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Students work to raise awareness about sex trafficking locally, globally

By [Marjorie Cortez](#), Deseret News

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Summary

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SALT LAKE CITY — In a small conference room at the shared work space [Impact Hub](#), a group of high school students tackled the weighty issue of sex trafficking Saturday afternoon.

The students are the latest members of [Backyard Broadcast](#), a youth resistance movement dedicated to fighting sex trafficking in the United States. Teens interested in becoming advocates and teaching others about the issue came together to learn more about sex trafficking and effective means to inform fellow students, policymakers and others how they can reduce its incidence.

The organization, launched three years ago, has clubs or "stations" at Cottonwood, Kearns, Skyline, Davis and Judge Memorial Catholic high schools. Backyard Broadcast director Terry

Palmer said the organization plans to reach out to other Wasatch Front schools this fall to further the reach of the organization.

As Backyard Broadcast student leaders have graduated, some have launched "stations" at the colleges they now attend, including Madi Palmer, founder and station chief of Cottonwood High School's chapter. She now attends Cal State Monterey Bay.

Sarah Weyrich, entering her senior year at Judge Memorial, said she got involved because she wants others to be aware of youths who are at risk of being trafficked.

This summer, Weyrich traveled to Guatemala to do service work. Prior to her trip, she became intensely aware of the issue.

"I had done some research about the airport I was flying into. What I found was that sex trafficking is really big at the airport there. I was traveling alone and they love to pick up young girls for sex trafficking. So I wanted to be more aware how to avoid that," she said.

But Weyrich said she has also learned that people fall prey to sex traffickers in Utah. Last week, a federal grand jury in Utah indicted eight people for alleged sex trafficking of children.

"If you had asked me a month ago I would have had no idea that all this was happening in my hometown and something like that could have happened to me if I'd gone on the wrong side of the path," said Weyrich.

According to Backyard Broadcast's website, youths who are vulnerable to sex trafficking are generally young teens, youths who have experienced abuse, have unstable home lives and older boyfriends.

The average age a child is forced to have sex for money is 13 years old, according to the organization's website.

"According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, at least 100,000 American children are being trafficked every year," the website states.

During Saturday's training session, students were taught how to lobby state lawmakers and other policymakers and tips for interviews with the news media and presentations to the community and fellow students.

The youths also learned about who is at risk of human trafficking and how to help them.

Some Backyard Broadcast leaders have worked through the summer to raise awareness and prepare for activities during the upcoming school year.

"This was just a brush up, a mini-training. We'll do a bigger training in October. But we wanted to remind them of what we're supposed to be doing, do some planning for some events, get

together with like-minded friends and see what other stations are doing. We're also thinking about doing an international trip this summer," Terry Palmer said.

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