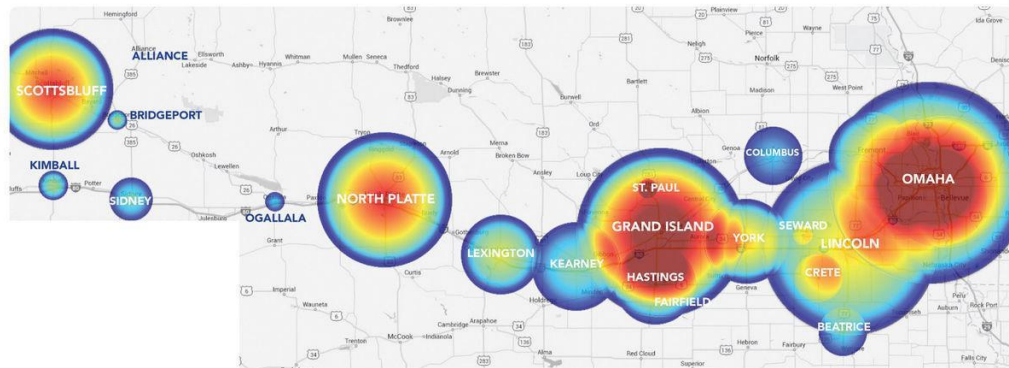


## Sex Trafficking: A Hidden Crime

Human Trafficking is a hidden crime that impacts vulnerable individuals, including children, throughout the state. One of the most common types of human trafficking is sex trafficking. In Nebraska, 900 individuals are sold for sex each month (Women's Fund of Omaha). Though most of the activity occurs along I-80, sex trafficking can happen in any community to anyone. In 2017, there were 25,000 runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Endangered Children and 1 in 7 of those are likely victims of sex trafficking (Nebraska Attorney General).

U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines human trafficking as "modern day slavery that involved the use of force, fraud or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act." A commercial sex act includes prostitution, pornography or another type of sexual act in exchange for goods, like money, drugs or shelter (Shared Hope International). Human trafficking victims are exploited by the trafficker to earn money from buyers. There are several different ways victims are trafficked including sex trafficking, forced labor, including child labor, child soldiers and child sex tourism, in which a person travels to another country where the law enforcement is weak to have sex with a child. The average age children enter sex trafficking is 14-16 (Shared Hope International). In a report from Creighton University's Human Trafficking Initiative, it is estimated that 1 in 5 individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are sold multiple times and in multiple markets throughout the state.

It is very challenging to identify sex traffickers because they often appear to be someone they are not. Traffickers may appear to be friends with the victim or taking on the role of the caregiver. Traffickers may also be parents or family members of the victim. They often find ways to lure victims in by taking advantage of vulnerabilities and isolating victims from loved ones. Traffickers may use manipulation to lure vulnerable people by promising affection or something that the victim needs, like shelter. Traffickers also use force by violence or stealing immigration paperwork and other forms of identification. They often find victims online, at the mall, parties or other public places or within their own family or friends circle.



Women's Fund of Omaha, 2017

Warning Signs that a student is being trafficked:

- Unusual tattoos
- Unexplained absences
- Suddenly owns expensive items or has a large amount of cash
- Multiple cellphones
- Disconnected from family, friends and activities they once enjoyed
- Sudden changes in behaviors
- Appears to be coached or provides scripted responses to questions
- Appears deprived of food, water, sleep or medical care

What can parents do?

- Monitor online activity including social media activity
- Keep social media pages private
- Talk to youth about the dangers of talking to strangers in person or online. Emphasize that people are not always who they seem to be online.
- Talk to youth about consent
- Encourage youth to stay in groups when at the mall or other public places
- Report anything suspicious to the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

Sex trafficking can be prevented by being aware of the signs and reporting suspicious activity. The Nebraska Attorney General's office put together a task force that trained over 1000 law enforcement officers and other service providers to help prevent sex trafficking. The Attorney General's office also offers presentations for parents and youth that may be requested. The Set Me Free Project is a nonprofit organization that was formed to educate the community and work to combat sex trafficking. Their President, Stephanie Olson, will be presenting at a community awareness event on February 28<sup>th</sup> at Scott Middle School. For other resources and additional information of how Nebraska is working to prevent Sex Trafficking, please view the list below:

Resources and references:

Human Trafficking Data (Nebraska): <http://www.omahawomensfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Nebraskas-Commercial-Sex-Market-Report-FINAL.pdf>

<https://sharedhope.org/the-problem/what-is-sex-trafficking/>

<https://ago.nebraska.gov/combating-human-trafficking>

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/nebraska>

<https://www.setmefreeproject.net/>

<https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking>