

Target 8

Trafficked in Grand Rapids: Training to spot victims

By:

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — A West Michigan survivor who was trafficked for sex on Grand Rapids streets as a teen has created a new online training program for those on the front lines of the war against predators.

“Fighting human trafficking is something I will never be able to stop,” Ruth Rondon told Target 8 in a recent interview. “It’s my passion. I’m in this for life.”

It’s personal for Rondon. Now 63 and retired, she was **trafficked in Grand Rapids** for 18 years in the 1970s and 80s, controlled by pimps who beat her and the drug addiction that helped her survive it.

In addition to creating the online training program and writing a book about her life story, Rondon also represents victims on the state’s Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board.

At a recent meeting of the Board, Rondon spoke about the elearning curriculum, **W.A.R. on Slavery: Human Trafficking Awareness**.

“I have noticed in my anti-human trafficking work, when I go to trainings, a lot of people fall asleep, or they’re on their phones and they really don’t want to be there.” Rondon said. “I fell in love with this (e-learning) format because it’s just three minutes a day and you can do it on your own time.”

The program includes 20 short videos that professionals view daily over a span of 20 days.

“It’s got calming narrative, and you have to remember that law enforcement and health care are on the front lines and they’re subjected to trauma on the job,” she said. “So I can see why they wouldn’t want to take this kind of training. But our training is a soothing narrative with calming landscape pictures.”

Rondon developed the online curriculum with Patti Hathaway, M.Ed., a best-selling author, public speaker and education specialist.

“In every lesson, we tell a victim’s story, we give the research backing it up, and we give you one or two things you can do practically that day,” explained Hathaway in an interview with Target 8.

The program is also distributed through the **Michigan Public Health Institute**, which offers it to professionals to fulfill Continuing Education Credits.

A sample video of the program can be found **online**.

“Our goal is to get the curriculum in the hands of people who can make a difference on the ground,” said Hope Rollins, Director of Education and Training at MPH. I.

The team has also created a pocket guide that details warning signs that someone might be a trafficking victim, how to communicate with that person, and what to do to help them.

>>PDF: Pocket Guide

If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1.888.373.7888.

Some of the warning signs include:

- Avoids eye contact
- Is in the company of a controlling person (Doesn’t leave them by themselves, has their I.D. and papers)
- Appears unhealthy, fatigued
- Practical tips for communication

• Practical tips for communication:

- Listen to them
- Ask: Is anyone hurting you?
- Ask: Do you feel you are in danger of any kind?

The **Polaris Project**, a leader in the global fight to eradicate human trafficking, identifies **25 different types** of human trafficking.

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