



Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority

707 W. Milwaukee St.
Detroit, MI 48202-2943
Phone: (313) 833-2500
www.dwmha.com

FAX: (313) 833-2156
TDD: (800) 630-1044 RR/TDD: (888) 339-5588

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CONTACT: Tiffany Devon
Director of Communications
313-570-9382

Human Trafficking Survivor Now Ministers to Those on the Streets

DETROIT, MI – January 14, 2019 -- “I lived through the nightmare. I was bought and sold and bought again after running away from home and living on the streets when I just 14 years old,” said Detroit resident and human trafficking survivor Brenda Ford. “And it’s by the grace of God that I got off the streets and got help from The Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority and some of its Providers including Detroit Recovery Project. I now have a second chance at life and a chance to help others who are on the streets.”

January is National Human Trafficking Awareness month and we all need to be more aware of this horrific crime. In 2016, Michigan was ranked #2 in the nation in human trafficking cases and according to the Michigan Rescue and Restore Coalition, when large events are happening in big cities such as NASCAR, Super Bowls or the North American International Auto Show, it is prime time for predators.

“I was exposed to a lot of hard stuff on the streets but today I am 8 years clean and now helping others who are still caught up in this life,” said Ford.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery throughout the country and according to Executive Director of Strategies to Overcome Obstacles and Avoid Recidivism (SOOAR) Valerie Bonner, parents need to recognize the signs of trafficking. “Parents and any caregivers need to pay attention and know that it doesn’t just happen to young girls. They take boys too.” Bonner offers the below tips to parents:

- Show them genuine love
- Pay attention to their social media accounts
- Be present when out and about
- Notice unexplained gifts or purchases
- Meet their friends and their parents

After her traumatic experiences, Ford has gone through intense therapy and still sees a counselor. “I go out on the streets and help as much as I can. I used to have a Bible study in home where they could just come and relax and have a warm place and have a meal to spend a few hours. When you’re on the streets, sometimes they become your family. I want them to know they can always find help and hope. I tell everyone I meet, don’t give up on them, even when it seems hopeless. There is always hope.”

If you have any information on someone who may be involved in human trafficking, please call the DWMHA 24/7 helpline at 800-241-4949 or the National Human Trafficking hotline at 888-373-7888.

The Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority (DWMHA) is the largest and most diverse CMH system in Michigan. We are committed to being consumer and community focused, data driven and evidence based. Through programs and services that utilize promising best practices we hope to promote a community that is supportive and embraces individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities and substance use disorder. We offer supports in Infant Mental Health, Integrated Healthcare, Supportive Housing, and Recovery to support self-determination and improving the health and quality of life for nearly 80,000 consumers and their families.