

# Close to home: The Face of Human Trafficking

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When it comes to human trafficking, most people believe the problem to be *over there* – across oceans and continents, in a place far away from the neighborhood.

That's what educator, activist and author Carol Metzker found when she gave a presentation to local groups in her hometown of West Chester Pennsylvania. Hop 11,000 miles to Nepal, where she gave a talk to a group of businessmen. Their reaction was the same.

"You don't mean it was here in Katmandu?" one asked. "We know it's a problem in the West."

Human trafficking is a worldwide problem – including our local communities, said Metzker, during an Oct. 19 presentation on "The Face of Human Trafficking" held at SUNY Broome. The author of *The World's Dirtiest Secret: From Revelation to Action, a Journey to Help Survivors of Child Slavery* and *Facing the Monster: How One Person Can Fight Child Slavery*, she is an expert on the subject. She is also a well-known blogger on Free the Slaves, a platform for dialogue about how slavery affects communities around the world, and the recipient of Rotary International's highest distinction, the Service Above Self Award.

In short, human trafficking is modern slavery. Through force, fraud or coercion, victims are made to work against their own will. Sometimes, this involves the sale of sex. Other times, it's unpaid labor: working in factories or on fishing boats, in fields, nail salons or homes.

"This is not an easy subject to face," Metzker acknowledged. "It's really a very hopeful subject because there is so much every single one of us can do."



**Speaker Carol Metzker discusses human**

## **trafficking.**

### **Modern slavery**

Hot zones include India, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines and parts of Africa. North America, however, is not immune. A map of calls made to the human trafficking hotline showed hotspots in many major metropolitan areas – including the Southern Tier, due to its proximity to transportation systems.

In the United States, youth are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Vulnerable girls often enter prostitution at the age of 13 or 14, Metzker noted. Victims are often kept on the move to keep them from making connections and reaching out for help.

New York had 141 cases of possible human trafficking reported to the national hotline this year, with 80 percent involved in sex work, 13 percent in labor, from domestic servants to nail salons, and 5 percent to both.

Metzker showed images of real victims of human trafficking whom she has encountered both close to home and in her travels around the world. Mahabala, an orphaned boy, was forced to work in a hotel from sunup to the wee hours of the morning. A failed runaway attempt led to a severe beating from his holder, but the boy managed to escape to police during a second try.

Huro, whom Metzker met in 2004, was a slave in a carpet factory in India, initially abducted at the age of 6. After he was freed as a teen, he went to school and is now working as a teacher. Kalika, enslaved as a domestic servant in Nepal, is now a college sophomore studying journalism, as well as a trekking guide.

A survivor named Ann Marie was held by her pimp for 10 years, living in an abandoned building she called the “abandominium.”

“When you’re controlled, when he says the sky is purple, you believe him,” she told Metzker. “Even though you know it’s blue, you believe it’s purple.”

She is now finishing her GED, and working as a peer counselor for women who find themselves in similar circumstances.

Sadly, not all victims escape. In one photo, a woman stood silent and barefoot against a wall, in a milieu littered with human waste and discarded syringes. Her pimp was nearby and she dared not reach out for help. A photo progression showed two young women who were repeatedly arrested for prostitution – and who perished before they could leave that life.

“You could potentially run into human trafficking even if you don’t know it,” Metzker said.

### **How you can help**

There are steps each of us can take to stem the tide of human trafficking.

First, know what to look for, Metzker advises. Victims may appear to be controlled by someone else or fearful of authority. Most likely, they will not identify as victims because of a factor caused trauma bonding, which links them to their holder, or threats to themselves or their loved ones. Another possible sign: oversexualized teen girls, often with an older boyfriend who may give them expensive gifts.

In cases of imminent danger, especially to a child, call 911. In cases of suspected human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888 or text BeFree (233733). When reporting suspected incidents, be a good witness – providing visual details, times and locations – but don't put yourself in danger.

Switch your mindset, and view those subject to human trafficking as victims rather than criminals. Use the power of your wallet, and buy products labeled as Fair Trade, which are not made by slave labor. Many people don't realize that the mica in makeup is mined by child slaves, and that cocoa beans used in chocolate can be harvested by child labor. To see the intersection of lifestyle choices to slave labor, visit [slaveryfootprint.org](http://slaveryfootprint.org) and take the survey.

Be willing to have a very uncomfortable conversation with your loved ones: why it's never okay to pay for sex. Prostitution and human trafficking are heavily linked. And lastly, know your own state's treatment of trafficking and lobby for change.

"New York has great laws against human trafficking, but not a lot of funding sources for people who are rescued," Metzker said.

**Mug shots of two victims of human trafficking,  
taken before their deaths.**

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