



A Report on the South Cambs Modern Day Slavery Summit

'Many of us would quite justifiably think that slavery had long been consigned to the history books but as recent media reporting has shown, it not only exists but is a growing force.'

Chief Inspector James Sutherland (Area Commander - South Cambs Police)

Background

It is hard to conceive that slavery still exists in this day and age and even harder still, to imagine that this is a crime that might occur in our corner of South Cambridgeshire. However, after attending the Modern Day Slavery Summit on Saturday, 17th October, I realised that this issue was far more prevalent than I had at first supposed. I had been invited to the summit by our PCSO, Chris Wiseman, who asked if I would consider acting as a delegate for Castle Camps and the Linton Headteachers' Cluster. The pre-conference information was detailed and well-organised and I arrived feeling prepared, although a little worried that my subject knowledge might be found to be lacking. The event was jointly hosted by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, South Cambridgeshire's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, alongside anti-slavery campaign charity *Unchosen*. The role of the delegate was two-fold. Firstly, to attend the summit and develop an understanding of the situation in South Cambridgeshire and secondly, to raise awareness in the local community by sharing what was seen and learnt.

This brief report does not do full service to what was indeed an excellent and thought-provoking morning. However, it aims to provide a brief background to modern day slavery, a short overview of the summit and information on how to respond if you suspect someone is the victim of slavery or trafficking.

What is Modern Day Slavery?

Modern slavery is a complex crime that takes a number of different forms. It encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. Victims may be exploited, forced to work for little or no pay or forced to commit criminal activities against their will. Victims are often pressured into debt-bondage and are likely to be fearful of those who exploit them, who will often threaten and abuse victims and their families. All of these factors make it very difficult for victims to escape. These crimes are taking place in factories, fields and even in homes up and down the country. There is no typical victim of slavery – victims can be men, women or children of all ages and nationalities. Many victims are foreign nationals who are brought to the UK specifically so they can be abused and exploited for the benefit of others. Some are tricked into believing they are simply paying others to facilitate their journey to the UK, or that they are being smuggled here. Many often do not find out that they are destined for a life of abuse and servitude until after they arrive. A high number of victims are UK nationals, including children.

An overview of the Summit

The summit was held at the South Cambridgeshire District Council Offices and was extremely well-attended by representatives from the local villages. After a concise introduction by the Area Commander, Chief Inspector James Sutherland, delegates watched a series of short, emotive films based on real life case studies of victims of human trafficking within the UK. The films were produced by *Unchosen*, as part of its work increasing awareness of modern day slavery and helping people understand the everyday realities that victims of slavery face.

Two of the films shown at the summit can be viewed by following the links below, but others are also available.

<http://www.unchosen-films.org/portfolio-item/what-do-you-see/>
(An animation showing how Modern Slavery works in the UK)

<http://www.unchosen-films.org/portfolio-item/yoke-farm/>

('Yoke Farm' - A grocery store proprietor uncovers a forced labour syndicate when a young immigrant worker from a nearby farm reluctantly asks him for help.)

Following the films, there was a question and answer session with the panel, which consisted of representatives from South Cambs Police, Hope for Justice, the British Red Cross and Salvation Army. Each member of the panel also provided a succinct explanation of their own, or their organisations' role in combating modern day slavery. Delegates were reminded that the signs of slavery in the UK and elsewhere are often hidden, making it even harder to recognise victims. However, there were key indicators to look for. Please see below:

Physical Appearance - Victims may show signs of physical or psychological abuse, look malnourished or unkempt, or appear withdrawn.

Isolation - Victims may rarely be allowed to travel on their own, seem under the control, influence of others, rarely interact or appear unfamiliar with their neighbourhood or where they work.

Poor Living Conditions - Victims may be living in dirty, cramped or overcrowded accommodation, and / or living and working at the same address.

Personal Effects - Victims may have no identification documents, have few personal possessions and always wear the same clothes day in day out. What clothes they do wear may not be suitable for their work.

Restricted Freedom of Movement - Victims have little opportunity to move freely and may have had their travel documents retained, e.g. passports.

Unusual Travel Times - They may be dropped off / collected for work on a regular basis either very early or late at night

Reluctance to seek help - Victims may avoid eye contact, appear frightened or hesitant to talk to strangers and fear law enforcers for many reasons, such as not knowing who to trust or where to get help, fear of deportation, fear of violence to them or their family.

The summit closed at 1pm, although many delegates stayed for longer to network and meet with representatives from the panel. The morning was, unquestionably, a poignant reminder that modern day slavery is happening all over the country, including our villages. Although the subject-matter of the conference was, by its nature, graphic and concerning, I left feeling quietly reassured. Reassured that I was now better informed to act (should the need arise) and confident that others were working hard to tackle these appalling crimes. The summit was a testament to what can be achieved when the local community work in close partnership with the police. It was a thoroughly worthwhile event and a privilege to attend.

Miss Alexandra E. O'Connor
Headteacher Castle Camps C. of E. (V.C.) Primary School

HOW TO REPORT A CONCERN

If you believe you may have encountered a victim of modern day slavery and/or human trafficking, please call the police on 101.

Alternative Contact Information:

Salvation Army: 24/7 referral line 0300 303 8151