

Written by: WRAP Staff

January is Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month as well as National Stalking Awareness Month. WoMen's Rural Advocacy Programs, Inc. (WRAP) has been and continues to serve victims of trafficking since 2020 as well as victims of domestic violence since 1994 in Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, and Yellow Medicine Counties. The goal of this article is to bring awareness and education about human trafficking and stalking to our communities. It is important to understand the basics of these subjects and start the conversation regarding these crimes. Human trafficking and stalking happen even in our rural communities, even though it is hard for most to believe, and we want to believe where we live is safe for everyone.

When people hear "human trafficking" they assume sex trafficking. Victims of human trafficking can be trafficked through forced labor, sex, or both. Forced labor includes sweatshops, massage parlors, agriculture, restaurants, hotels, construction, and many other types of employment and domestic services. Traffickers use many tactics to lure victims. These tactics include force, fraud, or coercion. Examples of these tactics would be violence, threats of violence, manipulation, false promises of a well-paying job, false promises of a romantic relationship, threats of deportation, and any other tactic that obtains control over a person. Contrary to popular belief, traffickers rarely abduct their victims. Unfortunately, this idea is reinforced through media which is often for entertainment purposes. Most often, traffickers deceive and manipulate people they know in a process called "grooming". The grooming process happens over a period of time. Traffickers will then force victims into labor or commercial sexual exploitation, or both. Human trafficking is a very hidden crime. This crime is hidden even deeper due to language barriers, fear of law enforcement, fear of traffickers, or fear of their family's safety. Often a human trafficking victim will not seek out help, even in highly public settings. Victims may not come forward due to threat, violence, or fear of retribution, and they may not have control of their identifying documents (which can include driver's license, passport, social security card, etc.)

A simple action can be taken to help raise awareness of this terrible crime. WRAP is asking everyone to wear blue on January 11th, 2023. We wear blue as it is the color of human trafficking awareness. We invite you to share a photo of you wearing blue on January 11th and use the hashtag #wearblue when posting and explaining to friends and family why you are wearing blue that day. Help start important conversations about this crime.

January 2023 marks the nineteenth National Stalking Awareness Month (NSAM), an annual call to action to recognize and respond to this traumatic and dangerous crime. It is critical to raise the issue of stalking as a form of interpersonal violence as well as a crime that frequently predicts and co-occurs with physical and sexual assault. 1 in 6 women and 1 in 17 men have experienced being a stalking victim in their lifetime. Many of these victims are stalked by someone they know and often care about. Less than 40% of stalking victims report to law enforcement. Stalking victims suffer higher rates of anxiety, insomnia, depression, and social dysfunction. Stalking is a crime under the law in each of the 50 states. Stalking is defined as a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that causes fear or emotional distress. Stalkers often follow, monitor, and wait for their victims, as well as leave them unwanted gifts, spread rumors about them, and repeatedly call, text, and message them. Stalking can include but is not limited to: approaching the victim or showing up places that the victim didn't want them to be, making unwanted telephone calls, leaving unwanted messages (text or call), watching the victim from a distance, and spying on the victim with a listening device, GPS, or camera. Stalking is not only psychological trauma, but often also physical trauma. 1 in 5 stalkers use weapons to threaten or harm

Written by: WRAP Staff

the victim. Stalking increases the risk of intimate partner homicide by three times. One of the difficulties of recognizing and responding to stalking is that each individual action may not be a problem or a crime on its own, but each act becomes criminal when part of that pattern of behavior that comprises stalking.

Both of these are serious crimes that can impact a victim's entire life. Start the conversation and spread awareness of these crimes. For more information about the Blue Campaign and human trafficking, please visit <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/about-blue-campaign> or <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking>

For more information about National Stalking Awareness Month, please visit <https://stalkingawareness.org> and www.ovw.usdoj.gov

For more information about WRAP, search for us on Facebook and Instagram as well as on our website at www.letswrap.com