to work between 11:00 PM and 6:30 AM when there's school the next day.

8:15

Also, there is a role for entertainment and performing arts.

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So under the state law of Florida, a work permit is required for minors to be employed in the entertainment industry.

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Child labor and entertainment industry is regulated by Florida law 450.132.

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Employers or agents must make an application to the division and notify the division showing the date, number of days, location, and date of termination of the work performed by minors in the entertainment industry. And that's the Department of Professional Regulations.

8:49

So kids who say, oh, they're acting or they're dancing or whatever they're doing. Oh, I know with us in our DCF investigations. We really want to make sure that it's a legal operation and that they do have a work permit to do that and not being exploited.

9:07

So looking at the reports, the DCF abuse hotline. This is over the period of 2009.

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And 2009 is the year that DCF actually added the maltreatment of human trafficking to it's hotline. Its maltreatment index, and so it was added really early in like May of that year. There's very few reports. So these reports are representing unique children.

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As you can see, going back, it was only 43 and how it grew every year. It did go down a little bit during Covid, but it's going right back up again.

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So last year, in 2022, 1,595 children were reported to be alleged victims to the abuse hotline of human trafficking. And this is both sex and labor.

9:52

But here, it's broken down. So those unique children, the 1,595 unique children that were reported to the hotline create at 1,811 initial reports.

10:04

And as you can see, only 9% work for labor, which is pretty typical. We've consistently seen about 9% for labor trafficking to our hotlines. Majority is sex trafficking. And majority are females.

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Again, so we know our males and our labor trafficking reports as well are both underreported.

10:24

Here we're going to break down how many trafficking cases we've had in 2022. So we received 170 initial cases to our hotline for children last year. 94 were male, 69 were female, and four were unknown. From the verified cases, 22 of those minors were verified to be victims and the industries that they were working in were food industry, electrical work.

10:49

Some was unknown and construction work. And if you look on the right hand side map, you can see where the area where most of the verified cases were from.

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The higher areas: Broward, Escambia, Hillsborough, and Miami Dade. For 22 minors, these cases really were throughout all those counties. Again, 73% were males, and 27% were females for the verified cases.

11:19

The type of labor trafficking reports we have received to the hotline over the years.

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And we just said that in the verified ones, as well, but these are the ones over several years is agricultural work and farms, traveling sales crews, servitude, forced employment, forced illegal activities.

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And the type of victims that we see are their domestic-born children, children here, born here.

11:42

Majority even in Florida, undocumented children, unaccompanied children, and the runaway homeless youth population.

11:51

Traveling sales crews.

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This is usually our domestic children, kids here who are legally here, are US citizens, born here, and they usually recruited for summer. Starts off with summer employment programs. You know, which are really a bogus charity.

12:06

We've seen many, many agencies out there doing this or, I guess they call themselves non-profits, but they're really not non-profits.

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Anyone can go to Sunbiz, create a name of a company and say, we're going to be a non-profit and click that. Pay their registration for their corporation or LLC, print out articles of incorporation in good standing because they've paid the registration fee.

12:29

And that's that limit to it. It's through the IRS that says they're a non-profit. There's nothing else to that, except that one paper, that they've registered the name of that company with Sunbiz, and they print out those articles that it's registered.

12:41

And that's what these kids are flashing to people when they go out to solicit.

12:46

You will see them carrying bins, usually in those bins or dollar store type items. Sometimes candles, chocolate, candies, different things like that. And they're selling them for high price compared to what their value is. You know, maybe \$10. And the kids are told they get to keep \$2 for every item they sell, or \$3, whatever it might be.

13:09

And so they go out and they solicit door to door, you'll see them also at convenience stores, gas stations, wherever they can go and get money.

13:18

Um, they're really being exploited for labor. There is force, fraud, and coercion. Often, sometimes these kids are tired. They don't want to work. And then sometimes they're physically beaten because they need to be working.

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And they're told when they go home, to tell their parents that they got in a fight with someone else in the band.

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Um, there's threats and punishment.

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If they don't meet the quota. You're going to see a video coming up, and you will see a band that has been used for this organization, particularly the one in this picture, Florida's Youth Club of America.

13:50

Actually, back then they were called Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol. So they changed their name to Florida Youth Club of America now. And so these kids have to be a certain quota to be able to sit in the seat.

14:03

So it's a makeshift van. In this particular situation, the video you'll see. You'll have the driver and the leader sitting in the front bucket seats and the bench in the back. Which if you're a high producer, if you sell enough money, if you sell the items, you get to sit in those three seats there. Or two seats depending on the band. And then this particular video that you'll see behind that seat, he had blocked off with plywood.

14:26

So everybody else was piled up on the floor behind that plywood.

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So those kids, if they're in an accident, have no access to exit the vehicle at all, just sitting on top of each other.

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They're sitting on wood, plus all the things that they're selling is tossed back there, too. It is a hazardous situation there. Unsafe transportation.

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Kids, remember, under the age 14- to 15-year-old, should be supervised by eyesight, by labor laws in Florida.

14:53

These kids are being told to go out and sell items. They are not in eyesight of anyone.

14:58

Sometimes when they knock on a door, they're exposed to assault, depending on what's going on.

15:04

If they don't want to work anymore, sometimes they are abandoned. Or wait many, many hours to be picked up.

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So in the situation you are gonna see in the video. What happened is they had been working in an area in Brevard County, and they had stopped working. They were at a retirement community that had a golf course on it. I believe it was trailers.

15:24

And a golf course. And these kids had been waiting a couple of hours. So they got in a golf cart and started vandalizing a golf course, so to speak.

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So law enforcement was called. And that's what brought them to the attention of law enforcement.

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We're going to watch this video now about that situation.

15:45

Channel 9 Eyewitness News continues right now at six, with Bob Opsahl, Martie Salt, and chief meteorologist, Tom Terry. We have some major news right now in the fight against child exploitation. Palm Bay Police say they've arrested two men accused of using young children as salesman for fake charities. We told you earlier this month how DCF received complaints that some of the children were being mistreated. Jeff Deal is live and Palm Bay now, and Jeff for the first time these men are facing human trafficking charges. And for DCF, this is a big deal. Investigators tell us this group has been fined for violating child labor laws in the past. And one of these guys have been arrested in an operation like this before, but this is the first time the human trafficking charge has been applied.

16:36

You see the name on the van, Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol. The group bills itself as a charitable organization, but DCF investigators say charity is the last thing on the organizers' minds. The leaders of these groups are doing it just for the exploitation to gain money. They're not concerned about the safety of the children. Today, two men Johnny Carascio and John St. Hilaire appeared before a judge on human trafficking and child abuse charges. Investigators say on Friday they used the van with plywood seats. No seat belts and no easy way out to drop off 24

children from Orange County, into this Palm Bay neighborhood. The kids were telling me that they had splinters in their butt or in their hands from sitting there. But children walk the neighborhood, selling candy and trinkets. Teens told police that they would get picked up in these vans around nine o'clock in the morning and wouldn't get home until midnight. Eyewitness News has been looking at Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol since the 1990s. DCF launched an investigation into this group and others a few years ago after getting complaints about abuse.

17:37

We've had kids faint. We've had situations where kids have been beaten up. But this is the first time human trafficking laws have been applied anywhere in Florida to put guys like these behind bars.

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And the children told police they were not even picked up for restroom breaks. They were told to either use the bushes or ask a neighbor if they could use their restroom. The men are each being held at the Brevard County Jail here on a \$5 million bond. Reporting live at the jail in Brevard County. Jeff Deal, Channel 9 Eyewitness News.

18:09

OK, that was a short-lived success because when he appeared in front of the judge and was charged with 24 counts of human trafficking and other things, it was a weekend judge.

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And when he went appeared in front of the regular docket, that judge was very, didn't really understand. And this is, again, from 2012. So we've had a lot of education since then. But one of the things that judge asked is what's the difference between this and selling Girl Scout cookies. Well, it's a huge, big difference, right. You're not being forced to sell Girl Scout cookies. You're not collecting the money for yourself. It's not a job that you think you're having. And it's a true non-profit, Girl Scouts.

18:48

So big difference. I think education has happened since then, but he ended up getting off on probation.

18:57

I think with the one charge sticking as contributing to the delinquency of a minor, because of them stealing the golf cart and getting arrested and getting charged with all of that.

19:06

So anyhow.

19:08

But those are what we consider one of the type of labor trafficking reports we can on minors that are domestic children, children who are born here. Here's another sample. So it's a Ted-X video. His name is Elijah Muhammad, and he talks about his labor trafficking experience.

19:28

My parents joined a religious organization in the early nineties.

19:35

They've given their time, money, and ultimately their children to this organization.



19:42

In summer of 2002, my mother received the phone call from one of the executive representatives of the group.

19:51

The lady was calling to inform my parents that it was the will of God that my brother and I begin our pilgrimage into manhood.

20:02

And part of that meant moving to the headquarters of the organization located in Kansas City, Kansas.

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So the following evening, our bags were packed, and we were asked to begin this new life.

20:23

When we got there, we were taken to meet the strangers who would transport us.

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After giving our parents our hugs and saying our goodbyes, we discovered that our arranged transportation was on the back of an 18-wheeler semi-truck.

20:45

We roll nearly 600 miles on the back of a truck as if we were packages being sent out for delivery.

20:56

When we arrived to Kansas, we were taken to the place we would stay. A small apartment.

21:08

There were dozens of boys and men.

21:12

Packed like sardines.

21:16

We were immediately put to work, dictated on how to dress, how to speak, how to walk, what to eat.

21:29

And to disobey meant severe punishment.

21:33

Slash us with a rod or paddle.

21:37

Days, sometimes weeks, of fasting or worse. Beaten until bones were broken.

21:48

Face swollen.

21:49

Anything that will remind the other kids what happens when you disobey.

21:57

I started out as a dishwasher in the back of the restaurant owned by the traffickers.

22:07

I will work countless hours a day. Restlessly reporting in at 8:00 AM and not leaving sometimes until 3:00 AM the next morning.

22:19

One time.

22:21

I showed up late for work.

22:24

A habit I soon regretted making.

22:28

Because almost immediately upon walking through the doorway of the small diner, I found myself on the floor bleeding after being hit in the mouth with a Yellow Page phonebook.

22:41

Attempting to stand to my feet, the man began to beat me on the back until I passed out.

22:50

Acts of violence were not of rare occasion at all.

22:56

A good friend of mine named Naji found himself being questioned by four men about something he should not have done.

23:06

Almost immediately without notice, one of the men threw a punch that brought Naji to the floor.

23:17

The other three men eagerly followed up were blows of their own.

23:23

They concluded the beat down section by kicking him down a flight of about 13 stairs.

23:34

To add insult to injury, one of the guys literally poured salt on Naji's wounds.

23:42

I was just 12 years old.

23:46

Shocked, saddened, and terrified of the possibility of facing the same consequences as my older friend.

23:58

Until this day, I'm still unsure of what Naji did wrong.

24:04

But one thing was made clear to me.

24:07

My well-being was no longer in my parents' hands.

24:12

Now I know what you're probably thinking.

24:15

Elijah why don't you just pick up the phone and call your parents and tell them what was going on?

24:23

If the traffickers allow me to use the phone, the call was monitored by the executives to be sure that not too much detail was given as pertains to what was going on.

24:39

So the next nine years that follow, without my parents' permission, I was taken to New Jersey, Georgia, Maryland, and places all around the country that the trafficking organization owned property.

25:03

It began the same like every year I was being taken to one place to the next.

25:13

And everywhere I went, the living arrangements were the same as what I experienced in Kansas.

25:20

Finally, the last place I worked before escaping the group was Harlem, New York.

25:29

While working in the traffickers New York restaurant, I received word that a friend of mine had died.

25:40

Message of her death began to spread like wildfire. Feeling bombarded by all the questions surrounding the young teen's death, the founder of the organization made an announcement of it.

25:57

In a nutshell, he said, that the young girl, want it to die, and she killed herself by becoming ill.

26:11

It seemed that most people accepted that explanation.

26:15

But not me.

26:17

I knew better.

26:20

How do you go from being well to two months later being ashes in an urn?

26:30

Not soon after I learned the truth, my friend pleaded that she did not feel well.

26:40

She begged to be taken to the hospital. They forced her to work through her illness.

26:48

Until eventually, her immune system shut down.

26:52

We were not allowed to seek professional medical help. That meant no annual physicals, no dentist.

27:05

And no treatment for illness.

27:09

In her case, she was allowed to go to the ER.

27:17

But by time they began treatment, it was too late.

27:27

Parents all around the country join this forced labor, human trafficking ring.

27:39

Disguised as a religious organization.

27:44

Willingly send them their children off, placing them in an unfortunate situation.

27:54

My childhood was ripped from me.

27:57

When I finally got out, it was a culture shock to say the least.

28:02

People would ask me about my upbringing in my life.

28:09

I would tell them things that sound good to avoid talking about what I went through, but it wasn't until I embraced my truth.

28:18

Then I actually started to heal.

28:23

And you know what I learned.

28:26

I'm not that unique.

28:30

We all have things that we've been through that have caused us to dare ourselves to be ourselves.

28:41

Fortunately, I have overcome most obstacles that have stood in my way.

28:52

Good therapy.

28:54

Developing friendships.

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Education and work related to survivors, like myself, makes me thrive.

29:08

By far, my greatest assets are my family and friends. When I fall to moments of sadness, nightmares, anxiety, and confusion, it is them, who lift me up. And although moments and years of my life stolen could have wrecked me, I have gotten up stronger than ever.

29:45

And he really talks about, I guess, I think it was. He says it's a religious cult that his family joined, and they sent him to go and live with these people in Kansas and work for them. And he was moved around to several states and was being forced to work in restaurants and other things.

30:12

He doesn't identify the cult. At least I didn't hear the identification, but I Googled, and I found other people that did identify a cult, and that had the exact same experience as him. And one person named Kendra Ross actually was awarded \$8 million for being a victim human trafficking and abuse from a group, a religious group.

30:33

So again, those are examples of our domestic children, and he was sent when he was 12 years old. Actually, that's when it started. He's an adult now, and Kendra, as well, was a child when she was victimized.

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So moving along to undocumented children that we're seeing here in Florida, particularly, So they enter the United States unaccompanied usually, or with an adult, and they're placed with a sponsor, usually they are intercepted at the border.

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They go through ORR, and ORR tries to find them a sponsor who they can go live with while they're going to the process of applying for asylum or refugee status through the court. So they get their next court date.

31:19

And through this process, there's a lot of inadequate screening and supervision of the placement where they're put. And this has been on the national news. I'm not just saying something here. It's been documented heavily on the national news.

31:30

I do want to say that there are a lot of good sponsors out there who are doing it for the right reasons, but there's some out there that are really just wanting to exploit the child.

31:39

And so the type of cases we've seen are kids who have been put with sponsors who do want to exploit and who have no concern for the safety and well-being of the child. And the kids are working 8 to 10 hours, seven days, you know, possibly in fields, sometimes construction work sometimes a tree service, et cetera.

31:57

The uncle, or the relative, that they call uncle obtains fraudulent IDs for them. He keeps their money, charges them rent, charges them for food. These kids have to usually send money back because they have a debt that they incurred to come.

32:11

So parents are expecting them to send money back as well.

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And often, when we get reports and we go out. The parents were completely unknown. The sponsor will often not show up, because he does not want to claim any legal responsibility if the child happens to be arrested for something or ends up in the hospital with a labor injury, a work injury that's inappropriate for his age anyhow. So there's a lot of different repercussions there, as well.

32:39

So ORR, Office of Refugee Resettlement, defines unaccompanied minors as children that have no lawful immigration status in the United States.

32:47

They have not attained 18 years of age yet.

32:50

There is no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or no parent or legal guardian United States available to provide care and physical custody for them.

32:57

The majority that we're seeing are coming from the Northern Triangle, which is Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

33:04

The majority are 15 years old or older.

33:07

And the majority are males that are coming from this area.

33:11

So what are the vulnerabilities, right? We know these kids have a lot of vulnerabilities. They are coming from a home country that may have gang recruitment, involvement, violence and crime, abusive home situations, poverty, lack of employment opportunities.

33:24

And a lot of times, kids in these countries that are 14- and 15-year-olds are considered almost adults, as compared to here. Then they're coming here.

33:34

So, through transit, as they try to come to United States, they go unidentified throughout their journey, goes through multiple borders.

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Some do not have the means for safer transportation. So whatever is available.

33:46

Some do not know the path very well.

33:48

Individuals looking to exploit them or abuse them along the way, like the coyotes and the gangs, know that they're vulnerable.

33:57

Then they come into the United States. They are undocumented, which is a vulnerability in itself.

34:02

They need to send money back home to their family members.

34:06

The family or sponsor here is exploiting them.

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They're not fluent in English.

34:11

They have probably no education level or they can't fit into the education system by their age, their grade level, by their age.

34:19

They distrust authorities.

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They've been taught that all along. There's a language and culture barrier. Being coached by to say, what not to say. And really for them, exploitation may be normalized, right? That's where they've come from.

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So we know they're extremely vulnerable.

34:38

So let's look at this. So this is data about unaccompanied children that were released to the states, to the states in the past. Let's say this is six years, now, actually.

34:48

14 to 22 is 8 years, so with eight-year data from ORR, these are the top 20 counties where children were released to, and four of those counties are in Florida.

35:00

So Miami Dade. 10,908 children. Palm Beach County. 9822 children. Lee County. 4121. And Broward County reported 3797.

35:12

So for the top 20 counties in the country, Florida has four of them for minors that were released.

35:21

So now we're breaking down to total number of minors that were released of Florida. So you can see last year alone, fiscal year, 13,195 children were released to minors in Florida.

35:34

I can tell you we have not had reports on that many children at all. So we do hope that these, you know, quite a few of these sponsors are appropriately taking care of these kids, But just to show you the difference from 2022 of the 55,960 children release to sponsors, only 8619 home studies

were completed, which is like 15%. So only 15% of these kids, when they're placed with a sponsor did any type of home study, background being done.

36:15

So if you're familiar with eligibility and certification letters of its child or an adult. As a victim of human trafficking, they can apply for an eligibility status or certification status.

36:26

Certification is for adults. Eligibility is for the minors. So you can see the age range for the minors in 2022 are from 9 to 18. The youngest was nine years old. 81 were males. 80 were females. Almost half and half there. So 161 eligibility letters for children were issued last year, 2022, And 17 certification letters were issued for adults.

36:58

So this is a video about children, undocumented children that were brought to the United States to work in a chicken egg factory, and there's a nexus to Florida. So we're going to watch this.

37:16

This is where the traffickers force the Guatemalan teens to work off their debts. This man says he worked with the teens at Trillium. In October 2014, after 4 months at Trillium, one of the teens managed to call his uncle in Florida. The uncle agreed to talk to us but was afraid to show his face on camera. One day I received a phone call. There was a gentleman who has a nephew that had been smuggled into the country from Guatemala and was being kept against his will to work in Ohio. And within 24 hours, I had a conference call from the head of the FBI, HIS, and the US Attorney's Office in that region. Two months later, federal and local law enforcement moved in. Human trafficking bust at an egg farm in America. In the early morning hours, they raided the trailer park where the teens had been living. Federal prosecutors call it modern day slavery. Their paychecks kept by their traffickers, They detained approximately 45 people. A human trafficking operation was run by a third-party contractor, hired by Trillion Farms. At least 10, they determined, were victims of trafficking, including eight minors, and the US Attorney's Office says its investigation is ongoing. I mean, how could that possibly happen? The more we learned about it, the more it became apparent that there was a connection back to our immigration policies and how the Department of Health and Human Services deals with kids who come here unaccompanied.

40:09

What makes this Marion case even more alarming is that a US government agency was actually responsible for delivering some of the victims into the hands of the abusers. How could the federal government take these kids in and try to protect them?

40:25

Then, as they send them out to families in appending a court date, give them right back to the people who had brought them up here. Here's one of those homes. This is a trailer. Senator Rob Portman was chairman of the committee that investigated the failures that the Department of Health and Human Services, the agency that released the boys to the traffickers in Ohio.

40:45

The more we learned, the more troubling it was from a federal perspective because no one seemed to want to take responsibility for it.



40:52

What everybody's doing is doing this? Out the door. We're done.

40:56

We've got these kids. They're here.

40:59

They're living on our soil and for us to just, you know, assume someone else is going to take care of them and throw them to the wolves, which is what HHS was doing is flat out wrong. I don't care what you think about immigration policy. It's wrong.

41:14

The HHS Division responsible for placing the teens declined to be interviewed. They told the committee they had strengthen their procedures to protect children. But the committee had found over 12 other cases of trafficking related to the search and said it's impossible to know just how many more victims there are.

41:34

It was not just the Ohio egg farm case. There were other cases in which multiple children were placed with sponsors in homes where they were subjected to human trafficking, sexual abuse, and other severe forms of abuse and exploitation. More than 180,000 unaccompanied minors have been placed in communities across the country. But because there's so little follow up with them, once they're out of the government's care, we have no idea what's happened to them.

42:13

OK, let's keep going here.

42:18

So smuggling and trafficking. There is a difference.

42:21

A lot of people think it's the same thing. It is definitely not right. Smuggling is a crime against the country. Trafficking is a crime against the person.

42:30

Smuggling usually involves an undocumented, always involve an undocumented person, crossing international border.

42:37

It's often voluntary.

42:39

I will say we've had some cases where a child was actually sold to an adult in Central America, one of the countries from Central America, so that adult could use that child to enter the country as a family unit.

42:53

That's a concern, too. That's a whole different form level of exploitation. But usually it's voluntary.

43:02

It's usually a business relationship, and smugglers usually get their money upfront.

43:07

Trafficking may involve movement but doesn't have to.

43:10

It's not voluntary. No person chooses to be trafficked.

43:14

The business relationship does not end when the trafficked person arrives at the destination. There's a destination or to the house or to the home or wherever they're going to work or serve.

43:22

Traffickers allow the immigrant to pay off the debt gradually.

43:31

Forced criminality. We really need to always talk about forced criminality. Sometimes it's the cross between.

43:37

You know, a lot of times, you'll see cases that involve sex trafficking and labor trafficking and that labor trafficking is often forced criminality up the trafficker from the sex trafficking as well. We see that a lot. But one distinct yet often under-identified characteristic of human trafficking is forced criminality.

43:56

Traffickers may force adults and children to commit crimes in the course of their victimization, including theft, illicit drug production and transport, prostitution, terrorism, and murder.

44:06

So there have been studies to support this, as well. We're going to get to that in a minute.

44:12

This organization, Antislavery.org, says one distinct yet often under-identified characteristic of human trafficking is forced criminality.

44:24

Traffickers may force adults and children to commit crimes in the course of their victimization, such as that illicit drug production and transport, prostitution, terrorism, and murder.

44:33

Youth can be coerced to sell drugs or to steal or to recruit for the traffickers. We see that a lot, right? These kids are sent into our group homes to recruit other children.

44:43

Or even in schools, they said, you know. They're forced to recruit other children.

44:48

Coercion includes power and control by the trafficker, avoiding risks of commercial sex, threats and violence, including gang control.

44:55

There was a survivor that I worked with for many years. She used to be in foster care. She used to be a habitual runaway, and we kinda developed a relationship. And this quote here is from her, from her recovery.

45:07

And one thing that she always used to say is that she labeled one of her traffickers, a good trafficker, because he did not force her to exchange sex for money. But he did force her to sell drugs and recruit, and she thought that was great.

45:22

So avoiding risks of commercial sex for her was huge, and so she always thought that that was a great trafficker.

45:31

So this is one of her quotes. In situations of captivity, the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator.

45:51

Here's a study that was done.

45:53

So on this one, arrests that occurred during the trafficking time period were directly related to their trafficking. Arrests that occurred before or after the trafficking type or were unrelated to their trafficking. So victims who are known to be involved and this is specific sex trafficking have other arrests that are related.

46:11

Individuals arrested only in relation for the trafficking are arrested seven times more often than those arrested only for activity unrelated to their trafficking.

46:19

They usually have seven times more arrests.

46:26

This one study was done on DJJ. Here on Florida's DJJ.

46:30

If you remember prior to 2016, minors could be arrested for prostitution. So they have that on their record, and this is what they were looking at. So CSEC verified children had a history of prostitution had an average of 7.5 arrests, and those that had no history had 4.9 arrests.

46:59

So, how do children with investigated allegations of labor trafficking differ from those for sex trafficking allegations? And these are going to be based on a study that was done with DCF's data.

47:10

RTI, Research Triangle Institute, took all of DCF's data and did all these different studies with them. Gave us some great information.

47:19

So compared to children who are the subject of sex trafficking allegations, those investigated for labor trafficking are younger. The median age was 15 versus 16, more likely to be male, 55% less likely to have prior child welfare involvement.

47:36

So if you look here at the chart, number of prior investigations for child maltreatment, um, the first column is labor trafficking and the second are sex trafficking allegations.

47:48

So, you can see 72% of sex trafficking allegations had prior maltreatment compared to 46% of the ones who had labor trafficking allegations.

48:01

So among children with prior child welfare history. If we take those out, those with labor trafficking allegations had fewer prior allegations of all types, less likely to have been placed in out of home care, and less likely to have been missing from care.

48:17

Looking at the prior treatment types.

48:20

Again, the dark blue are the children with labor trafficking and the lighter blue is sex trafficking allegations.

48:26

But they all had the same prior type of maltreatment, right? Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or psychological abuse.

48:34

The biggest one is neglect, which makes sense, right, because whatever trauma that child experiences. If the family and the community come around, that child to help protect that child, then that child's not experiencing neglect.

48:47

Those who don't, then that child has a high incidence of neglect.

48:51

And then other things started happening. Trauma starts becoming chronic.

48:59

How your traffickers control their victims. So there's some similarities with domestic victims and foreign victims, and then there's some differences between domestic and foreign victims.

49:08

So with domestic victims, similarities between domestic and foreign, is their psychological abuses.

49:13

There are beatings, burning, sexual abuse, and starvation.

49:16

Isolation, drug and alcohol dependency are used for both.

49:20

Both are foreign born. There's always stress of deportation, threats against the victim's family members.

49:25

Withholding of documents. There's a debt that's been incurred.

49:29

I mean, you don't see as much branding with our foreign-born victims.

49:34

Both have a significant physical and mental impact on both.

49:43

So there's challenges faced throughout all of these cases, right? Child labor versus child exploitation versus labor trafficking. That can become very tricky.

49:52

We know that traveling sales crews are definitely child labor and child exploitation. The labor trafficking piece. We need that first part of coercion which, as we know, it's there.

50:01

When we talk to these kids, oh, it's really hard to prove. So there's not really been any successful prosecutions for those yet.

50:07

We're hoping that we'll get there.

50:09

Resources for labor trafficking cases and legitimate job, legitimate teen jobs, right?

50:15

The vulnerability for labor trafficking as much more money related financial related, is kids want to make money. They think they have a job.

50:22

So what kind of alternative job can you give a child when they can't legally work anyhow? How can you help them get money?

50:31

That becomes a really challenge for our investigators, when they're investigating these cases, with these kids. Particularly the traveling sales scripts.

50:39

Then understanding the cultural components of these cases, particularly for the undocumented foreign-born child, right?

50:45

The minors are often viewed as adults in their own country. The norm that girls marrying and dating significantly older males. So, not uncommon. Their perception of who is an authority figure.

50:56

Fear of deportation. Negative experiences. The ICE border patrol. Often unsafe, corrupt, and their own home country, right? Their experience with their law enforcement locally in their home country. Belief that accepting assistance will affect the whole immigration case.

51:09

There'll be repercussions.

51:12

These are challenges in working with these kids, and I've already said their language.

51:19

The culture differences. The language. The dialects. Employment arbitrarily have to be taken out.

51:23

So, when you, this child will take them out of that exploitation. That labor trafficking case, you know, what employment opportunities do they have?

51:31

Which are zero. Safety issues for family in their home country.

51:36

Setting an employment expectation are different than what we know.

51:40

Ended up having to talk to an immigration attorney and federal law enforcement.

51:45

All of these really complex the case.

51:51

So here's a sample of a case. This is the Guatemalan national. Sentence two.

51:58

Prison for labor trafficking a 12 year old boy.

52:02

And this is a Florida case as well.

52:05

They'll offer Alicia, and I probably not pronouncing this correctly. Camposeco-Montejo, a 35 year old Guatemalan needed to convince the Guatemalan mother to allow her 12-year-old son to come to the United States with him. Remember, I told you that happens pretty often.

52:20

He promised the boy's mother he would provide the minor with an education upon their arrival to the United States. The mother agreed to the proposal.

52:36

So the journey from Guatemala to the United States. Camposeco-Montejo obtained false Guatemalan documents to claim a 12-year-old Guatemalan boy as his son.

52:48

They entered the United States crossing the Rio Grande River in November 2006.

52:55

So upon entry to United States, they were found and arrested by the US. Customs and Border Protection. At this time, Camposeco-Montejo stated he was the boy's father.

53:04

Based upon Camposeco-Montejo's false representations, he and the boy were released as a family unit and subsequently made their way to Florida.

53:14

Beginning in December 2016, Camposeco-Montejo obtained false identification for the 12-year-old boy and forced him to work at agricultural farms throughout Palm Beach County for more than six months to pay a debt on the human smuggling venture. The boy was eventually able to escape and reported his victimization during the course at the labor trafficking scheme.

53:38

So there was a trial and conviction on January 10, 2020. A Guatemalan national was sentenced to eight years in prison followed by three years of supervised release of labor trafficking of a minor. Camposeco-Montejo pled guilty to providing forced labor, alien smuggling, and unlawfully transporting aliens.

53:57

Judge Altman also ordered Camposeco-Montejo to pay \$34,000 in restitution to the minor victim.

54:04

I'm sorry if I butchered that name, but the story remains the same, that you need to be understanding.

54:11

So this is a case that happened right here in Florida and Palm Beach County for a minor.

54:17

Another case that happened in Florida in the Miami area was for a child that was brought here to serve in someone's home, So a former middle school teacher, Maude Paulin, and her mother, Evelyn Theodora and her ex-husband Saintfort Paulin.

54:34

Minor was considered a restavek, a Haitian-Creole term, meaning one who stays with, applies to low-income Haitian children who are given, are sold by parents to wealthier families or taken from orphanages for a better life.

54:46

The minor was taken from an orphanage that Theodora owned, the lady who lived in Miami owned the orphanage.

54:52

For six years between 1989 to 2005, the 14-year-old typically worked 15 hours a day, seven days a week.

54:59

She came here as a young teenager.

55:02

She washed dishes. She made beds, cooked for a family that beat her and hid her in a closet when visitors came.

55:08

She slept under rolled up mattress on the dining room floor, bathed in the backyard with a garden hose.

55:13

She was not allowed to go to school.

55:15

She worked out of Pauline's House, and her sister, Clara Telasco, and charged other people to have the teen work at their homes.

55:22

Combination of psychologic coercion and physical force was used.

55:26

She was able to escape with assistance of a family friend who witnessed the treatment.

55:34

We also know massage parlors, right? There's been cases in Florida. The big case in Jupiter. We know also that there's forced labor and also sex trafficking in those areas as well.

55:46

Well, thank you for attending. I think it's really important to know that labor trafficking does exist here in Florida. We showed you some cases. I'm sure you've seen this. Kids going door to door selling things from, probably from the traveling sales crews with those tubs. You might see a young person being forced to work in a restaurant.

56:05

Again, you know, be aware of what labor trafficking is. Make sure you call the abuse hotline at DCF 1-800-962-2873.

56:13

If you're not sure if it's trafficking or not, let the hotline decide if they're going to accept report or not. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

56:24

So, thank you for attending. If you have any questions, you'd like to email me. My email address is on the screen. My cell phone number is on the screen, as well.

56:31

Hopefully, you've learned something from today's presentation. Thank you.