

NAHT Board Meeting September 10, 2024

Present: Bernadette Rixner, Maggie Tinsman, George Belitsos, Tom Barr, Shirley Fineran, Linda Harrell, Lyna Debner, Mike Tupper, Kim Hilby, Jackie White, Stephanie Olson, Deanna Jensen-Valliere, Karl Schilling, Teresa Davidson, John Chessser.

Guest: Linda Dettmann of the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services; Teresa Harms; Chelsea Hoyer.

Minutes taken by John Chessser

DHHS human trafficking statistics from 2023. Linda Dettmann, case management program manager for DHHS, presented DHHS human trafficking statistics from 2023, as prepared by Roxanne Riesberg, who has left DHHS. Roxanne was child protection program manager and oversaw policy for intake and assessment where as Linda oversees policy for open service cases.

A PDF copy of this report was distributed to all board members with the other board documents. Questions to Linda pertain to this report. The statistics are also available on the DHHS website and the link to the page is provided on the PDF.)

Founded incidents of child sex trafficking were 22 in 2021, 21 in year 2022 and 16 in year 2023. Not only did the number of incidents decrease over these three years, but also were reported in fewer counties: reports came from 15 counties in 2022 but from only seven in 2023. "This is likely a combination of fewer reports of suspected cases of trafficking being reported to HHS along with the complexity of victims not readily identifying as victims which many times leads to the lack of evidence required to have a founded outcome," Dettmann said. Looking at the data, more broadly, of the total number of 243 allegations, only 29 were considered founded. Nevertheless, 114 were referred to outside services and 25 to Dept HHS services. Dettmann said that often there is enough evidence to provide services where there is not enough evidence to refer to law enforcement for investigation.

George noted that in 2022 the number of allegations was 244, almost exactly the same.

Maggie said that she could not believe that the number of proven cases were so low.

George noted that statistics from other hot lines, such as the one funded by the Attorney General, are not reflected in the DHHS statistics. That's why the NAHT every year must consolidate all these different sources of statistics into one.

Shirley noted that it's important to have a complete statistical picture of human trafficking in Iowa. Stephanie added that the reality of human trafficking is that only a small portion of incidents will ever be reflected in official statistics. Jackie agreed and added that even to begin to obtain a consolidated statistical view of trafficking in Iowa would require putting all state agencies on the same information system, which is highly unlikely, not to mention the different confidentiality requirements of various agencies. Shirley noted that the state does not even ask the direct service providers to tell them how many survivors they serve.

John asked Linda why there were 103 referrals for Services when only 29 cases were

founded. Linda replied that in many cases where the evidence does not justify a referral to the legal system there nevertheless is evidence of a need for services.

Teresa asked Linda whether the state is still using prostitution of a child as a category and whether labor trafficking is a category. It seems that there is a significant increase in labor trafficking of children in Iowa, Teresa added. Linda replied that there are 11 categories of child abuse in Iowa and that child sex trafficking and child prostitution are separate categories. Labor trafficking, Linda said, is not a category. Teresa requested that DHHS include statistics on "Child Prostitution" in their statistics on Child Trafficking, as there is no such thing as a child prostitute because according to Iowa law any minor child involved in a commercial sexual exchange is a victim of human trafficking.

Maggie remarked on the need for more funding for survivor services. Linda agreed and added that there is particularly a shortage of residential treatment facilities for trafficking survivors.

Update and discussion of "The State of Human Trafficking," August 26 presentation to legislators by Teresa.

John noted that there were 58 participants on the call. Teresa introduced the NAHT legislative agenda to legislators. To lay the foundation for increased funding for survivor services, Teresa described the facilities that currently provide such services in Iowa. The annual budgets of the five residential facilities vary from \$266,00 to around \$850,000 a year. The average cost is \$548,000 per year. The cost varies according to many factors. For example, Dorothy's House this year is beginning to offer crisis services, which will increase their budget by more than \$300,000.

Nevertheless, there is one common factor among all the facilities: salaries of staff make up 80-90% of their budgets. Unfortunately, it's always difficult to raise money for salaries. Teresa also discussed representative Lohse's bill from last year, in particular the need for an annual stakeholder meeting for all entities working on human trafficking, as well as Safe Harbor laws. Teresa noted that Safe Harbor is not just one law, but rather a whole set of laws and processes that protect children from being arrested and prosecuted for being trafficked, directing them towards needed services. Safe Harbor laws also protect children from being arrested and prosecuted for crimes they are forced to or coerced into committing while being trafficked, Teresa added.

Shirley, Bernadette and George commended Teresa for an excellent presentation to the legislators. George added that Teresa had been up till 4 AM the evening before working on a crisis situation, so her presentation was all the more remarkable considering how tired she must have been.

Nomination to the board of Chief Tricia Thein of Decorah Police Department.

George made the motion to nominate Chief Thein to the board. Kim Hilby seconded the denomination. There was no discussion. Chief Thein was elected unanimously.

Heather Brown nomination. Maggie Tinsman nominated Heather Brown to the board. Shirley seconded the nomination. Maggie had invited Heather to join the legislative committee but Heather wanted to be a board member as well. Teresa said that Heather is currently in the hospital and that Teresa had set up a Go Fund Me for Heather because she's struggling. She noted that Heather no longer has any PTO or FMLA. Heather Brown was elected unanimously.

Fundraising Committee report from chair Tom Barr. Tom noted that the fundraising committee has seven members and decided at their August 22 meeting that the fundraising goal would be \$18,000, which is approximately our annual budget. The immediate task is Giving Tuesday.

John told the board that an ISU student had offered to do a free internship for the NAHT and is open to doing any useful NAHT task.

The board agreed that newly hired Iowa Law Enforcement Academy trainer for human trafficking David Gonzalez should be invited to be a guest at future board meeting.

Update on possible hotel-motel video changes (Teresa). Ray Fiedler told Teresa that the TPS had updated its hotel motel training video to reflect new legislation and that we should consider doing the same with our video.

Teresa's meeting with DPS Commissioner Bayens. Teresa met with Bayens to discuss DPS opposition to Safe Harbor legislation for minors. His chief concern was any form of immunity for those committing crimes, specifically how that immunity would be obtained and most importantly how it could potentially be misused by traffickers. Under current law, immunity can be granted by a judge through judicial process. Bayens is concerned about going outside this judicial process in granting immunity. Who would control grants of immunity if not a judge? His other concern is removing the power of law enforcement officers to arrest minor victims to get them out of danger because sometimes that is the only option that officers have. He voiced concern over any Safe Harbor legislation that would lack compulsive authority to mandate children into services. Although he reiterated many positions he has taken in previous meetings, he and Teresa did discuss potential solutions, including a "Human Trafficking Court," as well as adding human trafficking to the language defining a child in need of assistance (CINA). He mentioned that DPS is hiring two new agents to focus exclusively on human trafficking cases.

John told the board that the September 17 Legislative Advocacy presentation has been postponed to October, date TBA.

The August meeting minutes were approved. No changes were requested.

The August treasurer's report was approved. George urged board members to remember to donate to the NAHT so that we have 100 percent participation by board members.

Meeting adjourned at 3:55p.

[Includes changes by Teresa Davidson]