

SOUP KITCHEN VOLUNTEER

Who You Are Matters: Combating Trafficking Every Day

Ian and Tasha are volunteers at the local soup kitchen. Ian is a chef by trade and Tasha volunteers with several organizations throughout the community that serve those in need.

Tasha has learned that human trafficking is usually the end result of a story that started much earlier, often for individuals who were vulnerable, suffered abuse or neglect, or experienced homelessness or poverty. She recognizes that many of the organizations she volunteers with serve these populations. She not only wants to make clients aware of the dangers, lures, and tactics of those who would exploit them, but also wants to understand more about how these organizations can engage as well.

Tasha arranges for local organizations and agencies to come in once a week to provide presentations during the meal time. This allows for the information to come to those who may benefit from the services available.

One of the presentations she schedules on a monthly basis is the local anti-trafficking coalition. Tasha wants to equip as many clients as possible with information about the tactics traffickers use and how the clients can keep themselves and the youth in their lives safe. To ensure that everyone has access to help if it is ever needed, she passes out wallet cards and brochures that have hotline and emergency information. She also makes sure the poster with the number for reporting activity or seeking assistance is posted in each bathroom and hallway.

Tasha also wants to ensure that all staff and volunteers are trained on how to identify and report human trafficking. It is very likely and possible that a trafficker may frequent a soup kitchen or homeless shelter – this may be because he has a victim with him or because he is looking to recruit new victims. Tasha works with the local Task Force to learn how they can be helpful and how to properly report so that the information gets to the proper authorities for response.

Ian learned that serving vulnerable populations is essential to preventing human trafficking from occurring in the first place. Now, he volunteers his culinary skills to the kitchen's efforts. Ian also builds relationships with local suppliers and farmers markets to coordinate donations of food items, ensuring there is no slavery footprint in the food supply chain.

Tasha and Ian both are engaging right where they are, using their talents and relationships within the sphere of influence they already have. Their impact is far reaching and their efforts are making a difference on behalf of those in need.

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Homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food pantries, and other community based feeding programs serve individuals who are among the most vulnerable to human trafficking. Food is a basic need, and one that vulnerable individuals and families may struggle to meet. Traffickers exploit this vulnerability. Volunteers are uniquely positioned to not only prevent human trafficking from becoming their client's story, but also to identify suspicious activity and report it to authorities.

As a volunteer, you can make a big difference with simple additions to what you are already doing every day! Consider the following:

- Learn the signs of sex and labor trafficking. Know what to look for to identify human trafficking of women, men, girls, and boys.
- Program the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888) into your mobile device, post free flyers with the contact information on bulletin boards and in restrooms, and include a link to humantraffickinghotline.org on your social media pages so that you and your clients can quickly report suspicious activity or get help. Flyers and hotline representatives are multilingual.
- Understand how homelessness intersects with human trafficking, particularly for children and youth (covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues)
- Coordinate with other service providers in your community to discuss what needs and challenges vulnerable populations in your area face. Consider mapping the efforts to identify where there are plenty of services and where there are gaps in services.
- Establish a protocol for what happens when human trafficking is suspected. Ask local law enforcement or your community's anti-trafficking Task Force where to begin.
- Train all outreach teams, employees, and volunteers how to identify trafficking and what your organization's/community's protocol is for addressing suspicions or reports.
- Invite service providers to present on what human trafficking looks like locally, as well as topics such as safety, empowerment, violence, drugs, etc.
- Build relationships with organizations, ministries, and individuals who donate goods, finances, and services. Let them know that addressing human trafficking is important to you, and ask if they would like to help meet immediate needs and share available resources.

When we engage together, miracles happen. Eradicating human trafficking will not be an easy task, but the steps to engaging the fight are simple. For more information about combating human trafficking and protecting vulnerable populations as a business, individual, or organization, visit engagetgether.com.