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McMillin: United Way pushes to put an end to human trafficking

More than 20 million people are victims of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. United Way wants to do something about it.

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In June, United Way Worldwide launched the United Way Center on Human Trafficking and Slavery.

What is human trafficking? UWW offers a definition. It is "...the exploitation of a person through force, fraud or coercion for labor or commercial sex against their will. While it is most often associated with commercial sex, trafficking can take many forms, including child labor, domestic servitude and migrant working. Victims include men, women and children from all backgrounds and walks of life. It can happen anywhere: in homes and on the streets, in factories and mines, and on fishing boats and in fields."

Recently, UWW held more than 120 nonprofit and religious leaders to explore means of building innovative, cross-sector partnerships. Special guests included advocate and actress Mira Sorvino, Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn. and Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., along with anti-trafficking leaders and survivors.

United Way Worldwide CEO Brian Gallagher recently told colleagues, "United Way works to address systemic community challenges that undermine opportunity for all. It cuts across demographics and geography. Among the many challenges of combatting human trafficking to date has been a general lack of awareness of the issue, access to adequate resources and coordination of services. To that end, the Center will work to strengthen and expand the programs and services that defend our most vulnerable populations and help to ensure that individuals and families can achieve their human potential through education, income stability and healthy lives."

The center was founded because, according to UWW, we can be the generation that ends modern slavery. Human trafficking cases have been reported in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These human traffickers make more than \$150 billion in profit annually, which is why there are actually more slaves today than at any other time in history.

United Ways are asking everyone to look at the clothes we wear, the coffee we drink, or the phones we use to communicate because these products we use or consume every day may have either been produced with trafficked or slave labor. Many of us probably think of sex trafficking as the only form of human trafficking. Labor trafficking can also affect men, women and children. Victims of human trafficking often do not seek help or even identify themselves as victims because of lack of trust, self blame or even because they have been told how to behave when talking to law enforcement or social services.

While Tennessee cases are considered moderate in number compared to many other areas, human trafficking can happen even in small towns across America in legal and legitimate business settings. In fact, cases have been reported in restaurants, hotels and manufacturing facilities. Get help, report a tip or request services if you suspect a case of human trafficking, or

if you are a victim, by calling 888-373-7888 FREE. For more information, visit traffickingresourcecenter.org.

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