

# Hispanic Affairs Project



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## **January, 2017 is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Month. President Obama published a presidential proclamation.**

What does this proclamation have to do with us as residents of the western slope of Colorado?

The majority of human trafficking crimes committed do not involve sex trafficking of minors, though we know there are too many cases of this horrific act. In fact, statistically, the larger number of crimes of modern slavery are those of labor trafficking. According to a recent presentation by the University of Nottingham, U.K., slaves as a commodity have lost their relative worth, as compared to what a human slave was valued at in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, a slave would have been worth the equivalent of a luxury automobile, approximately \$40,000 by those standards. Today, as a result of the population boom with the planet having a “surplus” of humanity, a slave is worth as little as the value of a styrofoam cup. We see this extreme in the gold and diamond mines in East Africa and in the brick yards of India. There have been cases in the AP reports of trafficked workers from Myanmar being forced to labor in the seafood production in Thailand, much of whose shell fish is sold in the U.S.

The victims of this slavery share several important characteristics and their prevalence is due to the peculiar conditions that proliferate in our world today. The economically disadvantaged, out of desperation, are likely to fall victims to trafficking through the lure of fraudulent job enticements that induce workers to take unusual risks. They may respond to a recruiter’s lies where otherwise they would be more cautious. And once they are cut-off from the protection of family and friends, the abuses begin. With no recourse, the victim may remain in the exploitative situation for years. As has been stated, human trafficking proliferates as the crime next remunerative to drug trafficking because the exploited worker, whether for sex or for labor, will produce income for the trafficker multiple times whereas a drug sale will require the narcotrafficker to find another supply for the next sale.

In our communities, the same principles are at play: likely victims are the marginalized economically and or socially. Those susceptible to being trafficked may be a homeless youth who left an abusive situation and, on the streets is likely to be victimized by someone pretending to merely want to let him / her stay at their house, but soon they will be required to provide a “service” in exchange for staying in that house. There is a large population of homeless youth in our valley who are vulnerable to such abuses.

In Colorado, cases of nurses being lured from the Philippines under the false pretense of getting a teaching job in a university health program in the States are then forced to work in low-paying jobs in nursing homes in which the trafficker receives their pay checks and forces them to live in crowded and unhealthy conditions.

Our agricultural sector and hospitality sectors here in Colorado are possible venues for abuses by unscrupulous contractors. Because undocumented workers are common in those sectors, their vulnerability makes them easy prey to wage theft, coercion, fraud, threats of violence and deportation.

As residents, we can prevent trafficking by getting informed. The Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP), the local initiative Western Slope Against Trafficking (WSAT), and The Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking are working together as a diverse and multidisciplinary group of professionals and community members dedicating their time and expertise to enhance the response to human trafficking by developing greater protection, prevention, prosecution and forming partnerships to make our communities trafficking free. More information can be found at: <http://combathumantrafficking.org/> and <https://sites.google.com/a/state.co.us/cdps-prod/home/human-trafficking-council/whoweare> ) .

WSAT holds monthly meetings. If you would like to get involved, please contact us at [ocoa\\_1953@yahoo.com](mailto:ocoa_1953@yahoo.com) and write “WSAT” in the subject line.

**Tom Acker, PhD**

**Hispanic Affairs Project Board President**

**The Colorado Human Trafficking Council Board Member.**