

Kentucky Derby Triggers Spike in Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is on the rise in Louisville, Ky., this week. The reason? The Kentucky Derby.

Criminals try to take advantage of big events like the Derby that bring many potential customers to town seeking prostitutes.

"We have high rates. We have a serious problem," Gretchen Hunt, of the Louisville Metro Police Division of Child Abuse/Domestic Violence Services, told CBN News.

"These pimps or handlers look at it as a way of making fast money in a one-day or two-day event, and they are going to double or triple what they normally make, so they'll bring these girls in from all over," Sgt. Andre Bottoms said.

Louisville metro police and victims' rights groups monitor websites known for advertising adult escorts.

They estimate postings on these sites have tripled for Louisville this week leading up to the Kentucky Derby.

"And before Keeneland's Spring Meet and before the Derby, women—and what we believe to be are children—are advertised as 'fillies' and 'mustangs,'" Hunt said.

Bottoms says the prostitution and human-trafficking rings are set up in hotels and motels in every part of the Kentucky-Indiana area surrounding Louisville. He estimates about 10 percent of the hundreds of prostitutes in Louisville this week are being forced or coerced.

After each prostitution arrest, police look for signs of trafficking.

“Then we change course, and at that point, we treat them as a victim and not a criminal,” Bottoms explained.

Therese Flores is a **human-trafficking** survivor. She found the organization TraffickFree, which helps build awareness through what’s called the “SOAP Outreach.” SOAP stands for “Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution.”

At national events like the Kentucky Derby, the outreach program distributes thousands of bars of soap to high-risk motels in the area.

The soap is wrapped with a red band that gives the National Human Trafficking hotline number, 1-888-3737-888, and asks questions like, “Are you being forced to do anything you do not want to do?”

Volunteers offer the soap free of charge to motel owners and explain what is happening to young girls in their motels.