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Victims of Human Trafficking Need Full Support

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Last week, the Government of Alberta announced it is committing \$20.8 million over the next four years to fight human trafficking. The funding includes the implementation of the Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force's five recommendations to better protect and assist vulnerable Albertans and stop their exploitation at the hands of traffickers.

"We applaud the Government of Alberta on their funding to work toward ending human trafficking and supporting survivors," said Kerrie Isaac, executive director at Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan. "While the Government of Saskatchewan has made commitments to combatting human trafficking with the Saskatchewan Trafficking Response Team, there is still a great need for survivors. Policing measures are one part of the solution, and survivor support is another. There is a serious need for funding to deal with this issue in Saskatchewan."

Statistics show that Canada has a serious issue with human trafficking. Ninety-three per cent of sex trafficking in Canada involves our own Canadian citizens, with an over-representation of Indigenous women and girls, and only one per cent of victims are ever rescued. The current 2019-2024 National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking frames federal activities under the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, partnerships, and empowerment.

SASS member agency, Hope Restored, is Saskatchewan's only community-based organization dedicated to supporting victims and survivors of human trafficking. Supported by donor funds alone, Hope Restored helps women and girls escape sexual exploitation and trafficking, and empowers them to regain control and independence. Since opening the safe house in November 2019, over 50 individuals have sought support through safe housing and programming. To date, 65 per cent were Indigenous, 30 per cent other minorities and 5 per cent Caucasian. The average age of participants is 26 years old.

"While we are grateful the province has increased HT supports in the area of protection and policing there is still a very large gap when it comes to services for those after they have exited," said Joeline Magill, executive director at Hope Restored. "As an agency we have been provided this necessary support in the province since 2019 with private funding alone and urge the province of Saskatchewan to consider how they can uphold the National Strategy to combat human trafficking by funding these supports and services to victims in our province."

"Intervention and the initial rescue are only the first steps on the road to escape for these victims," said Jim Bence, president and CEO of Hospitality Saskatchewan. "Once extricated from the trafficker, victims

and survivors are in desperate need of safe lodging, food, access to health services both physical and mental, and most importantly, guidance. Without these wrap-around supports all the good work done to help remove them from harm will be lost and they will inevitably be lured back to the predator and re-enter the world of sex trafficking. This is why organizations like Hope Restored exist and need to be fully funded, to facilitate a full and complete escape from human trafficking.”

“A commitment by the government, backed up by funding, is the only way we can address this serious issue in our communities,” said Isaac. “Legislation is just one part of the solution.”

“The work being done to address human trafficking in Alberta is commendable, and we need the same to occur here,” says Magill. “Without funding, we cannot make a difference for those escaping trafficking, and ending this violence in our province.”

Established in 1984, SASS is a provincial non-profit organization that works collectively with front-line agencies, community partners, and governments that provide support and advocacy for those affected by sexual violence in Saskatchewan. SASS fosters the coordination and collaboration amongst front-line agencies, community partners, and governments to support those affected by sexual violence.

Based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Hope Restored a charitable organization guided and led by compassionate people who care deeply about the restoration and empowerment of all people, especially those who have been impacted by sexual exploitation and trafficking.

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