

Source: <https://winnipegsun.com/news/provincial/nationwide-joy-in-action-campaign-raises-awareness-of-human-trafficking-in-rural-canada>

Nationwide 'Joy in Action' campaign raises awareness of human trafficking in rural Canada

Winnipeg Sun – August 13, 2025

Written by Steven Sukkau

Human trafficking is not just a big-city problem, it's happening in towns and rural communities across Canada. That is the urgent message from Janet Campbell, President and CEO of the Joy Smith Foundation, as the organization ramps up its annual *Joy in Action* campaign.

The Joy Smith Foundation, recognized as Canada's leading authority on human trafficking, has supported more than 7,000 survivors and their families in rebuilding their lives. The non-profit provides long-term, individualized support, walking alongside victims on their path to healing.

"Our depth of understanding and survivor-centered approach sets us apart," Campbell said. "Every survivor's journey is unique. We're not just supporters, we're partners in their recovery."

'Hidden in Plain Sight'

Campbell says one of the greatest misconceptions about human trafficking is that it only happens in large urban centres. In reality, rural and small-town Canada are far from immune.

"Many cases actually start in rural communities," she explained. "The average age of entry into the sex trade in Canada is just 13 years old. These are our children. Traffickers use online platforms, gaming sites, and social media to reach youth anywhere, building trust before exploiting them."

Campbell notes that trafficking often begins with what seems like an innocent friendship or romantic relationship, and can happen while victims still live at home.

“These are good homes, with caring parents. But the crime is complex, and without awareness, it can hide in plain sight,” she said.

Education as a First Line of Defense

The *Joy in Action* campaign aims to break that invisibility by bringing awareness events into communities across the country. The signature kickoff, a family-friendly walk, run, and bike ride, took place August 9 at Birds Hill Provincial Park.

“Education is our greatest weapon,” Campbell stressed. “When people know what to look for, they can prevent exploitation and protect vulnerable individuals in their community.”

The campaign encourages Canadians to host their own events year-round, from barbecues to bike rides, raising funds and awareness to combat human trafficking. Resources, including online safety guides for parents and youth, are available free at joysmithfoundation.com.

Campbell hopes more communities will get involved. “This isn’t about fearmongering, it’s about empowering people with the knowledge and tools to make a difference,” she said.

To learn more or to organize a *Joy in Action* event, Canadians can call 204-691-2455. “Together, we can create communities where human trafficking has no place,” Campbell said.

— Steven Sukkau is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter who works out of the Winnipeg Sun. The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.