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SOAP project working to end human trafficking in Dayton

by: Kelley King

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DIGGING DEEPER

REScue OTHERS LIKE HER WITH A

"S.O.A.P. UP DAYTON"

MARCH 9TH, 9:30AM - 2:30PM, UD'S KELLER HALL

DAYTON, Ohio (WDTN) — Several groups and volunteers are coming together to work to put an end to human trafficking with the [SOAP Project](#).

The [SOAP Project](#) was started by [Theresa Flores](#) who is a survivor of human trafficking. When she was being trafficked, the only time she had to herself was in the bathroom. The project is meant to reach and rescue others like her.

SOAP is an acronym for Saving Our Adolescence from Prostitution.

Jen Morin-Williamson is the Peace, Justice, and Ecology Coordinator with the Sisters of the Precious Blood. The group is part of a collaborative effort labeling soaps and makeup remover wipes with the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 888-373-7888.

“It actually happens in Dayton. We don’t like to think about it, but it does,” says Morin-Williamson.

Saturday, March 9, volunteers will go to nearly 90 hotels around the Dayton area to deliver them.

The soap and wipes are meant to be a discreet way to reach out to someone in trouble.

“We need a lot of volunteers. It takes a lot of people to go out because we go in groups of four. We make sure everyone is safe. We have roles that people can do. So, you can be in the car or you can talk to the managers and the desk workers. So, it may put you out of your comfort zone but it’s a good way to go out of your comfort zone,” states Morin-Williamson.

They’ll also drop off missing children’s posters and information on how to spot human trafficking.

“If you notice a person they’re not really making eye contact, they’re walking kind of away from you, they have someone with them that has more of a heavier demeanor, they can’t really speak for themselves, things like that,” describes Zola Howard, the Student Success Coach at the Career Prep High School. “Some people may have bruising on them.”

She says this undertaking is critical.

“This is important to me because when working

with youth, I started at Daybreak working with children ages 10-24. I am now at a high school. I work with high schoolers 9th through the 12th grade. And when working with youth, you see the possibilities. You see things. You understand their stories. And protecting our youth is something that’s very close to my heart,” states Howard. “Anything I can do to help reach them, get them out of that life, find something else for them, then that’s what I’m going to do.”

Timing of the outreach is no coincidence.

“It’s right before the First Four basketball games. Commercial sex trafficking goes up around these kinds of events,” says Morin-Williamson.

Tony Talbott is the Director of Abolition Ohio and the Director of Advocacy at the University of Dayton Human Rights Center. He says the project is crucial for both awareness and outreach.

“It gets people engaged across the whole city and whole community. They learn more about human trafficking. Then we come together, actually doing something about it—producing the bars of soap and the packets, getting organized into teams, and going out to businesses and hotels to distribute information, distribute knowledge, and distribute missing children’s posters, response protocols, and bars of soap with the national hotline on it, so that if people are forced to do something against their will, maybe they’re in that right state of mind and that right place, so right place right time, where they can see that label and actually call and get help,” says Talbott.

As we move forward, he says protection for victims, prosecution for offenders, and prevention are key.

“In some ways I’m hopeful because our response is improving, but I think we need to do a lot more and put a lot more money and resources behind the programs that we do have to make them more effective,” states Talbott.

They still need a lot of volunteers to help with “SOAP Up Dayton” on Saturday, March 9 from 9:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. People will meet at Keller Hall on the University of Dayton’s campus. To sign up to volunteer, [click here](#).