



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

January 2019

MiNavigator Newsletter Issue 27

Presented by Autism Alliance of Michigan
www.AAoMI.org

Help. Hope. Answers. Today



Human Trafficking and Disabilities

Contributed by Joanna Lofton & Mikhail Filipovitch, AAoM

Human trafficking is the modern-day form of slavery that subjects people by force, fraud, and coercion. It is the second largest criminal industry in the world, reaping \$32 billion a year in the trade of human beings for commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor. Nationally, human trafficking has been reported in all 50 states, where the U.S. acts as both a source destination and transit point for trafficking victims. Michigan, with its proximity to Canada and the state's many major highways, ranked as the second worst state for human trafficking crimes in 2015 (behind Nevada). While recent law enforcement activity has helped, Michigan continues to rank in the top 10 for human trafficking crimes.

Trafficking victims span all classes, races, and genders; it is an unfortunate reality, however, that individuals with intellectual, cognitive, emotional, and mental health disabilities are often targeted due to their additional vulnerabilities.

cont.





One of the first cases in the United States recognized as human trafficking involved a peddling and begging ring in New York City, where traffickers brought 55 deaf Mexican nationals to the United States as forced labor.

In fact, victims with disabilities played a central role in the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000. TVPA was established in response to the outcome of a federal criminal case involving men with cognitive disabilities held on a dairy farm in Michigan, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that psychological coercion (even in cases involving individuals with mental disabilities) was insufficient to support an involuntary servitude conviction. Spurred by the results of the decision, Congress created the TVPA and broadened the definition of forced labor.

Notable examples

While victims with disabilities may be trafficked into sex or labor, many cases include another unfortunate element: the theft of Social Security and disability benefits. A notable example is a RICO indictment where conspirators held six adults with cognitive disabilities and four children in forced labor and sexual servitude for years, keeping the captives locked in closets, cabinets, basements, and attics. The defendants targeted individuals with disabilities who were estranged from their families and convinced them to move into their home so the defendants could become their “representative payee” and steal the victims’ Social Security benefits. Ultimately, two victims died in captivity.

Caregivers and employers can also perpetrate human trafficking against those entrusted to their care. In a 2009 case, *U.S. v. Kaufman*, a federal court convicted two defendants who abused victims at a residential care facility in Kansas. Arlan Kaufman, a Doctor of Social Work, and Linda Kaufman, a licensed nurse, ran the unlicensed residential care treatment center for the mentally ill for more than 20 years. The Kaufmans stole Social Security benefits and billed Medicare for the “services” provided to mentally ill residents of their group home. Victims were forced to perform nude manual labor and record videos of sex acts.

In a notable employment case, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charged Henry’s Turkey Service for abusing the labor of 32 men with intellectual disabilities who eviscerated turkeys in an Iowa-based turkey processing plant for just 41 cents an hour (their employers deducted money for room and board from their earnings).

cont.





The Texas men had been transferred from a residential care facility to the work site in Iowa. Forced to live in squalor, the men faced constant physical and verbal abuse as well as harsh discipline.

As some of the above cases show, there are several factors that make people with disabilities more vulnerable to trafficking:

1. People with disabilities often rely on others to meet their basic needs.
2. Due to their dependence on the caregiver and lack of cognitive understanding, people with disabilities often become submissive to caregiver wishes, which makes the unequal power dynamic of the trafficker seem normal.
3. People with disabilities are often desensitized to touch or unsure what is appropriate due to the level of touching that can accompany intimate care or medical procedures.
4. People with disabilities often live very isolated lives and desire friendship and human connection. Due to their lack of understanding, they can be persuaded to perform sexual acts or other forms of coercive labor, if promised friendship.

What needs to be done?

The fight against the global criminal enterprise in human trafficking is a daunting challenge, but the elimination of the violence, exploitation, and inhumanity experienced by victims with disabilities makes it a top priority for all that value human rights.

- There is a need for a coordinated effort to create partnerships between health care and social service agencies to educate individuals and their families on healthy relationships as well as and trauma informed one-on-one conversations with at-risk individuals.
- Utilize peer supports to effectively teach information on causes and responses to violence and exploitation as well as safety strategies.
- Support the training of social workers, health workers, police, and border officials to spot signs of trafficking.
- Advocate for governments to strengthen oversight of caregivers.
- Avoid products and companies that facilitate human trafficking.
- Advocate for accessibility to allow people with disabilities to access mainstream services and employment.

AAoM is grateful for the funding of our AWARE program and to the Detroit-Wayne Mental Health Authority for including AAoM in their efforts to address Human Trafficking.

cont.





JANUARY AT A GLANCE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					4 Sensory Storytime for Special Needs Adults (Boyer City)	5 Lunch & Movie for families with special needs children/adults (Marne)
6	7 Creating Confident Caregivers (Marquette)	8 PAWS for Reading (Sterling Heights)	9 DNOM Cooking Class (Troy) Making sense of Discipline for Students with Disabilities (Flint)	10 Arts for All NYE Party (Traverse City)	11 Sensory-Friendly Night at Impression 5 Science Center (Lansing)	12 Sibshops (Escanaba)
13 Rejoicing Spirits -no-shush worship service (Birmingham)	14 Guiding Principles for Highly Effective Families (Cheboygan)	15 Estate Planning Basics (Brighton)	16 Grand Rounds-Depression Toolkit and MiChart Enhancements (Ann Arbor)	17 Youth Mental Health First Aid Training (East Lansing)	18 Fowler Center Weekend Respite Camps (Mayville)	19 Kalamazoo Valley Museum Sensory Saturdays & Interactive Lecture Series (Kalamazoo)
20 Abrams Planetarium Sensory friendly show (East Lansing)	21 Sensory Friendly Skate Nights (Muskegon)	22 PAWS for Reading (Sterling Heights)	23 Macomb ISD IEP Workshop Series (Clinton Township)	24 Arc of Kent County IEP Webinar Series (Grand Rapids)	25 Midwestern Behavior Analysis Job Fair (Kalamazoo)	26 Friends of Different Learners Camp and Resource Fair (Beverly Hills) FALCONERS "Around the World" (East Lansing)
27 Rejoicing Spirits -no-shush worship service (Birmingham)	28 Crucial Conversations: Building a Transition IEP (Big Rapids)	29 Mental Health First Aid- Adult (Lansing) Let's Talk Transition (Troy)	30 Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy (Plymouth)	31 The After I'm Gone Program - How to Get What You Want Out Of Life (Livonia)		

** For more information on any of these events, please contact the MiNavigator line at 877-463-2266.



AutismAlliance
of Michigan

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

of raising expectations and expanding opportunities for people touched by autism

