

# **SAN MATEO COUNTY HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROGRAM**

**A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM  
BETWEEN THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, THE  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND THE SAN MATEO  
COUNTY POLICE CHIEFS AND SHERIFF  
ASSOCIATION**

**2020 Annual Report  
April 9, 2021**

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&  
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## PREFACE

This report is the work product of San Mateo County Human Trafficking Program Coordinator John Vanek and San Mateo County Human Trafficking Advocacy Coordinator Pamela Estes. Mr. Vanek and Ms. Estes are tasked with providing subject-matter expertise and leadership to: Improve the County's response to human trafficking; enhance coordination among both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the response to human trafficking within the County, and; represent the County in regional anti-trafficking efforts. This report contains the results of their efforts during the calendar year 2020. This annual report addresses the following areas: 1) Law Enforcement Operations and Efforts; 2) Identifying and Assisting Human Trafficking Victims; 3) Community Training, Education and Outreach; and 4) Additional Items.

*(Per the San Mateo County Human Trafficking (HT) Program Coordinators' deliverables, an annual report was due January 31, 2021. The Program's Annual Report includes data on the number of trafficking victims identified by governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) either within, or with a nexus to, San Mateo County. Collection of this data is reliant upon these organizations voluntarily collecting and reporting the data. Collecting this data in early 2021 appeared to be compounded by COVID-19-related, work-from-home and other staffing issues. This report contains data collected as of April 9, 2021, which may be updated if additional data is received.)*

### **COVID-19's IMPACT ON THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROGRAM**

*The Human Trafficking Program, like all other County programs, was drastically impacted by COVID-19 and the resultant stoppage of in-person gatherings. Program Coordinators have not conducted any formal in-person meetings or events since March 2020 and will continue to operate remotely until instructed by the Sheriff's Office. However, the Program quickly shifted to remote operations and found positive aspects as a result. Where appropriate, greater detail of COVID-19's impact is included in each section of this report.*

## **1. LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS AND EFFORTS**

In 2020, pro-active law enforcement operations were drastically impacted by COVID-19, with only five pro-active operations reporting to the Program by the following agencies: Sheriff's Office (3); South San Francisco Police (2). (Additional agency operations may have occurred that were not reported to the Program.)

In addition, the past practice of the Program Coordinator being responsible for coordinating "Zone Operations" was curtailed in 2020 at the direction of the Police Chiefs and Sheriff Association's Human Trafficking sub-committee. Instead, the



Program Coordinator is to attend agency-scheduled operations when available, and offer technical assistance as needed.

### Illicit Massage Businesses (IMBs)

Under California's COVID-19 4-tier assignment system, personal service businesses in San Mateo County were closed from March through September/October 2020, and later closed a second time. Consequently, pro-active operations to identify potential HT victims and reduce criminal activity known to occur in massage parlors (referred to as Illicit Massage Businesses – IMBs) essentially ceased in 2020.

The Program Coordinator is responsible for delivering intelligence to the Police Chiefs and Sheriff Association every two months, based on buyer reviews posted to the website Rubmaps.com. The January 1, 2020 Rubmaps Intel Report included 14 IMBs with buyer reviews in November or December 2019. From April through June 2020 no buyer reviews were posted, likely as a result of COVID-19 business closures. Five IMBs had reviews for July and August, and by the end of 2020 six IMBs had reviews posted.

This represents a decline of over 50% between January 2020 and January 2021. (As of early 2021 some agencies are conducting pro-active operations targeting IMBs and screening workers for trafficking victimization.)

### National Human Trafficking Hotline Tips

Contact with the National Human Trafficking Hotline (Hotline) was re-established in March 2018, updating the Hotline's protocol on how to notify San Mateo County when trafficking tips are received by the Hotline. The Coordinators continue to update the Hotline protocol as needed.

The impact of COVID-19 on reported victimizations is a debatable topic; some experts believe victimizations have increased due to job loss and the resultant financial pressure. Meanwhile, most agencies reported a decrease of victim's self-reporting, potentially due to the decline in personal interaction with social service agency staff during COVID-19 restrictions. To date, there is no national evidence-based research analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking.

During 2020, 10 Hotline Tips were received (an increase from four in 2019), along with an additional six Tips from other sources (total of 16). All were referred to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation, and services were offered and/or provided when potential victims were identified.

The Hotline also reports directly to Rape Trauma Services without notifying Coordinators when callers request anonymity and do not want law enforcement involved. RTS estimates that their Crisis Line received 6 callers referred from the Hotline, and one caller referred from RTS reached out to Coordinators.

## Prosecution of Criminal Cases

Prosecution of trafficking cases ceased in March 2020 due to COVID-19.

The trial of the “Rainbow Bright” case, a major labor trafficking case involving at least 100 adult victims that is being prosecuted by the California Attorney General’s Office, was scheduled to begin just as COVID-19 restrictions began. It is now scheduled to start in August 2021.

In April 2019, the District Attorney’s Office filed HT charges against a San Bruno woman for labor trafficking (i.e., domestic servitude) of an adult female. This case was dismissed by the trial court in 2021 on a constitutional finding of prejudice and has since been referred to the United States Attorney’s Office for possible prosecution.

## **2. IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS**

During 2018, Coordinators conducted an assessment to determine an estimate of the number of HT victims identified by county service providers who sought out some type of social services support in the 3-year period 2015-17. Service agencies identified approximately 102 likely HT victims among their clients who sought services during 2015-17, an average of 34 HT victims per year or 2.8 per month over the 3-year period.

In 2018, the number of HT victims identified in San Mateo County by the HT Program, service providers, and local NGO partners was 130 (12 identified as labor trafficking victims); and for 2019 was 304 (43 identified as labor trafficking victims).

During 2020, from the 20 responses received, a range of 282-306 human trafficking victims were identified who had some nexus with San Mateo County; an average of over 23 victims per month. These responses include minors and adults, labor and sex trafficking victims. Surprisingly, the San Francisco Asian Women’s Shelter identified 10-15 female victims with a nexus to San Mateo County. Of the 20 responses, nine service providers stated that they served fewer clients in 2020 than in 2019 and five stated they served more.

Again, COVID-19’s impact on actual victimizations is unknown, and the impact on reporting to the Program is unknown. However, it is far more reasonable to assert that the numbers reported are below the true rate of victimization.

In addition, many service providers still do not screen for human trafficking as part of their client assessment process, so complete tracking of HT victims does not exist in the County. However, this estimate of victim identifications since 2015 is extremely valuable to the Program and County: It validates the work of the Program and community partners; it is valuable for grant submissions, and; provides tangible outcomes for



Measure K reporting. Very few communities in the United States have similar local data in victim identifications.

The identification of a HT victim often occurs after a trust relationship has been established with a social services provider through the course of providing services. As many service providers had limited in-person contact with clients in 2020, it is reasonable to assert that a number of victims were undetected. Coordinators will continue to explore ways to encourage service agencies to screen and track likely HT victims so more accurate data can be obtained in the future.

### Funding for HT Victim Services

In May 2020 the partnership of StarVista, the Sheriff's Office, and the District Attorney's Office submitted an application to the U.S. Department of Justice / Office for Victims of Crime, for the *Services to Victims of Human Trafficking* grant. This grant would have provided \$750,000 in federal funds (plus \$250,000 in-kind match funds) over three years to serve HT victims with a nexus to San Mateo County. Despite a comprehensive plan, the grant was not awarded to StarVista. In April 2021 StarVista will again apply for the grant with the same partnership structure and many (but not all) of the sub-grantee partners. The federal award for the 2021 grant has increased to \$800,000. The additional in-kind funds needed have already been identified and added to the proposed budget.

In 2020 the Program also applied for a grant from the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI) but did not receive an award.

As a result of relationships formed through the Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI), the HT Program has assisted in meeting victim needs through generous gifts from local NGOs, such as WorldSong Aid, and Special Operations Silicon Valley.

### Identification of CSEC Victims and At-Risk Youth

Child and Family Services (CFS) has jurisdiction over Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) who reside in San Mateo County, and non-minor dependents who remain open to CFS and have a Social Worker assigned to them between the ages of 18-21. CFS continues to use the CSE-IT tool (Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool; pronounced "See it"); an evidence-based observation tool to identify youth who are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. During 2020, CFS identified 59 youth who scored the highest category of concern. Twelve of these youth were between 18-21 years old. CFS has been able to confirm commercial sexual exploitation for only a handful of these youth, but all 59 youth's circumstances merit the highest level of *suspicion* (i.e., not confirmed) for commercial sexual exploitation.

Juvenile Probation also uses the CSE-IT tool. During 2020 they had 4-6 juveniles under their care who they identified as CSEC.



Youth who score high on the CSE-IT tool, but are not under supervision by CFS, are placed on a “watch list,” which the County Office of Education serves as custodian. Coordinators are not privy to the number of youths on the “watch list.” In addition, other at-risk youth may be identified by other County agencies or NGOs that the Human Trafficking Program is not aware of.

### Comprehensive Services for All Victims of All Forms of Human Trafficking

HT victims often require a wide variety of services to recover from victimization and become self-sufficient. In addition to general victim services, often services are differentiated based upon various criteria such as, victims age (i.e., minors or adults), sex (i.e., male or female) or place of birth (i.e., U.S. citizen or foreign national). Due to a lack of funding for victim services in the County, there is a lack of tailored and coordinated delivery of services, which is a significant gap in the County’s response to trafficking. Coordinators continue to identify the various service providers currently providing specialized services to HT victims, or who may be able to offer services in the future.

### Provision for Minor HT Victims

In 2014, SB 855 clarified that exploited children and children who are forced to trade sex to meet their basic needs may be served through the child welfare system as victims of child abuse and neglect. The law also established the opt-in CSEC Program to encourage counties to develop an interagency protocol for CSEC case management, planning, and delivery of services, and to operate under a multidisciplinary teaming (MDT) approach. San Mateo County opted-in to the CSEC Program and Coordinators represent the Sheriff’s Office as a member of the CSEC Steering Committee and participate in quarterly meetings.

Child Protective Services (CPS) and the Juvenile Court have jurisdiction over CSEC youth pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300(b)(2), and AB 1322, which decriminalized prostitution for minors under the age of 18 and mandated services rather than criminalization in juvenile delinquency court. Rape Trauma Services (RTS) is under contract with CPS to provide crisis response and case management for CSEC youth. CPS faces the ongoing challenge to find housing for CSEC youth as few foster families are willing (and appropriately trained) to care for CSEC youth, and with the passage of AB 403, which is phasing out group homes, in general, there are fewer housing options for minors.

CPS and the Juvenile Court also have jurisdiction of minors who are victims of labor trafficking under W&I 300(b)(1) if determined that it is the result of parent/guardian neglect.

## CSEC MOU Update

Since February 2018 Coordinators have worked as part of the County's CSEC Steering Committee and CSEC Work Group to update the CSEC MOU. The CSEC MOU was completed on December 10, 2019, at which time it was circulated to department heads for signature. The CSEC MOU was signed by Sheriff Bolanos in February 2020, and by Chief Pardini, President of the PCSA on April 22, 2020.

## Housing and Other Services for Adult HT Victims

StarVista's First Chance Sobering Station (FCSS) provides immediate respite shelter for adult HT victims who are referred by law enforcement. During 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, FCSS provided short-term shelter to 1-3 HT victims. Other victims were temporarily sheltered at hotels.

Long-term housing options for adult HT victims remain a significant gap in services. In October 2020, Freedom House, a NGO that operated the Monarch Shelter, an 8-bed, long-term housing facility for single females, closed its operations. Consequently, the HT Program is dependent upon a small number of NGOs located outside of San Mateo County to provide housing to HT victims.

In Alameda County there are two housing facilities with a combined 24 beds available for single women and women with children, and a 6 bed shelter for men that Coordinators can access if space is available.

During 2020, Coordinators were able to find housing for HT victims at Serenity House, Love Never Fails (Alameda County), and through hotel stays paid for by NGOs Worldsong Aid, and Special Operations Silicon Valley.

The County has a policy against paying local shelter providers to hold shelter beds. Health Services Agency is of the opinion that the County's shelter system is not appropriate for HT victims, so the County shelter system is not currently a housing solution. The HT Program will continue to seek other viable housing options.

Coordinators attend the County's quarterly Continuum of Care meetings, which is a collaboration of stakeholders promoting a community-wide commitment to end homelessness, in order to stay abreast on the various County agencies' efforts to increase housing for under-resourced residents, and to represent HT victims.

## Case Management for Adult HT Victims

Once an HT victim has been identified who desires assistance, comprehensive case management services are important to the victim's stabilization and forward progress. Providing case management to adult victims continues to be a challenge due to lack of funding. The District Attorney's Office, Victim Services Division, (DA VSD) provides case management for trafficking victims who are identified as crime victims.



Justice At Last (JAL), a non-profit law firm located in San Mateo County, provides legal services exclusively to HT victims in the Bay Area and now offers case management to their legal clients. During 2020, JAL had 143 San Mateo County clients.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), San Jose office, regularly receives case management referrals from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and immigration attorneys to assist HT victims in San Mateo County who are often unknown to the HT Program. During 2020, IRC received referrals to provide case management to 12 HT victims residing in San Mateo County.

Finally, Coordinators provided case management to three adult, U.S. citizen, sex trafficking victims during 2020.

### **3. COMMUNITY TRAINING, EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

#### Ongoing Law Enforcement Training

Coordinators continued to offer the two-hour *Human Trafficking for Law Enforcement* course every other month, doing so remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions. In 2020 seven (one over the required six) presentations were offered, with a total of 44 attendees. As of December 31, 2020, a total of 200 individuals have attended the training. Upon consultation with the Sheriff's Office Training Unit and the South Bay Regional Academy, the decision was made to not seek POST Certification of this course, a stated goal in the 2019 Annual Report.

#### Ongoing Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI) Meetings

In February 2018, Coordinators launched the Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI) which is a forum open to all who are interested or involved in the response to trafficking in San Mateo County in order to share information and to receive education and training. The HTI meeting is held monthly on the second Tuesday (except in December). The connections made at HTI meetings have resulted in NGO's offering direct assistance to HT victims, increased community knowledge of human trafficking, and collaboration between a wide variety of organizations and individuals to work against human trafficking in San Mateo County.

In 2020, in-person meetings were held in January through March. The April meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19. In May 2020 HTI meetings transitioned to Zoom and continue to be conducted remotely.

The average attendance of virtual HTI meetings rose to an average of 27 attendees per month. Moving to Zoom has allowed the Program to access subject matter experts from across the country to present at HTI meetings, offering a greater range of experts to educate HTI attendees. In addition to Northern California-based speakers, the HTI hosted nationally recognized experts from Southern California, Tennessee, and



Pennsylvania; none of which would have been possible in-person. (The Zoom meeting and webinar services are paid for by the Program Coordinator at no cost to the County.)

During the March 2021 meeting, an informal poll was taken asking HTI attendees their meeting preference once COVID-19 restrictions ease. 29% prefer all meetings via Zoom; 12% prefer all meetings revert to in-person; 24% prefer alternating in-person with Zoom; 18% prefer to meet in-person three times a year, and; 29% prefer to meet in-person four times a year. (This poll was only to receive attendee input, not as a decision-making process. Decisions on HTI format will be decided by the PCSA Human Trafficking sub-committee.)

### Program Website

The Program website was launched in March 2019 and is updated as necessary. Website analytics reveal that during 2020, there was an average of 3.7 viewers per day, with a spike of greater than 30 viewers per day during November and December. 1,190 unique users viewed the website and 1,187 were new users in 2020. Eighty of the new viewers visited the website more than one time, with a total of 1,346 sessions on the website and 2,326 page views. The five most visited pages were: The Homepage (998 views); “About Us” page (334 views); “Resources” page (265 views); “What is Human Trafficking” page (193 views); “News” page (171 views); and the ‘HT Poster” page (55 views). The website can be read in multiple languages and the IP address of website visitors were from the following countries: U.S. (979); Denmark (56); United Arab Emirates (56); Japan (9); Canada, India, U.K. and Hong Kong (between 4-6 each).

### Access to Program Meetings and Trainings via the Sheriff’s Office YouTube Channel

The Program now records all HTI meetings and training webinars and curates the recordings on the Sheriff’s Office YouTube channel for later viewing by the public and for content transparency.

### Managing HTI Contact List through GovDelivery

Coordinators maintain an email Contact List via GovDelivery. Currently 372 individuals are on the list and receive notifications for HTI meetings, additional training events, and information relevant to the response to human trafficking.

### County’s Community Information Handbook Presence

The San Mateo County Human Services Agency prints an annual Community Information Handbook (CIH), a resource guide for County and Bay Area wide services which has a corresponding online version at [www.smc-connect.org](http://www.smc-connect.org). Coordinators submitted a listing for the National Human Trafficking Hotline which is now included on the first page of the CIH with other emergency numbers. Additionally, Coordinators promoted the CIH to HTI members as a place to list their services since previous



editions of the CIH had no resources for HT victims. Justice At Last is now included in the CIH. Coordinators will continue to monitor and encourage service providers to list their resources in the CIH.

### Hotel/Motel HT Poster Compliance Checks

California Civil Code Section 52.6 requires certain businesses to post a notice that identifies resources available to HT victims and the community. The law was amended in 2017 to include hotels, motels and bed and breakfast inns in the list of businesses required to post this notice, which went into effect on January 1, 2019. Additionally, California Government Code Section 12950.3 effective January 1, 2019, requires all hotel and motel employers to provide at least 20 minutes of education regarding human trafficking awareness to employees by January 1, 2020.

In November 2018 the Program (in collaboration with NGOs and citizen groups) distributed posters and supporting material explaining the requirement to every hotel/motel in the County. In November 2019, Coordinators worked with several NGOs to train volunteers to visit hotels and motels to conduct poster compliance checks which continued through March 2020 at which time visits were halted due to COVID-19. Volunteers visited approx. 61% of the hotels and motels in the County, returning feedback forms for 99 out of 161 hotels. Thirty-eight percent of the hotels and motels visited were displaying the human trafficking notice/poster in a location where it would be conspicuous to the public, as required by law (i.e., lobby), and approx. 50% of the hotels and motels are training employees on human trafficking.

### Local Outreach

In January 2020 Coordinators hosted an evening event in support of National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. The event consisted of appetizers, display tables from a variety of NGOs, and formal presentations on the response to trafficking within San Mateo County by the Program Coordinators. Opening comments were delivered by Sheriff Bolanos, and the Master of Ceremony was Assistant Sheriff (then-Captain) Mark Duri. 75 community members attended.

San Mateo County Public Health requires that providers report communicable diseases, child or elder abuse, and other situations that are a threat to the well-being of San Mateo County residents. Public Health provides reporting guidelines and forms, and uses the data received to respond to specific situations, to identify and track health problems, to develop local health policy and programs, and to report out findings. From February through August 2020, Coordinators worked with Dr. Tricia Tayama, Medical Director of Keller Center for Family Violence Prevention at San Mateo Medical Center, to draft new County Health reporting guidelines for human trafficking. These new and revised guidelines were submitted to Dr. Curtis Chan, Deputy Health Officer for San Mateo, for his consideration and approval. To date, these new and revised guidelines have not been published which, we presume, is related to Public Health's involvement



in managing the COVID-19. Coordinators will continue to monitor the approval of these new guidelines.

In addition, during 2020, Coordinators were engaged with the following: East Palo Alto Police, Belmont Police, Redwood City Police; Sheriff's Office, San Mateo Police, South San Francisco Police, District Attorney's Office (specific HT investigations); Star-Vista First Chance (training of staff); Primary School of EPA (training of staff); CARON Program (presentation at Women's Health panel) Immigrant Forum (presentation); FLY youth program (presentation); American Association of University Women (presentation); National Charity League Half Moon Bay (presentation); SamTrans (training of staff); County Attorney's Office (IMB enforcement); San Mateo Medical Center (Grand Rounds presentation); Office of Diversity and Equity (partner agency training); East Palo Alto Councilmember Yarbrough-Gauthier (HT Awareness event); attendance at County Commander's Meetings, and; International Rescue Committee.

### Regional Networking

Coordinators represented San Mateo County at regional meetings whenever possible. During 2020 coordinators attended or presented at a wide variety of events including: San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (San Francisco) (monthly meeting and annual conference); South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking (San Jose) (monthly meetings and annual conference); Innocence Lost (conference); UC Berkeley Anti-Trafficking Forum (annual); CSEC Action Team Meeting (statewide, quarterly meetings); Coalition to End Human Trafficking in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties; and No Traffick Ahead (regional, quarterly meetings).

Meeting via Zoom allowed an equal (if not greater) number of meetings / engagements by the Coordinators in 2020.

### Preparations for January 2021 HT Awareness Events

As a result of the public's acceptance of remote events, in late 2020 the Program initiated efforts to host a variety of Zoom-based webinars during January 2021 for National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. The ability to connect with the community online contributed to the success of a series of webinars hosted by the HT Program in January 2021. Three different webinars were presented and two were additionally presented in Spanish and co-hosted with the Sheriff's Office Unidos Community Program (formerly CARON). The Program Coordinators plan to increase webinar offerings in 2021 to more easily engage the community and make them aware of the Program's existence and efforts.

## 4. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

### Coordinators' Continuing Education

Coordinator Estes attended more than a dozen trainings, including: Certified Trauma-Informed Specialist (24-hour training by Arizona Trauma Institute); CSEC Training (3-hour training by San Mateo County Child and Family Services); CSEC 101 (8-hour training by Santa Clara County Child and Family Services); Understanding Trauma Bonds Between Traffickers and Their Victims (by National Criminal Justice Training Center); and When Coercion Feel Like Choice: Impact of Sex trafficking on the Brain (By Dr. Chris Wilson and Survivor Becca Charleston).

-END-