

High school production shines spotlight on human trafficking in Maine

Deering High School students, Maine officials raise awareness of sexually exploited children

UPDATED 11:54 PM EDT May 03, 2016

PORTLAND, Maine —A group of high school students is raising awareness about sexually exploited children in Maine.

A production of “It Could Happen to You” debuted Tuesday night at Deering High School and will soon make its way to high schools across the state.

There are 200 to 300 cases of human trafficking in the state each year, according to a report by the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

Officials said that might be a conservative estimate because so many cases are not reported.

Many victims are teens as young as 14, whose stories go untold.

“Wherever drugs are sold, and they’re sold everywhere, children are being sold as well,” said Catherine Mossman, executive director of Stop Trafficking ME, a nonprofit partnership with Deering students to shed light on sexual exploitation and trafficking.

“The title of the show is ‘It Could Happen to You,’ and I really didn’t know that that was a fact. I always assumed that it was in third-world, developing countries and that I was growing up in a really great place,” said Abigail Deluca, a junior.

Deluca plays the parts of a victim and a predator in the production.

“It’s really hard to put yourself in the position of being a victim and also maintain your composure at the same time because all that plays in your mind is that it happens to people. It happens to people that go here,” Deluca said.

A recent study by the Maine Human Trafficking Needs Assessment shows 200 to 300 people are sold for sex each year. Many were also abused as children, most likely by a family member or friend.

“What would make you think you could use another human being and treat them like an object?” asked Emmanuel Lam, a sophomore.

“There’s so much mystery, and we just need to bring some light to this darkness and expose it for what it is. So we’re all on the same page and we can unite together to take care of this and protect our children,” Mossman said.

The actors have been rehearsing for months. The production will be recorded and distributed to every high school in Maine.

The production ended with a panel discussion Tuesday night as audience members asked questions of victim specialists, Homeland Security investigators and Cumberland County’s assistant district attorney.