

Alabama Against Sex Trafficking by Digital Means

Daniel Community Scholars Team 10 Proposal

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I. The Issue

Human trafficking is the second-largest criminal industry in the world today.¹ While human trafficking is widespread, it is heavily concentrated in the southeastern United States along U.S. Interstate 20.² This issue resonated strongly with Daniel Community Scholars Group 10, because of the severity and prevalence of this issue in the state of Alabama and Tuscaloosa, and its threat to college student's safety.

The proximity of this sex-trafficking corridor to the University of Alabama makes the threat of internet-based sex-trafficking recruitment all the more severe. According to the Polaris Project, the use of the internet and social media platforms to coerce individuals into sex trafficking has been and continues to be a significant issue. They report that victims are baited by false job offers or flattery and feigned romance and are offered to be flown out to accept the job or to meet in person, only to be trafficked³. This same study found that in a two-year span, over 844 victims were reported to have been trafficked because of social media, mostly Facebook, Instagram and location-based dating sites⁴. Traffickers tend to target individuals who express fear, longing or loneliness on their profiles, and contact them to offer their "support"; they often convince the victim that they love them or that they can rescue them, and then extort the victim into sending an exposing photo the trafficker can use as blackmail⁵.

In a related vein, an increasingly popular gateway to sex trafficking is sugar-dating. Essentially, an older middle to upper-class man or woman seeks to maintain a relationship, often involving some sort of sex work, with a much younger individual. The definition of this relationship varies greatly, and it is most frequently between an older man and a younger woman⁶. There are many internet platforms dedicated to connecting sugar daddies and sugar babies, but one of the most ubiquitous is SeekingArrangements.com. This website often targets college women, using advertisements like: "Sugar Baby University: Say goodbye to college debt and hello to a higher-class

¹ "Human Trafficking Fact Sheet - Homeland Security Digital Library." <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=23329>.

² "The 'Sex Trafficking Superhighway' most Alabamians don't even" <https://yellowhammernews.com/the-sex-trafficking-superhighway-most-alabamians-dont-even-realize-runs-through-their-state/>.

³ "On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes - Independent Anti" <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1266/on-ramps-intersections-and-exit-routes.pdf>.

⁴ "On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes - Independent Anti" <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1266/on-ramps-intersections-and-exit-routes.pdf>.

⁵ "Study details link between social media and sex ... - Phys.org." 8 Oct. 2018, <https://phys.org/news/2018-10-link-social-media-sex-trafficking.html>.

⁶ "'Sugar dating' among college students in the ... - Csustan.edu." https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/groups/University%20Honors%20Program/Journals_two/18_odonnell.pdf.

education,” and offers lucrative account incentives for signing up with an .edu email address⁷. According to the site’s founder, Brandon Wade, of the over 800,000 members, around 35% are students⁸. This cycle of young college students being pulled into a world of sex work, without fully realizing what they are doing, is often perpetuated by a culture of acceptance for the practice, though there is a significant lack of firm knowledge and legal protections in this field than in prostitution⁹.

II. Historical Context

Alabama is one of the six southeastern states home to U.S. Interstate 20, also commonly referred to as the “Sex-Trafficking Superhighway.”¹⁰ Traffickers are known to pimp their victims out in gas stations, rest stops and motels along this route. I-20 runs directly through Tuscaloosa and two local trafficking hotspots lie in close proximity to it; McFarland and Skyland Boulevard. In May 2018, the general manager of the LaQuinta Inn on McFarland Blvd was arrested on two counts of human trafficking charges. It was reported that in the eleven months preceding the arrest, five cases of human trafficking were identified in this hotel alone.¹¹

One year later, the Tuscaloosa City Council planned to revoke the business license of the Master’s Inn, which lies adjacent to the LaQuinta Inn, based on suspicion of sex trafficking before the business owner surrendered it.¹² In addition to these cases, there are many Tuscaloosa Police Department stings in action that actively targets the pimps and large scale organizers of human trafficking rings in Tuscaloosa. Most recently, the Tuscaloosa Police arrested 26 men on charges of soliciting prostitution and rescued one victim in the process on February 2nd, 2019.¹³ There are several more testimonies and police reports outlining similar operations and successful stings consistently for the past few years.

⁷ “Sugar dating” among college students in the ... - Csustan.edu."

https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/groups/University%20Honors%20Program/Journals_two/18_odonnell.pdf.

⁸ "Sugar; is it still sweet? | ENC Human Trafficking Non" 27 Feb. 2017, <https://encstophumantrafficking.org/sugar-still-sweet/>.

⁹ “Sugar dating” among college students in the ... - Csustan.edu."

https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/groups/University%20Honors%20Program/Journals_two/18_odonnell.pdf.

¹⁰ "The 'Sex Trafficking Superhighway' most Alabamians don't even" <https://yellowhammernews.com/the-sex-trafficking-superhighway-most-alabamians-dont-even-realize-runs-through-their-state/>.

¹¹ "Tuscaloosa woman arrested for human trafficking at area hotel - CBS 42."

<https://www.cbs42.com/news/local/tuscaloosa-woman-arrested-for-human-trafficking-at-area-hotel/>.

¹² "Tuscaloosa city leaders strengthen plans to fight human trafficking" 16 May. 2019,

<http://abc3340.com/news/local/tuscaloosa-city-leaders-strengthen-plans-to-fight-human-trafficking-problem>.

¹³ "Tuscaloosa Police Rescue Human Trafficking Victim, Arrest 26 Men." 13 Feb. 2019, <https://953thebear.com/tuscaloosa-police-rescue-human-trafficking-victim-arrest-26-men-in-prostitution-sting/>.

The presence of Interstate 20 in Tuscaloosa significantly increases the prevalence of this crime in Tuscaloosa, due to its interconnectivity with other states. City Councilwoman Sonya McKinstry represents the City Council District housing a human trafficking hot spot off of I-20, and calls the problem an “on going fight” with “even more work to be done.”¹⁴ Tuscaloosa and surrounding areas appear to take this issue very seriously, and are actively meeting the challenge in many ways.

III. Community Partners

We began our relationship with our community partner by contacting Dr. Javonda Williams in Social Work. We found her name in our research stage when we learned that the Department of Justice awarded the school of Social Work a grant to help victims of human trafficking. No one in our group had an existing relationship with the school of social work. Dr. Williams referred us to Mr. Lim, the director of the BEAMS project (Bringing the Exploitation of Alabama’s Minors to a Stop). Mrs. Valerie Trull also works with BEAMS, whom I met with to create a partnership between our group and BEAMS. Mrs. Trull has agreed to proofread the materials we create to avoid us incidentally spreading any harmful false stereotypes. We also have an informal partnership with the UA Chapter of International Justice Mission. I met with the president of the chapter, Anna Stephens, and she both offered great insight about how to avoid perpetuating false stereotypes. I also learned that there are not that many resources geared specifically towards college student awareness in Tuscaloosa. Both Mrs. Trull and Anna recommended that I reach out to the Women and Gender Resource Center (WGRC) to see if they could help with distribution of our materials. I reached out to the WGRC and the Office of Student Care and Well-Being, and the Office of Student Care and Well-Being did not answer. The WGRC said they would be happy to help and asked us to include information about how the WGRC can help victims of trafficking here on campus. Both groups will have to contribute minimal time. Mrs. Trull will help proofread our materials, and the WGRC will as help us distribute our materials to freshmen at the beginning of fall semester. While we will work with both groups, our primary community partner is BEAMS. We will work with our partners to ensure success by making sure that our materials have the most helpful, efficient, and truthful information and that it is distributed as widely as possible.

¹⁴ "Tuscaloosa city leaders strengthen plans to fight human trafficking" 16 May. 2019, <http://abc3340.com/news/local/tuscaloosa-city-leaders-strengthen-plans-to-fight-human-trafficking-problem>.

IV. Proposed Action

For the Daniel Community Scholars Project, we will create material to spread awareness of sex trafficking by digital means. Firstly, we will create an infographic on the topic of sex trafficking, targeted for an audience of college students. The infographic, as seen below, will be a front and back cardstock, featuring 1-4 simple steps on one side, with the fourth step being our call to action. The call to action will be the hashtag #SwipeLeftUA, which will spread further awareness on social media platforms. “Swipe left” refers to the action users on popular dating apps use to say “no” to a potential match. The campaign is to “Swipe left” on sex trafficking, which often occurs on such apps. On the opposite side, the card will feature tactics and language commonly used by traffickers, statistics of college-aged people subject to sex trafficking, and resources for victims of sex trafficking. The infographic will be distributed to all freshmen through a partnership with the Women and Gender Resource Center, who distributes educational dorm packages upon move-in each year. To ensure the addition of the materials will be added to the packages by move-in, we will be meeting with the WGRC in May. We will enlist Blackburn members to help prepare the materials.

In addition to the infographic, we will host a workshop on sex trafficking, led by the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. The workshop will be held in January, Human Trafficking Awareness month, and open to all UA students. The workshop will include incidences of human trafficking in Tuscaloosa as well as how “sugar baby” dating through websites like SeekingArrangements.com contributes to the problem. At the end of the workshop, we will train participants in how to recognize a sex trafficker and how to take action. This will ensure our project is sustainable and that participants carry their knowledge into the future.

To supplement the workshop and encourage attendance, we will create a social media campaign in the beginning of January, using a digital form of the infographic with the hashtag #SwipeLeftUA. We will partner with the students in the Blackburn Institute, School of Social Work, Student Government Association, the Women and Gender Resource Center, URGE, Spectrum, Greek Life and any other interested organization to spread awareness of sex trafficking and promote our workshop. “Swipe Left UA” profiles will be created on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. To kick off our campaign, we will post pictures of all the supporting organizations holding a “Swipe Left UA” sign. The organization that gets the most “likes” within the competition dates will win \$500 towards the charity of their choice. The competition will largely increase the number of people who see our campaign and encourage followers to attend the workshop.

In addition to the social media campaign, we will table once a week to spread awareness and information about sex trafficking through digital means, for two weeks in January. The tabling will occur in the Ferguson Student Center for 2 hours per day. The 2 hours will be split up into four 30-minute shifts. The Blackburn class will volunteer at the tabling events. The week before tabling, any tabling volunteers will come to a training session where the DCS group will teach the volunteers the tabling material. During tabling, we will hand out “Swipe Left UA” stickers for further exposure of our overall campaign.

V. Proposed Graphics

SWIPE LEFT ON DIGITAL SEX TRAFFICKING 

- 1 Don't share personal information with strangers online.
- 2 Be aware of sex trafficking language and tactics.
- 3 Be aware of your resources.
- 4 Join the movement against digital sex trafficking using the hashtag **#SwipeLeftUA**

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VI. Tentative Timeline

Sunday, November 17th: Practice for presentation

Monday, November 18th: DCS Project Presentation

Wednesday, November 20th: Valerie Trull to proof our marketing materials

Week of November 18th: Create “SwipeLeftUA” Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter

Week of December 2nd: Contact West Alabama Task Force to secure workshop date, finalize catering for workshop

Week of December 9th: Order stickers online to be distributed during tabling

December 16th-January 1st: emailing on-campus organizations and confirming support of campaign

Week of January 6th: Take photographs of organizations in support of campaign, reserve room in Ferguson Center for workshop

January 8th, 8:00 PM: Blackburn meeting for tabling training

January 10th: post all photos of organizations on #SwipeLeft social media accounts

January 10th-3rd: social media competition to increase followers (\$500 to philanthropy of Greek organization with most likes)

January 13th-31st: social media campaign

January 15th, 12:00-2:00 (4 30-minute shifts): tabling in the Ferguson Center

January 22nd, 12:00-2:00 (4 30-minute shifts): tabling in the Ferguson Center

January 29th, 5:00: West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force workshop

Week of April 6th: print and prepare materials for WGRC to distribute in following fall semester

VII. Budget

The budget covers the cost of materials for the workshop (gifts for speakers and catering), stickers and other marketing materials for “Swipe Left UA,” the \$500 towards winning philanthropy, and printing costs.

VIII. Sustainability

This project is sustainable in its partnership with the WGRC. The marketing materials will be added to every freshman package from 2020 on. This creates a more educated incoming student community in the area of digital trafficking.

Group Number:	10				
Project Name:	Fighting Sex Trafficking in the State of Alabama				
	Quantity	Revenue per Unit	Total	Running Total	Notes / Details
Revenue:					
Daniel Foundation Grant	1	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	
TOTAL REVENUE				\$ 5,000.00	
	Quantity	Expense per Unit	Total	Running Total	Notes / Details
Expenses:					
<i>Example: Supplies</i>	30	\$ 2.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	Example - Coloring Books for Classroom Activity
<i>Example: Volunteer Management</i>	50	\$ 3.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 210.00	Example - Snacks for Volunteer Training (50)
<i>Example: Ticket Costs</i>	30	\$ 5.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 360.00	Example - Zoo Field Trip for Pre-K Students (30)
<i>Example: Transportation</i>	4	\$ 60.00	\$ 240.00	\$ 600.00	Example - Shuttle Rental (4 hours) for Field Trip
<i>Workshop Expenses</i>	100	\$ 9.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 900.00	Catering Expenses from Taco Mama to feed attendees of the workshop. Taco Mama charges \$9 per person for a Taco and Nacho bar set up. We are hoping to have approximately 100 people at the workshop, including volunteers
<i>Workshop Expenses</i>	1	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 900.00	West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force does not charge to have a representative speak at a class or workshop
<i>Social Media Competition Incentive</i>	1	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,400.00	To start our social media campaign with heavy engagement, we will be hosting a social media competition between Greek organizations on campus. The house's post with the most likes during the competition period will receive \$500 to their philanthropy.
<i>Materials</i>	1000	\$ 0.12	\$ 118.00	\$ 1,518.00	Stickers branded with "Swipe Left UA." Passed out during tabling efforts. Bought through the vendor stickermule.com and be used to entice people to the table, where they may learn more about the dangers of sex trafficking and dating apps
<i>Materials</i>	5000	\$ 0.15	\$ 750.00	\$ 2,268.00	Printing costs for double sided, one page hand-out in color, on cardstock. This will both be passed out during the workshop as well as given to the WGRC to distribute during move-in to freshman. The bulk quantity allows the price to be so low
TOTAL EXPENSES				\$ 2,268.00	
DIFFERENCE				\$ 2,732.00	Balanced or Budget Surplus