

My name is Katie Newell and I serve as the Human Trafficking Case Manager Coordinator for Vermont, my office is located at the South Burlington Police Department and I have been in this position since 2018. The Human Trafficking Case Management program was formed in 2017 through an identified need that we did not have a dedicated Human Trafficking Case Manager in Vermont to work within the systems that are already in place.

Victim Advocates work to navigate the court system, but it was recognized that these cases, require much more intense and broad type of support. I provide training and technical assistance throughout the State, offer direct services for the Northern part of Vermont and oversee a case manager who is embedded in the Bennington Police Department and serves the southern portion of the State. Our positions are unique where we are able to serve individuals who have experiences of exploitation through sex or labor trafficking, regardless if they are working with law enforcement. This program was created to offer support that looks and feels different than other supports that already exist—it is defined and driven by the needs, safety and readiness of the client.

Human trafficking is a fundamental abuse of human rights and dignity. Human trafficking is the intentional exploitation of vulnerable individuals for the exploiters financial gain, using force, fraud or coercion. We also work with individuals who may be experiencing exploitation that may not fit the legal definition of trafficking but engaging in work to meet a basic need. That could mean trading sex, drugs, and/or guns for money, food, a place to stay or to support a substance use disorder. Both involve the exploitation of individual vulnerabilities predicated on social inequities and marginalized populations.

I am asking the Senate Judiciary Committee to restore the inclusion of carrying a firearm while committing a felony, trafficking a regulated drug and human trafficking and aggravated human trafficking to Section 1 of S.4. Given the level of seriousness and dangerousness inherent in the cases we are seeing, these charges should be considered among the "Big 12".

Over the last couple of years, I have observed a large-scale overarching trend of juveniles, some under the age of 16, purchasing and possessing firearms. Human trafficking in Vermont presents as organized activity in which individuals are using guns, drugs and vulnerable individuals as currency. Guns, specifically, are being used to provide a young person who otherwise has no power have the ability to force a vulnerable person to engage in labor or sex

trafficking with ease. A juvenile having access to a firearm is a symbol of power and acts as a power amplifier. When I say labor trafficking, I include the movement of illegal drugs.

Our focus as human trafficking case managers has shifted from services users being forced into commercial exploitation to working with young individuals who are made promises of love, attention, protection and a better life through engaging in violent criminal behavior that includes gun violence and moving, selling and facilitating drug use. Victims who have been traumatized through these acts of violence are in fear of coming forward to report the details of their victimization because they are aware that actions do not have legal consequences and their reporting puts them at greater risk of harm. I have experienced the threat of retaliation through the eyes of my service users when an individual who caused significant harm was not held accountable. As previously mentioned, the acts of organized crime involving drugs, guns and humans has significantly changed over the last couple of years. The perpetrators what we are aware of are getting younger and they are reckless in decision making in order to create a name for themselves or put themselves in a position of power.

Many of the individuals we are serving are often seen as both perpetrators and victims. A big 12 should not mean that someone is in jail for the rest of their lives, this could be an access to services. Additionally, this would allow victims to feel more comfortable coming forward to start their own healing journey.

We know that anyone who is not having their basic needs met is vulnerable to becoming trafficked. A trafficker is a person who is very skilled at spotting vulnerabilities and may have grown up in similar situations as the individual for which they are exploiting. Traffickers can be all ethnicities, men, women, even family members. A trafficker will take time identifying, exacerbating and exploiting the existing vulnerabilities of their victim. The trafficker will take time to build a relationship with the individual they are exploiting to maintain a strong emotional attachment. This attachment hooks the victim into compliance and, through filling their needs builds a bond that builds confidence within their relationship. This bond makes the victim believe that the trafficker truly cares, which can make it difficult for the victim to feel that they can relate to any other person or service provider. This gives the trafficker an advantage over friends, family, law enforcement and service providers because this strong attachment creates a trauma bond that makes it difficult for the victim to believe that anyone else could understand or relate to them the way trafficker could.

You might be wondering how someone might allow themselves to be manipulated into oppression, but it happens more than you might think. Remember, it is a trafficker's goal to spend 110% of their time recruiting, seducing and romancing their victim into promises of a better life. What might some of these risk factors be for the youth that we may work with?

- Lack of supervision, child runs away from home frequently and for a significant period of time
- Lack of stability and a high tolerance for chaos
- History of being in the child welfare system
- Truancy from school
- New, unexplained possessions – clothing, phone, jewelry
- Excessive, almost pathological attachment to cell phone
- Disconnection from social supports
- Hx of childhood trauma to include sexual abuse and neglect
- A sense of responsibility to provide for others

Having the opportunity to serve the individuals who are experiencing exploitation in Vermont is a privilege that I am thankful for each day. It is an honor to learn from our service users and each story shared is a gift. It is both gut wrenching and rewarding to watch a young person start to recognize the patterns that may have contributed to the lifestyle that they have been recruited into and provide space and support that allows for better decision making.

Thank you for your time, I respectfully request that you include these crimes as originally proposed in the version of S.4 as it passed the Senate.

Katie Newell

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