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News Release: Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services Raising Awareness of Human Trafficking in Ontario

In support of Human Trafficking Awareness Day Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) is working with partners across the province to raise awareness of human trafficking in Ontario communities.

"It's crucial to learn the risk factors and signs of human trafficking," says Justin Marchand, "few people know how prevalent it really is in Ontario."

Contrary to popular belief, human trafficking doesn't only happen to people from other countries, and it doesn't necessarily involve movement across international borders. According to police data, most of the people trafficked in Ontario are sexually exploited girls and women who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents. They are often recruited and sometimes even trafficked right in their own community. Indigenous girls and women are at higher risks of becoming victims of human trafficking due to the negative socio-economic factors facing Indigenous people across the country.

Ontario is not immune to this deplorable crime. "Kids are often targeted by human traffickers online who look for signs of vulnerability," says Marchand. "they try to create a bond with someone, and then use tactics like threats, emotional abuse, drugs and violence to force them to perform labour or sex acts."

OAHS works with a range of community partners to prevent trafficking and to support survivors along their healing journeys. Across Ontario, OAHS delivers various programs to assist people transition out of vulnerable situations, such as homelessness and living in overcrowded housing, that are risk factors for human trafficking.

No one person can take on this complex problem alone. As a community, it's important that we learn about the signs, risk factors and how to get help. This information is available at Ontario.ca/HumanTrafficking. You can also join the conversation online with the hashtag **#KnowHumanTrafficking**.

If you or someone you know may need help, Ontario has a dedicated 24/7 Human Trafficking Helpline that can direct callers to services in or near their community. The number is **1-833-999-9211, TTY 1-888-340-1001**.

Background - Facts about Human Trafficking:

- Human Trafficking Awareness Day (February 22) was established through provincial legislation. It is an opportunity to bring this devastating issue to the forefront by discussing its prevalence, learning about how it happens, the risk factors and signs, and how to get help.
- There are different types of human trafficking in Ontario, including labour and sex trafficking. While both forms are believed to be underreported, the vast majority of cases in Ontario involve sexual exploitation.
- According to police-reported data, over 90% of victims are girls and women. 70% are under 25 and 26% are younger than 18, and the reported age of recruitment is as low as 12 or 13. Most victims of sex trafficking are from Canada.
- Victims of human trafficking are often targeted based on a vulnerability - traffickers first build trust with the victim by offering them what they want or need, and then use tactics like threats, emotional abuse, drugs and sheer violence to exploit them.
- While someone can be trafficked right in their home community, victims of commercial sexual exploitation are often moved from place to place. This helps traffickers avoid detection by police and increase the victim's isolation and dependence.

About Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

OAHS has been providing safe, affordable, and culturally-appropriate housing to Indigenous people living in urban and rural areas of Ontario for almost 25 years. OAHS also owns and administers more than 2,000 subsidized units across the province and has Regional Service Centres in Sault Ste. Marie, Dryden, Peterborough, and London.

Founded in 1994, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services provides safe and affordable housing to urban and rural First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people in Ontario. Our vision is to lead the design, development and delivery of a sustainable and culturally-appropriate continuum of housing. We are governed by representatives from three Indigenous organizations in Ontario – the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Ontario Native Women's Association, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Learn more at ontarioaboriginalhousing.ca.

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