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# Truck drivers, nuns unite against human trafficking

## Workshop set for Monday in Cedar Rapids



Greg Stewart (from left), director of Transportation at Kirkwood Training and Outreach Services, Teresa Davidson, chairwoman of Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Trafficking, and Sister Emily Devine, founder of Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Trafficking, at the Kirkwood Continuing Education Training Center in Cedar Rapids on Monday, Dec. 15, 2014. (Stephen Mally/The Gazette)

[Alison Gowans](#), The Gazette

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CEDAR RAPIDS — Nuns and truck drivers may not seem the most obvious of partners. But in Cedar Rapids, they’re working together to fight human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a real issue both across the nation and in Iowa, advocates say, and truck drivers, as the “eyes and ears of the road,” are in a unique position to help stop it.

“The trucking industry always has been a good partner when we’ve needed more eyes and ears out there,” said Iowa Department of Transportation chief of motor vehicle enforcement Dave Lorenzen. “The more eyes we can put on this the better.”

Sister Emily Devine, a retired nun with the Sisters of Mercy, agreed. She and another retired Sister of Mercy, Mary Doughan, formed Cedar Rapids-based group Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Human Trafficking just more than a year ago.

“In this area, people are surprised to hear this is taking place,” Devine said. “But when you see all the information about human trafficking, it makes you concerned.”

The committee partnered with [Truckers Against Trafficking](#), a national coalition of truck drivers, to hold a workshop in Cedar Rapids on Monday. Thirty-four trucking companies from around Iowa have been invited to attend the event, which is open to the public.

### A national and local problem

Human trafficking in the United States is overwhelmingly centered on the sex trade. Victims, as defined by federal law, include anyone under the age of 18 induced into commercial sex, or an adult coerced into commercial sex through force, fraud or coercion. Underage victims are [often runaways or other vulnerable youth](#), and they often are moved away from their hometowns to increase reliance on their traffickers.

“If you look at Iowa, we’re in the middle of the country, with two of the biggest interstates in the country crossing in Des Moines,” Lorenzen said. “Folks in this activity are very mobile, and they don’t move long distances without trying to generate income. They’re traversing through our state and conducting business in our state.”

Drivers may encounter victims in the state’s restaurants, gas stations, motels, rest stops and truck stops. If they know [what to look for](#) and see something suspicious — such as a teenage girl in a truck stop in the middle of the night, for example — they can call a hotline run by the [National Human Trafficking Resource Center](#). Truckers Against Trafficking passes out wallet cards printed with the hotline number for drivers to carry with them.

The organization has taken 379 tips that refer to Iowa since 2007, which have led to 82 cases being opened by law enforcement. As of Sept. 30, 17 cases had been opened this year.

“Anyone who sees something that’s out of place, you should make a call,” said Greg Stewart, director of Transportation at Kirkwood Community College’s Continuing Education program. “If you see a young person and it seems odd, it might be odd.”

### A broad coalition

About 25 instructors from his department will participate in Monday’s event. They then can take what they learn to more than 1,000 students who go through the school’s truck driver training programs each year.

Devine gave Stewart, Lorenzen and others involved with Truckers Against Trafficking credit for the work they’re doing.

“Truckers really need to be praised for what they’re doing,” she said. “They’ve really taken the lead in this.”

Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Trafficking also partners with Mount Mercy’s Master of Business Administration program, where students research human trafficking issues and help the committee form strategy.

The committee also includes Marion Police Sgt. Lance Miller, St. Luke's Child Protection Center forensic nurse Kristen Kasner and others. The chairwoman of the committee, Teresa Davidson, is a nurse practitioner.

Having both law enforcement and medical staff involved is key, Devine said. Nurses, doctors and police might overlook a victim if they're not aware of the warning signs, she noted.

In fact, advocates said, anyone can look out for potential victims, usually children and women, who may be in distress.

"If you see something, say something," Lorenzen said. "If we get one victim out of this life, it's absolutely worth all of the effort."

More about the program:

What: Truckers Against Trafficking and Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Trafficking workshop

Where: Kirkwood Continuing Education and Training Center, 101 50th Ave. SW, Cedar Rapids

When: 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Monday

Resources:

- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1 (888) 373-7888 or text 233733
- Sisters and Brothers Collaborating Against Human Trafficking: (319) 361-2806 or email [lifewideopen@me.com](mailto:lifewideopen@me.com)
- Truckers Against Trafficking: [www.truckersagainstrafficking.org](http://www.truckersagainstrafficking.org)
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center: <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/>

Get involved:

- Cedar Rapids Gives: <http://www.cedarrapidsgives.org/>
- Braking Traffik: <http://www.brakingtraffik.org/>