



Junior League of Santa Barbara helps empower human sex trafficking victims

S.A.F.E. House now operating in the County

By: Beth Farnsworth

Posted: Jun 26, 2018 01:24 PM PDT



The Jr League of Santa Barbara opens SAFE House for sex trafficking victims
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, Calif. - Santa Barbara County has a new resource in the battle against human sex trafficking and it is coming from a group previously devoted to improving literacy in our community.

"It is the Junior League of Santa Barbara's new Signature Project," said Kielle Horton, President of the Junior League of Santa Barbara.

The local women's organization, now 95 years strong, has joined the ranks of law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office to help victims trapped by the growing sex crime by opening S.A.F.E. House, the County's first therapeutic and rehabilitative shelter for victims of sex trafficking and exploitation. The facility is geared for minor girls between the ages of 12 and 17.

Local members put together a video which included testimonials by young girls healing from sexual trauma. Their faces and identities are not revealed.

"A lot of us kids, we've been through a lot and we want to go to a place where we feel safe," said one young girl in the video, with her hands clasped.

"Our members really stepped up and they wanted to dig deep into an issue that was plaguing our community that few people knew about," Horton said.



Law enforcement experts said that tourism, conference venues and migrant labor are among the draws that make all of Santa Barbara County vulnerable to this alarming trend.

"It was late at night I was under the influence of GHB," said another girl during a testimonial. The camera is pointed at her gray, high-top sneakers as she speaks.

It took a little more than a year for the local 500-member organization to secure permits and a license for the private, furnished, 4-bedroom home. It is in an undisclosed location in the county.

"Some will stay longer than 6 months," Horton said. "Some hopefully are able to go back either with biological family or kinship family or a foster placement sooner than that time."

State licensing now allows shelter for six girls at a time. Horton said it filled to capacity within days.

"I feel really motivated when I'm here. I feel like I can do everything," said another girl during her videotaped testimonial. We see her toenails, painted blue.

Often, the girls' stay at S.A.F.E. House is the longest stretch of normalcy they've ever experienced.

"They're finally, for the first time in their life, in a safe place where they can actually just have that time to feel protected, cared for, loved and receive those services to be able to heal from what they've been through," Horton said.

"I want to plan on going to college. I want to get my Ph.D., start first with registered nursing," said another girl with her hands crossed.

Santa Barbara County places the girls with help from the Department of Social Services, Child Welfare, the juvenile justice and foster systems, among others.

For more information about the Junior League of Santa Barbara visit jlsantabarbara.org.

<http://www.keyt.com/news/safety/junior-league-of-santa-barbara-helps-empower-human-sex-trafficking-victims/759215178>