



As 2015 comes to a close, we wanted to thank our supporters and provide an update on some of this years' accomplishments.

In March of this year we held a Human Trafficking Awareness Conference at Heartland Community Church to train local law enforcement, human service providers and the general public on the realities of human trafficking in our area and how to combat this very dangerous criminal enterprise. Over 100 people attended, and the conference became a catalyst for important change in our community. Since then, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department, under the leadership of Sheriff Gary Caruana, has dedicated officers to specifically target and disrupt human traffickers and purchasers. The City of Rockford Police Department under the encouragement of Deputy Chief Doug Pann and Loves Park Police Department under the leadership of Chief Rodney Scott have also turned their efforts to targeting purchasers and traffickers. As a result, more "johns" and traffickers have been arrested since March than any other time in recent history. We are extraordinarily grateful for our law enforcement partners and their dedication to our mission.

Later in the Spring RAASE was honored to be invited to join the Illinois Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force and received recognition from Senator Toi Hutchinson and Senator Karen McConaughay on April 28, 2015 for front-line efforts to identify and eradicate human trafficking. In May RAASE received the Community Based Learning and Partner Award from Rockford University for our partnership with students on researching and developing strategies to combat human trafficking and restore victims. In 2015 RAASE also completed our fourth semester of working with Rockford University Students to develop practices and training to be implemented in our community.

From July to November we partnered with CAASE to bring in specialized Law Enforcement Training to local agencies on tactics designed to target purchasers, trained the Public Defender's Office on legal remedies for victims and trained the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office on recent legislation on harsher penalties for johns and pimps. We have also trained over 680 community members on human trafficking in our area, so that they are aware of trafficker's recruiting tactics, understand that this is not a victimless crime, and know how to spot a victim and assist us in implementing our mission.

In the victim services and restoration area, victim services staff have conducted trauma healing curriculums within the jail for women currently incarcerated, and a bi-monthly support group outside of the jail began in September 2015. This informal group provides a safe place for people in any stage of forced prostitution or recovery to receive support and information on options to get out of their situation or continue recovering from past trauma. We also have a designated phone for victims to reach RAASE trauma staff, and it is used to stay in contact with members of the support group as well by law enforcement, offering the hotline as support for the victims they encounter. In December, RAASE transported a victim of sex trafficking to a long term treatment program and safe housing outside of the state.

As you can see, we have accomplished so much through our volunteer efforts and your support, and the changes we are making in our community are truly transformative. We have so much planned for 2016, and as we look forward, we want to sincerely thank you for your encouragement and support. Have a safe, prosperous, and Happy New Year!