

Hello, my name is Nicolette Ware and I am currently finishing my senior year as a social work major at Nebraska Wesleyan University. I have served as an RTMJ intern in the University Ministries office since January 2010, with support from the Risk-Taking Mission and Justice team of the Nebraska Annual Conference. My initial focus was on poverty and homelessness, but it quickly shifted to human trafficking. After taking a social policy class for my major and seeing the fictional yet all too true movie *Human Trafficking* on Lifetime one evening, I became very interested in researching this issue, advocating for victims and survivors of this modern-day slavery, and just educating and making people aware of the issue. My primary interest is in Roma Rights and how the Roma (commonly referred to as gypsies) population is affected by human trafficking. My desire is to, one day, participate in an immersion trip to a certain country and led by one of these organizations. Last year, I brought in speakers from the Nebraska Family Council to talk to the campus about the basics of human trafficking and what their organization does. This academic year, I have already attended a campus presentation given by someone from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. I am working on bringing in someone from Tiny Hands International, which is a Lincoln-based organization. In addition, I would like to bring in products from this organization that have been made by survivors with profits used towards anti-trafficking efforts.

### **What is Human Trafficking?**

Human trafficking is modern-day slavery. A more formal definition of human trafficking is: The illegal trade of human beings for the purposes of reproductive slavery, commercial sexual exploitation, and for forced labor. According to the *Not for Sale* campaign, an estimated 30 million slaves exist in the world today, which is a greater number than at any other point in human history. Second to only drug trafficking, human trafficking is on the rise to becoming the most profitable of illegal industries in the world. It is a lucrative industry, an estimated \$32 billion according to the Polaris Project, that affects every country and has no borders. While poverty can be a factor among those who are trafficked, it is not necessarily an indicator of those who are trafficked. Anyone can become the victim of human trafficking. The Polaris Project, an organization that works towards combating human trafficking, provides a brief list for recognizing the signs of an individual who may be a trafficked person. Some of these signs include, but are not limited to: Is not free to leave or come and go as he/she wishes; Is under 18 and is providing commercial sex acts; Works excessively long and/or unusual hours; Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work; High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations; Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid; Avoids eye contact; Lacks health care; Appears malnourished; Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture; Has few or no personal possessions; Is not in control of own identification documents (i.e. passport or ID); and loss of sense of time.

The reality is that human trafficking exists in many forms – sexual exploitation, forced labor, and bonded labor, or debt bondage. The average age of a victim of sexual exploitation in this industry is 13 years old, according to the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. There are many misconceptions that people have about trafficked persons. Victim blaming can be a problem. The fact is that children are not prostitutes. These individuals are tortured and withstand harsh

conditions on a daily basis, they may give up hope, they are manipulated, and just try to do the best they can to survive every day.

### **What can you do about human trafficking?**

The best thing you can do is to educate yourself on this issue and advocate. Report any possible domestic case of a trafficked individual to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, which has a toll-free hotline in the United States and is staffed by the Polaris Project 24/7 to accept these reports. **The number is 1-888-373-7888.** Also, support fair trade efforts. You never know when your chocolate, coffee, or diamonds are the result of the work of trafficked persons. Saying no to prostitution is also important. When there is not a demand for it, then it won't exist. Write to your local senators and make yourself familiar with current local, state, national, and international laws regarding this issue. Use the Internet and technology as a way to educate, advocate, and combat human trafficking. (Be mindful that there are websites like Backpage.com that have facilitated sex trafficking.)

Here is a brief list of resources/websites for more information:

- Not for Sale Campaign [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org)
- Somaly Mam Foundation [www.somaly.org](http://www.somaly.org)
- Demi & Ashton Foundation <http://demiandashton.org/>
- Tiny Hands International [www.tinyhandsinternational.org](http://www.tinyhandsinternational.org)
- Shared Hope International [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)
- Nebraska Family Council: [http://nebfc.org/?page\\_id=346](http://nebfc.org/?page_id=346)