



## **Human Trafficking and Vermont Network Member Organizations**

### **Senate Judiciary Committee**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the work of Vermont's domestic and sexual violence organizations toward the prevention of human sex trafficking in Vermont. The Vermont Network is the leading voice on domestic and sexual violence in Vermont and works to promote policies that support victims and survivors of violence to thrive and live free from violence.

In 2018, the fifteen member organizations of the Vermont Network reached 13,973 children and youth through programming designed to prevent gender-based violence. This programming focused on healthy relationships, consent, and recognizing the signs and indicators of gender-based violence. Programming was offered throughout the state by every organization.

Gender-based violence includes domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking. The behaviors of adults engaging in such violence cut across all forms of gender-based violence. These behaviors include psychological grooming, coercion, force (violence), and isolation. Programming offered by the Vermont Network's Member Organizations serves to raise the awareness of children and youth about these tactics and helps them recognize such tactics. Most Member Programs teach about these behaviors broadly with a purpose of interrupting all forms of gender-based violence, including trafficking. In addition, many Member Organizations work with teachers, school staff and other adults that work with youth to help build the collective capacity of adults in communities in Vermont to identify and interrupt gender-based violence.

Children and youth who are vulnerable to being trafficked are those whose lives are wracked with instability and trauma. Children and youth who are homeless or runaways are particularly at risk, especially if they also experience social marginalization based on their race, gender orientation, disability, economic situation, etc. Traffickers prey on children and youth who lack access to the resources needed to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, money.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends the following actions toward primary prevention of trafficking among children and youth:

- Encourage and educate on healthy relationships through adult and child/youth education programming
- Foster safe homes and neighborhoods
- Identify and address vulnerabilities through children serving entities including schools, churches, social organizations, and government agencies. Train adults in these settings to recognize at risk children and to intervene.
- Reduce the demand for commercial sex through policies designed to curb the purchase of sex.

Though human trafficking is one form of gender-based violence, the root causes of human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence and stalking are intertwined. Currently, scarce resources to combat trafficking as well as other forms of gender-based violence are utilized to intervene once an act of gender-based violence has occurred, and funding focuses on interventions through the criminal justice system as well as other social services systems. Organizations, like the fifteen Member Organizations of the Vermont Network, do a remarkable job of offering communities prevention education despite the lack of any dedicated funding for this work. There is a need for expanded prevention programming designed to prevent the first act of gender-based violence. This primary prevention reaches not just children and youth who are targets but also seeks to change systems and culture so that the idea of gender-based violence becomes obsolete, beyond societal norms.

In 2018, the Youth Advocacy Task Force of the Vermont Network surveyed over 300 youth in Vermont on a variety of issues in order to gain information about what interventions are most desired by youth. An Executive Summary of the report can be found [here](#). The survey respondents indicated that the single most important thing we can do to help them address issues around gender-based violence is to become askable adults. Askable adults are people who have educated themselves on gender-based violence and who can be counted on to listen, offer help and support the safety and well-being of children and youth.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue, and for all that you do to improve our state's responses to victims of crime.