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Community Leaders, Police Tackle Sex Trafficking Problem in Alaska

September 28, 2013 | By Adam Pinsker | Channel 2 News

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Keyana Marshall's story is similar to many other victims of sex trafficking. At the age of 15 she babysat for a woman who turned out to be a madam, and that's when she says the trouble began.

"She had me answering her business line, she owned a business and I babysat for all kinds of businesses in the past," said Marshall. "It was my way to help my mother around the house, things like that."

It was through that babysitting gig Marshall became connected with a man who she says coerced her into the sex trafficking industry.

"He forced me into sexual acts with him, forced me to watch him perform sexual acts on others, and used violence."

Marshall got out of the trade, but says she was mistaken by law enforcement for someone who willingly engaged in prostitution and as a result spent time in prison.

On Saturday, the second annual Human Trafficking Awareness Weekend was held in downtown Anchorage at the Salvation Army. The agency provides food and clothing for victims of human trafficking.

Saving and caring for these victims isn't that simple. Law enforcement and stakeholders say victims are afraid to leave their pimps because of retribution or promise of food, money and shelter by the offenders.

Marshall is a with a group called [Sex Trafficking Alaska](#), who's members say the state's prostitution laws are punishing women who are forced into the sex trade.

Alaska Attorney General Geraghty says a change in prostitution laws isn't necessarily the solution. He says victims need to take a courageous first step and help them untangle the web of commercial sex trafficking.

"They have to agree to cooperate – we have to get their trust," said Geraghty. "They have to come forward, testify and cooperate with us, in trying to get the traffickers."

Experts say victims of sex trafficking have struggled to find or maintain work since getting back on their feet. Marshall doesn't want to see anyone else travel down the same path.

"Have confidence, don't let a man tell you, or a woman tell you that you're not worth a certain situation in your life."

The Salvation Army is also holding a walk to raise awareness of the issue on Sunday at 1:00 p.m., in front of the agency's headquarters at 1701 C. Street.

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