

# Advocacy

## Sexual Exploitation & Child Abuse

## Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking

### Rescue and Restore Efforts

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has initiated the [Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking campaign](#) to help identify and assist victims of human trafficking in the United States. The intent of the Rescue & Restore campaign is to increase the number of identified trafficking victims and to help those victims receive the benefits and services needed to live safely in the U.S. The Rescue & Restore campaign was launched Atlanta in the Spring and the Corporate arm of Covenant House has been awarded the contract to implement the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline.

### Human Trafficking in Georgia

One of the most frightening issues facing homeless and runaway kids today is human trafficking & sexual exploitation. Trafficking in persons is a form of modern-day slavery. It is a crime against a person and traffickers often prey on individuals who are poor, frequently unemployed or underemployed, and who may lack access to social safety nets, all of which applies to the kids that we see every day at the Covenant House and those who have not discovered us yet.

The scope of the problem in the United States is large: the U.S. Government estimates that there are 200,000 to 300,000 sexually exploited children in the country. Sexual commercial exploitation of children occurs in the form of trafficking, pornography, prostitution and sex tourism. Human traffickers and pimps use various techniques to instill fear in victims and to keep them enslaved. Some traffickers keep their victims under lock and key. The victims are abused both physically and psychologically. Most are beaten, many are raped, forced to live in squalid conditions, often cut from the outside world. Victims get lured by fake romantic relationships (known in the industry as “loverboy approach”) or by promises of a lucrative career in the modeling business, victims from abroad are attracted by employment opportunities in the USA, others, both inside and outside of the country are simply picked up from the street.

The problem has reached Georgia, in fact, in 2003 the defiant pimps held their annual convention, the Player’s Ball in Decatur. According to the Georgia Department of Justice, the number of human trafficking cases brought before court has increased six-fold since 2000.

According to the Department of Justice news release, in late August of 2007, a man from Stone Mountain, Georgia, known as “Mike Spade” received 15 years for sex trafficking and transporting young women across state lines for purposes of prostitution. Just after his trial began, Spade admitted to the judge that he had lured and coerced eight young women – including two juveniles – into prostitution. Assistant Attorney General Wan J. Kim described the

crime saying that, “the defendant in this case took advantage of numerous young women by enticing them with promises of modeling contracts and then using force, threats, and coercion to force them to work as prostitutes.”

In another case a man is awaiting trial on the charges of child sex trafficking. The prosecuting attorney working on his case said, “This defendant allegedly took a young girl off the street and sexually victimized her repeatedly around the country.” He further added, demonstrating the government’s commitment, “The sexual abuse of American children in the so-called ‘game’ of prostitution has become a serious problem, and we will attack it wherever we can.”

Sexually exploited children suffer from a variety of ills. They bear physical and emotional health consequences of abuse often leading to substance abuse or suicide.

Trafficking is immoral and illegal. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlaws slavery and involuntary servitude. In 2000 the President signed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act supplementing existing laws that apply to human trafficking. This law established new tools and dedicated more resources to combat trafficking in persons. It also reinforced a victim-centered approach and required an array of services and protections for victims of severe forms of trafficking.

We are very proud of our own efforts to combat this problem here in Atlanta. Covenant House Street Outreach vans alone encounter as many as 50 children per month depending on the weather. But the staggering dimensions and pervasive nature of this problem demand a concerted community and government approach down from the local and up to the national and the global level.

That is why the Department of Health and Human Services launched a public awareness campaign aimed at informing people about human trafficking problem and how to recognize that the crime is taking place. Covenant House is part of this campaign, we, who are dedicated to serving Atlanta’s most vulnerable children with “absolute respect and unconditional love”, are committed to shelter and care for Atlanta’s homeless young adults. Additionally, Covenant House Georgia participated in the creation of the “Hidden from View – The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in Atlanta” report presented to the Mayor in 2006.

By continuing to provide security, food and a way out for homeless, runaway and abused young people, we are doing our part to solve this problem. By raising awareness through the media, Covenant House strives to be a voice for homeless youth who cannot speak for themselves.

By supporting Covenant House you can take part in confronting human trafficking overall and trafficking of children in particular. Educate yourself about human trafficking and donate to the cause. This horrid crime must stop.