

Meeting Minutes

Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking Board of Directors

June 14th, 2022

Present: Dr. George Belitsos, John Chesser, Maggie Tinsman, Linda Harrell, Lara Marsh, Thomas Barr, Jessica Hagin (proxy for Ruth Buckels), Threase Harms, Alyse Hardin, Bernadette Rixner, Lyna Debner, Shirlee Reding

Excused Absence: Sister Shirley Fineran, Katie Kyker, MacKenzie Bills, Ruth Buckels

Guests: Roxanne Riesberg (DHS), Gretchen Brown-Waech (Attorney General), Jessica Rohrs (Victim Call Center), Chelsea Hoye (Advocacy Iowa), and Izzy Elwood (Technology Consultant)

I. Call to order. Introduction to guests. (Belitsos)

Belitsos declared a quorum at 2:30 pm. Reisberg introduced herself as the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program Manager. Rohrs introduced herself as the Director of Victim Services for Family Crisis Centers. Hagin introduced herself as a YSS caseworker for their human trafficking transitional housing programs. Belitsos welcomed and thanked the guests for providing important statistical information to the NAHT.

II. Semi-annual DHS report and 2021 child trafficking statistics. What DHS can do to help DPS to support Safe Harbor legislation. DPS does not believe that foster care or emergency shelters can meet the needs of survivors under the age of 18. (Roxanne Riesberg)

Reisberg began by giving an update about the webpage on the DHS website. Located on the website are child abuse statistics and a Child Welfare annual data report that is in spreadsheet format. The annual report is broken down into five tabs: reports, unique children, duplicate children, type of abuse, and age. Each tab is broken down by the outcome and by the county. The reports tab includes the total number of accepted reports of alleged child abuse. Those that were assigned as child protective assessments may address one or multiple children and one or multiple allegations, and the most severe outcome is recorded for the total.

The unique children tab is the total number of unique children involved in a child protective assessment and the child victim is only counted once. On the opposite side of that, the duplicate children tab has the total number of duplicate children involved in a child protective assessment counts each victim as many times as they are identified as a victim of abuse. The type of abuse tab is the total number of confirmed or founded abuse cases that notes multiple types of abuse and child protective assessments. Definitions of terms used in the annual report are listed on the website or to the sides of the spreadsheet.

Reisberg then reviewed the Child Welfare by the Numbers report, which is a summary of all the data listed on the Child Welfare annual data report. The Child Welfare by the Numbers report for 2021 indicates:

35,593 assessments were for child abuse and/or neglect. 28,886 were child protective assessments. 6,966 of child assessments resulted in a finding of founded abuse.

Riesberg then reported specifically on child sex trafficking data in Iowa:

- Total incidents of Child Sex Trafficking alleged – 230
 - Total rejected – 90
 - Total accepted – 140
 - Not Confirmed – 121
 - Confirmed – 0
 - Founded – 19
 - Information and Referral Services – 9
 - Non-Agency Voluntary Services/Contracted – 113
 - Department Services – 18

Total Founded Child Sex Trafficking Incidents – 22 (The total of 19 Founded jumped to 22 after addendums were completed and this information is available on the DHS website Child Abuse Statistics). Below is a list of the top 10 counties:

Black Hawk – 2, Bremer – 1, Cedar – 1, Dubuque – 1, Muscatine – 4, Polk – 4, Pottawattamie – 1, Scott – 5, Sioux – 2, Woodbury – 1

Riesberg explained that many sex trafficking cases are not confirmed due to not having a preponderance of evidence to meet the criteria for substantiating them. As for numbers being low, Reisberg stated that if cases are not reported to them or are taken on as criminal cases by law enforcement, DHS is not able to get involved. Reisberg reiterated that DHS does not receive referrals for all child sex trafficking occurring across the state. For cases they do receive, it is difficult to get a founded outcome because victims do not identify as victims or are wanting to protect somebody. Frequently this is a family member or relative

Riesberg stated in cases of child sex trafficking there can be multiple allegations taking place. DHS is working on a holistic approach to work cooperatively with children and their caretakers. Reisberg explained these child victims are seeing their traffickers as their family, significant other, or as someone that cares about them. The goal of DHS is to engage with children in a way that is supportive and let them know that they want to keep them safe not to separate them from their family.

Riesberg described child sex trafficking cases as multifaceted. She said to the group that a difficult part of working on human trafficking cases is to work together including law enforcement and medical providers.

Tinsman asked why people are not reporting these cases. Riesberg responded that she has gathered that some people do not realize that child trafficking was a category of abuse and mandatory reporters did not realize that it was a requirement for them to report. DHS took control of mandatory training in July of 2019. Reisberg hopes that people continue to receive mandatory reporter training to get recertification and learn how to identify child sex trafficking.

Belitsos discussed how the NAHT heard opposition from the Department of Public Safety when trying to pass the Safe Harbor bill for children under 18. DPS did not trust juvenile shelter facilities that DHS licenses because kids have a chance of escaping since they are not locked facilities. Belitsos then asked Reisberg how she could help in passing the Safe Harbor bill next year. He asked if she would be willing to serve on a Interim Study Committee.

Riesberg peer reviewed the bill and explained that DHS supports the County Attorney's ability to consider a child in need of assistance (CINA) petition in lieu of criminal charges. Unfortunately, the County Attorney Offices are not utilizing this Iowa Code and there is no known reason behind this. DHS recognizes that child protective services and foster care emergency shelters

are not always the best option to meet the needs of child victims of trafficking. Some victims may benefit more from services offered through non-government organizations as cases are multifaceted and each child's needs vary. The Department works with those organizations to make sure they are allowing for proper services as it relates to victims of trafficking.

When it comes to Safe Harbor, Riesberg stated that she believes DHS agrees that children who are victims of trafficking should not be identified or prosecuted as criminals. They would be fully in support of looking at alternatives to court intervention.

Riesberg stated that she would be happy to run a legislation proposal draft by the Department's administrators and legislative liaison to identify how they can support Safe Harbor. Tinsman explained that Riesberg would be a good person to represent DHS in their work group for passing the bill. Belitsos thanked Riesberg for presenting and admired her leadership at DHS.

III. Annual Report and 2021 human trafficking statistics from the Victim Service Call Center. (Jessica Rohrs)

Rohrs gave an overview of the Victim Service Call Center in which they serve all 99 counties in Iowa and serve victims of all violent crimes, including domestic violence, burglary, human trafficking, arson, etc. Their advocates are available 24/7 in their offices, ready to take a call. Last fiscal year, October 2020 through September 2021, they answered 43,341 incoming calls. There was a 27% increase compared to the previous fiscal year.

The Victim Service Call Center partners with 33 rollover rape crisis and domestic abuse programs from across the state to relieve pressure off of their phone lines. An emergency number is also available, so an advocate can physically join the victim at the hospital. Advocates are trained through Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and trained in human trafficking.

Rohrs reported that they took 52 incoming labor trafficking calls compared to 29 calls from the previous fiscal year. For sex trafficking they answered 297 incoming calls compared to 160 calls from the previous fiscal year.

Belitsos asked why there was a large increase in calls. Rohrs responded that the reason could be due to the increase in marketing for getting their number across the state since starting in 2015. Rohrs reported that two other factors could be home advocacy rising during COVID and rollover programs rolling their lines to the call center.

Barr asked for a list of the top ten areas for both sex and labor trafficking. Rohrs said she would send out an email with the specific statistics.

Reding asked the for the reason behind the Call Center to turn its victim information over to law enforcement. Rohrs replied that it is a funding requirement that that restricts them. It is truly their service model. Their service model focuses on being survivor centered, so unless there is imminent danger present, the center must maintain confidentiality. Hardin added that Braking Traffik runs off the same confidentiality model, so unless the survivor wants law enforcement involved, it is not automatically reported.

Belitsos thanked Rohrs for the annual Call Center update. He informed her that the NAHT and 17 rotary clubs have distributed over 15,000 rescue stickers labelled with the phone number to

her call center along with the National hotline. This can be one of the reasons their calls have gone up.

IV. Review 2022 Iowa legislative session and final report on HF 2464 from the Legislative Advocacy Committee. (Tinsman)

Tinsman reported that they are concentrating on Safe Harbor and had a Legislative Committee meeting that day to discuss having a work plan and setting up a committee composed of law enforcement, human services, country attorneys, etc. To become successful, the group has looked at information from Minnesota's Safe Harbor program and law.

Tinsman asked Hoyer to continue reporting on the outcome of today's meeting. Hoyer stated that the group is looking for stakeholders to hold a couple sessions with a moderator where everyone can discuss how to implement Safe Harbor. Also, they are looking for someone who has a law enforcement background that may be able to bridge the divide between victim advocacy and law enforcement. Other beneficial additions to the work group include a person from DHS possibly Riesberg, Brown-Waech from the Attorney General's Office, and a survivor. The goal is to move the Department of Public Safety to support Safe Harbor legislation in 2023 and get some momentum in the legislature come January.

Tinsman added that she would like to hear from any providers about their legislative priorities for 2023 and how human trafficking should be addressed legislatively for 2023.

V. Review and approval of Consent Agenda. Reminder: If you wish to remove any motion from the consent agenda for additional information or debate you may do so. No second is required. (Belitsos)

1. Motion to approve May 17th meeting minutes of the NAHT Board of Directors.
2. Motion to approve the May Acting Treasurer Report.

The May 17th meeting minutes were removed due to Rixner noting there were some corrections needed. Rixner suggested to add into the meeting minutes that the Board should fill vacancies by looking at geographical areas that are not covered and service agencies and coalitions that that are currently not represented on the NAHT Board.

Reding raised a question about the Treasurers report. Belitsos will consult with Reding to clarify the error she identified. The May Treasurers report was removed from the Consent Agenda until July.

Belitsos called for a vote on the minutes as amended, **the consent agenda passed unanimously.**

VI. Executive session for board members only. Continuation of four special board planning meetings were previously held on April 5th, 12th, 19th, and May 17th. (Facilitator MacKenzie Bills)

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 pm and the Board moved into executive session.

Next Board Meeting: Tuesday July 12th, 2:30 - 4:00 pm