

Does human trafficking really happen here?

Yes! Texas is vulnerable due to our proximity to the border and the number of interstate highways that act as routes to other states. Did you know that cases of trafficking involving **sweat shops, domestic servitude** and **brothels** have been found *inside the Austin city limits*?

Why does it happen?

Human trafficking exists because it is **profitable**. Traffickers can make money selling human beings or selling the forced services of a human being. It can be relatively risk-free when compared to drug trafficking or arms trafficking. Traffickers can sell one person's services hundreds of times – but can only sell an ounce of cocaine or a weapon once before needing to restock.

People are vulnerable to human trafficking for various reasons. People who are in a new country, who don't speak the language, who believe they have no rights, who are desperate to leave their place of origin are perfect bait for traffickers. Even our own citizens are vulnerable. Teens, especially those who are escaping bad home lives are often naïve about their rights and about the different helping systems. The most marginalized members of our community – newly-arrived foreigners, and youth on the street – are vulnerable due to lack of social support and our willingness to overlook their need.

How can we stop it?

Human trafficking is a global problem. There isn't one solution that fits all cities, countries, or all governmental systems. The most important component in ending human trafficking is community awareness. In 2000, the federal government passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act – providing stronger tools to law enforcement to enable more prosecutions. Heavier sentencing can act as a deterrent, but this law also provided funding for specialized law enforcement to investigate this crime. The presence of specialized law enforcement sends a message in the community that this crime is taken seriously and won't be tolerated.

Beyond general awareness that this crime still exists and happens within our community, **professional training is essential**. Recent legislation passed in Texas mandates that all incoming local law enforcement receive training on human trafficking. (It is worth noting that the Travis County Sheriff's Office took it upon themselves to implement this training for all employees two years before the legislative mandate). The Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Austin Human Trafficking Task Force members provide free professional training to law enforcement, medical professionals, social workers and legal service providers.

Along with professional training there is always a need for outreach. Marginalized community members need to know they have rights and need to know who they can ask for help. On a broader note, **we as a community, need to be conscious of how we live – as consumers, as constituents, and as neighbors.**