

AG Tackles Sex Trafficking at Super Bowl Outreach

It was a perfect storm.

Sex traffickers were salivating over this year's Super Bowl in New Orleans. In addition to a city filled with Super Bowl fans, the city's often questionable Mardi Gras celebrations and parades were also drawing revelers into the area, creating unequal access to people flush with money and lessened inhibitions.

But as traffickers wallowed in a sea of dirty money, children who were under their control paid a horrific price.

What many Americans may find surprising is that **sex trafficking** isn't just about children from foreign lands who are forced into slavery. According to Assemblies of God U.S. Missionary Mike Bartel of FREE (Find, Rescue, Embrace, Empower) International, missing children from around the United States play a major role in the sex trafficking industry.

"There's a clear link between missing children and sex trafficking," says Bartel, who is the co-founder of FREE International with his wife, Denise. "Statistics show that 2,200 kids go missing every day. Within 48 hours of an adolescent being on the streets, one-third will be approached by a pimp or sex trafficker; that percent jumps to two-thirds by 72 hours."

But in addition to making the region irresistible to

sex traffickers, this perfect storm also provided unequalled opportunity for Assemblies of God affiliated ministries to step in and make an impact.

Through the unprecedented cooperation of AG ministries FREE International, StudentReach and Traffic Jam, working in coordination with federal, state and local authorities, churches and other non-profits, they canvassed online prostitution sites, hotels, businesses and schools in an effort to educate and inform people about missing and trafficked children, locate children and identify **sex traffickers** to authorities.

Bartel says that the AG ministries joined with other non-profit organizations to form a "Tackle the Trafficker" team, which included Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking, Called 2 Rescue, Global Child Rescue, Oregonians Against Human Trafficking and the KlaasKids Foundation.

In the end, numerous and reliable tips were given to authorities, who acted upon them and resulted in rescues; thousands of people and children were made more fully aware of the presence and dangers of sex traffickers; and more than 180 people made first-time decisions for Christ

Bartel, who has participated in similar outreaches the past four Super Bowls through FREE International, says he believes they've never had a more coordinated or complete plan of action—a plan that produced results.

"We printed 2,500 booklets with the faces of 56 missing

children from the region and distributed them to businesses such as convenience stores, tattoo parlors, dollar stores and to more than 200 hotels in New Orleans and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast," Bartel says. "People may not understand what sex trafficking entails, but they do understand the seriousness of a missing child."

Along with the booklets, the ministries—who were joined during the weekend by the School of Urban Missions (AG) out of Monroe, Louisiana—combined to hand out 30,000 baseball cards featuring hotline numbers and the faces and vital statistics of four different missing children who authorities felt there was a strong possibility of being in the area. They also distributed 9,000 copies of the "Book of Hope," sex trafficking editions, mostly to young people and those interested in learning more about the love of Christ.

Traffic Jam, an AG World Missions ministry led by missionaries Roberto and Carla Marroquin and based out of Nicaragua, was in New Orleans on its own intervention efforts. The group populated key areas, including restaurants and bars, to join in the effort to identify problem areas. They also had hundreds of intercessors covering the ministries' efforts in **prayer**.

However, ministries' efforts weren't restricted to daylight hours. During the night, multiple small but well-trained teams made their way through the streets, from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m., identifying possible missing or trafficked children, locating brothels, finding pimp

control locations and other sex trafficking possibilities and alerting law enforcement of the locations.

“Due to our strong relationship and interaction with authorities, we are limited in what we can say,” Bartel says. “But I can say, the information we provided authorities proved to be credible and viable—and for authorities to regularly respond to the information we offered during an incredibly crazy and busy week like this, confirms that in their eyes, we were a reliable source.”

Bartel says that this year, along with the work in the communities and online, a missing link to ending sex trafficking was added to the weeklong effort—kids were given the opportunity to make a difference.

Partnering with Louisiana-Mississippi Youth Alive, FREE International and StudentReach came together to hold 16 school assemblies and 35 lunch club events where the issues of sex trafficking and missing children were addressed (and many of the copies of the “Book of Hope” were distributed by student leaders).

During the assemblies and lunch events, kids were also invited to a pair of evening rallies, where Christ was presented to them. The response at each rally was strong, with an estimated three-quarters of the kids who attended, responding to the altar call—and the team receiving 187 cards indicating first time decisions to accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

According to Jeff Devoll, an AG U.S. missionary who is the founder of StudentReach, kids making decisions for Christ were connected to

a Christian group, called Generation Club, that meets in their school every week.

Bartel says the entire outreach effort was a massive success as multiple national and local ministries placed agendas aside to work

alongside each other and numerous levels of law enforcement officials and community leaders to bring a powerful message of help

and hope to sex trafficking victims and student school bodies.

“But our efforts don’t begin and end with Super Bowl week,” Bartel says. “This is a mission and message that we deliver throughout the

year—and we pray that the **Holy Spirit** will work through our efforts to not only see sex trafficking end, but new life in Christ

begin as we share the message of what real love is all about.”

For more information on FREE International, see its website at . To learn more about StudentReach, see Information on Traffic Jam can be found at .