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Human trafficking information available at driving schools

By: Miranda Leybourne
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Students in driving schools across Manitoba and the country now have access to materials that will educate them about the realities of human and sex trafficking, thanks to a new initiative from the Joy Smith Foundation.

The foundation, according to its website, is Canada's leading authority on human trafficking prevention, intervention and support, and education is the most important tool to prevent human trafficking across Canada, said Janet Campbell, president and chief executive officer of the Joy Smith Foundation.

"Every day, Canadian youth are manipulated and forced into the sex trade, with many unaware this is happening in their own backyard. When we know the signs, we can all take steps to protect our friends, family and neighbours," she said.

Something that many people seem not to understand is that human trafficking doesn't only happen in big cities, Campbell told the Sun.

"It happens in communities right across the country, and we actually have cases that are in even smaller, tight-knit rural communities where you might think, 'How could that ever happen here?' And it does," she said.

The internet and social media platforms have made it easier for predators to gain access to children and youth, Campbell said. It also means that human trafficking can happen anywhere, even in isolated, small communities. Oftentimes, parents aren't even aware of what their children are doing on their phones and on the internet, she added.

"It's important to keep those lines of communication open with them about what they're doing online, and to stay close to it, because we know many of our cases start online," Campbell

said. “Kids can be kind of secretive, and these are great kids from great families, but we’ve still had a number of cases.”

Parents need to know who their kids are connecting to in person and online, and understand the signs of human trafficking, Campbell said. It’s also important that youth themselves understand the dangers of human trafficking.

For many teens, obtaining a driver’s license marks a pivotal milestone, symbolizing newfound independence and responsibility. Recognizing this critical juncture, the Joy Smith Foundation is distributing resources to driving schools nationwide. These materials include poignant PSAs featuring survivors and fellow driving students, aimed at dispelling misconceptions about the prevalence of trafficking.

Equipping teens and parents with knowledge empowers them to identify potential victims and thwart predatory behavior. The Trafficking Signs handbook, modeled after the iconic Driver’s Handbook, delineates nine telltale signs of sex trafficking, urging vigilance in everyday interactions.

The foundation identifies the signs as: sudden interest in a man several years older; new clothing, jewelry or gifts without having money; frequent sleepovers at a friend’s house; a sudden change in style of dress or makeup; a new circle of friends and isolation from an old group; a change in attitude towards school, regular activities and friends; grades dropping; unexplained cuts or bruises; using two cell phones.

Human trafficking can happen to children from all sorts of backgrounds and families, Campbell said, so every youth and every parent needs to know the signs.

“Predators will threaten their victims, and so the victims will do everything they can to conceal what’s going on and keep it from their parents,” she said.

Protection from predators begins with education, Campbell said. Schools and teachers can also play an important role, she added, because kids are at school for so many hours.

“(Teachers) do notice changes and they also have an ear to discussions that happen in the school, so we offer free training for any school for teachers ... and as the teachers are more knowledgeable, they absolutely do play a very vital role.”

Concerned citizens are encouraged to educate themselves via [TraffickingSigns.ca](https://trafficking-signs.ca), a comprehensive platform offering PSAs, handbooks, and additional resources.