

Pat's Place Leads Charlotte's Human Trafficking Prevention & Response Efforts

Everyday Heroes public awareness campaign aims to educate community about child abuse prevention, including human trafficking

April 28, 2021 (CHARLOTTE) – In April [Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center](#) is shining a spotlight on all forms of child abuse, including human trafficking and exploitation of children. On Tuesday, May 25 at 10 a.m., Pat's Place will host a free public webinar titled [Taken? Dispelling Myths about Human Trafficking](#) in an effort to inform the Charlotte community about the crime, what signs individuals should look for, and the role that Pat's Place plays to enhance the prevention, identification and response to victims.

"There are a lot of misperceptions about human trafficking, and it's crucial that community members become educated about it so they can learn to help recognize, report and prevent it," says Shawna Pagano, Pat's Place Human Trafficking Outreach Coordinator. "We are more committed than ever in ensuring there is an effective response system in place and that victims have access to services to help them heal from trauma."

Pat's Place role in the community coordination of human trafficking began in 2017 after receiving a grant from Project NO REST, a statewide initiative launched by the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work with the goal of increasing awareness of the issue and enhancement of the response to human trafficking of youth and young adults up to age 25 in North Carolina. After the project concluded, Pat's Place continued its commitment to focusing on anti-trafficking work, which currently includes:

- Collecting, organizing and analyzing human trafficking data.
- Identifying gaps in human trafficking services, systems and legislation.
- Creating a community protocol to respond to young victims of human trafficking.
- Providing services such as a forensic interview, advocacy, a medical exam and counseling.
- Educating and training stakeholders and community members on the issue of human trafficking.

When addressing human trafficking, Pat's Place uses the legal definition found in [North Carolina General Statute 14-43.10](#). Put in simple terms, sex trafficking is the crime of using force, fraud or coercion to induce another individual to sell sex. Pat's Place also emphasizes that a minor cannot legally consent to engage in sexual activity in exchange for anything of value, and any minor who is induced to exchange sexual activity for money, food, drugs, etc. is a victim of sex trafficking. Additionally, labor trafficking is the crime of using force, fraud or coercion to induce another individual to work or provide labor services.

"Unfortunately, we saw an increase in the number of trafficking cases in the Charlotte region in 2020," Pagano says. "While tracking the number of trafficking cases on the local level is difficult, this observation has also been echoed by other anti-trafficking organizations across the region."

Pat's Place partners with a number of statewide and local agencies to address human trafficking and coordinate treatment, which includes other nonprofits, medical providers, social services and law enforcement. Pat's Place is also a member of the [Charlotte Mecklenburg Human Trafficking Task Force](#).

In addition to Pat's Place's ongoing work to protect and heal children, they also launched the three month [Everyday Heroes](#) public awareness campaign in April. The inspiring and hope-filled campaign highlights how every individual, from family and friends to professionals and community members, has the power and ability to keep children safe and help them heal from trauma.

Community members are encouraged to get involved and participate in upcoming Everyday Heroes events in May, including the following virtual sessions:

- **Tuesday, May 4 at 10 a.m.** - [Discover Pat's Place: How Everyday Heroes \(Like YOU\) Can Help Stop Child Abuse](#)
- **Thursday May 6 at 10 a.m.** - [Starting the Conversation: Talking to Children about Body Safety and Sexual Abuse](#)
- **Thursday, May 6 at 1 p.m.** - [United Against Child Abuse: A National Conversation](#)
- **Tuesday, May 18 at 10 a.m.** - [Helping Little Heroes: A Child's Path to Healing After Trauma](#)
- **Tuesday, May 25 at 10 a.m.** - [Taken? Dispelling Myths about Human Trafficking](#)

If someone suspects child abuse (including human trafficking or exploitation), they are required to report it according to NC state law by calling 911 or the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 980.31.HELPS. Concerned bystanders can also report a tip about human trafficking to the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888.373.7888.

Learn more about how to support Pat's Place and get involved in the "Everyday Heroes" campaign at www.patsplacecac.org/event/everyday-heroes-campaign and by engaging with the hashtag #PatsPlaceHeroes on social media.

About Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center

Pat's Place, Charlotte's only child advocacy center, was established in 2005 to improve the system of protection for child victims of abuse. The Pat's Place team coordinates the investigation and treatment of referred cases in a comfortable and child-friendly environment through forensic interviews, medical exams, counseling and advocacy support at no cost to a child's family. The mission of Pat's Place is to protect and heal children, unite key partners and engage the community to end child abuse. The center on East Boulevard is named for Patricia "Pat" Wolfe, an inspiring child advocate in the Charlotte community who passed away in May 2000. For more information on Pat's Place, visit patsplacecac.org and follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).