

TEACHER

Who You Are Matters: Combating Trafficking Every Day

Wendy is a high school history teacher. She is very engaged with her students and with her school. Wendy has a multi-disciplinary team meeting before school regarding a student in one of her classes. One of her students has been placed in foster care and has been struggling academically. Wendy came prepared to the meeting to share with the team that there are several resources available for those in foster care. The state education board has allocated resources and created programs for youth in care. Wendy advocates for her student and ensures that these resources are utilized.

Wendy's morning classes are studying the issue of slavery during the 19th century. Wendy wants her students to know that while slavery may have been addressed with the 13th Amendment, it is still ongoing today. She wants to educate her students on the many forms of slavery and to examine the historical significance of the slave trade throughout history and today. Wendy reviewed several available curriculums that addressed the issue of human trafficking (nesteducators.org). Some curriculums were about slavery and human trafficking, some were about a singular form of human trafficking, and some were focused on awareness. After reviewing curriculums and consulting with her school principal, she chose a plan with multiple lessons, a service learning component, and a discussion of slavery both historically and today.

As a follow-up to the curriculum, Wendy and several other history teachers have invited a local nonprofit to speak to their students about slavery as human trafficking today and how it appears in their community. They also learned about internet safety and how they can keep their students on campus safe as well as equip students to know the tactics and ploys that are currently used by exploiters. Wendy also wants to ensure that all students know their rights and protections against false job schemes and other ways they may be harmed. She wishes to empower students to know they have a voice and that school personnel are safe to talk to and to report any abuse or suspicious activity.

After learning that schools are a place where students may be recruited into human trafficking or may be showing signs exploitation, her school responded by creating a response protocol. Their protocols require all personnel to be trained, from school resource and truancy officers, to school nurses, to administrators to teachers on what to do if they suspect or have a student report to them.

During the lunch hour, Wendy allows the student civic league club to meet in her classroom for their weekly meeting. The club brings awareness to their campus about human trafficking, hosts fundraisers and in-kind donations for local organizations serving those in need, and seeks to stay educated on the issue. Wendy serves as the faculty advisor, seeking to equip her students to be local advocates.

Wendy is able to incorporate tools and programs that already exist into her everyday routine to educate and empower students, identify potential trafficking situations, and mobilize her community.

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Most child victims of human trafficking in the US are students in school systems. No community or school is immune to the abhorrent crime of human trafficking. Teachers, administrators, and school staff are specially positioned to identify abuse of all kinds, to report it, and to take steps to find wrap around services for children and youth in need. Additionally, schools are at the heart of every community and positioned to mobilize entire communities in the fight against human trafficking.

As a professional, 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 in your schools, and include a link to humantraffickinghotline.org on your social media pages and website so that you and your students and families can quickly report suspicious activity or get help.
- Understand trafficking in schools (safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools)
- Incorporate grade-level materials about human trafficking in social studies, health, and other subjects. Many educational curriculums are available (nesteducators.org).
- Partner with local law enforcement and your area's anti-trafficking task force to create protocols to follow when you or someone at your school needs to report suspicious activity.
- Educate students on internet safety using Netsmartz K-12 plans netsmartz.org/Educators
- Empower students to create civic service clubs or do research projects about human trafficking and vulnerable populations. Sponsor these clubs as a faculty member or make space available to students who want to meet. Support students as they seek to educate their peers and the community.
- Notice when students exhibit warning signs of human trafficking (sudden truancy, more tired than usual, older girlfriend/boyfriend, influx of expensive gifts, etc.) and report suspicious activity.
- Discover what resources your state or district may have available for vulnerable populations, such as youth in foster care, students living in poverty, and youth who have experienced loss. Advocate with these resources at multi-disciplinary team meetings (MDT), individual education plan (IEP) meetings, and anywhere else you may be able to connect students and their families to 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 an educator, individual, or organization, visit engagetgether.com.