Homelessness is unfortunately a major aspect and a contributing factor in many human trafficking cases; often the start of the human trafficking chain and an easily assessable pool of victims from which traffickers draw. The link between homelessness and commercial sexual exploitation, particularly, but also labor exploitation, is through force, fraud, or coercion. They are used, recruited, and transported in order to provide forced labor or commercial sex acts. So, we find both kinds of trafficking among homeless youth and homeless people because of their vulnerable circumstances.

Shocking statistics published by the Administration on Children and Family in Health and Human Services in Washington shed light on the severity. Remember, this is not a problem that is unique to the US, this is a problem around the world.

Every day, approximately 1.3 million youth run away, are thrown away, and live on the streets of America.
Every day, children – both boys and girls – are solicited for sex within 72 hours of being on the street.

- 55% of street girls engage in some form of commercial sexual exploitation.
- 75% work for a pimp.
- 1 in 5 becomes entangled in an organized crime network, forced to travel far from home and the area where they initially got involved in this.

50% of homeless kids spend at least one day a month without food.
25% of foster children become homeless within 2 to 4 years of leaving the system.
50% of adolescents that age-out of foster care or juvenile justice systems are homeless within 6 months because they are unprepared to live independently, have limited education, and no social support.

So, how does homelessness lead to human trafficking, or vice versa, and how do those fit together? When 50% of these kids don’t have any food for at least one day a month, it is about survival on the streets! Then, when offered an opportunity to make some money, this is the common practice for enticing and recruiting homeless youth. Traffickers take advantage of their vulnerability – they don’t have the capacity to get a job, they don’t have a car or a place to get cleaned up and dressed.

- 41% of these kids had witnessed acts of violence in their homes, only to run away to escape.
- 38% indicated someone in their family used drugs regularly, which puts the child at risk for being exploited.
- 19% of these kids had been beaten with an object.
- 19% endured sexual abuse.
- 15% had been present when someone close to them was murdered.

And, how do we do something that’s more meaningful than buying a meal, something more long-term. Identify where we can plug in as a professional in our community, as a member of our church. Our whole idea is to study the issue, be a voice so you can make a difference. By studying the issue, we find out how we break down the homeless youth populace.

Probably one of the myths out there is that we have a system and that provides for all of these kids, but the truth is that we don’t and many of these kids fall between the cracks. Learn what kinds of resources are available to homeless youth in your area – check your country offices – and have information to give to a young person if you happen to see them when you are passing by. Check in with your local police to find out what the protocols are, build relationships with them, find out what kind of training they offer in outreach to youth who are involved in sexual exploitation. It goes back to a conversation of prevention!

Defeat Human Trafficking Ministry
Awareness is Our Weapon