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Activists bring human trafficking campaign to Rochester

Donyelle Davis, Staff writer 10:39 p.m. EDT July 29, 2014



The call to join the fight in ending global human trafficking came to Rochester on Tuesday, as one of seven stops of the “Breaking the Links Campaign,” which brings awareness to 21st century slavery.

The event, held at the Little Theatre, featured anti-trafficking expert Matt Friedman and his teenage sons, Brandon and Damien, who gave presentations about modern-day slavery, including a clip from the documentary *Not My Life*. Sponsored by the Rochester Regional Coalition Against Human Trafficking, the event was aimed at teenagers and young adults, who Friedman said are more likely to participate in a cause they are passionate about.

“There’s a sense of right and wrong with a 16-year-old that doesn’t necessarily exist with an adult who says ‘Well, it’s complicated,’ ” he said. “(Teenagers) are very passionate and they are motivated to do something.”

Friedman shared horror stories of men, women and young children sold into prostitution or tricked with promises of jobs and then forced into labor in poor conditions.

According to the campaign's statistics, there are more than 20 million victims of trafficking in what has become a multi-billion dollar industry. The campaign hopes to recruit volunteers for the movement and raise money and awareness.

Friedman said he believes there is already a strong presence of organizations in New York dealing with the issues and that visiting Rochester was just as much about learning as it was educating people about human trafficking.

"There's a really strong coalition of organizations that are working on this here," he said. "One of the messages that we are really trying to get across is the idea of unity. Here in Rochester it is already happening."

Grace Ingle, 16, of Honeyoe Falls attended the program Tuesday and is passionate about the topic.

"I was interested in learning more about it in order to expand what I already learned," she said. "It definitely did. It broadened a very in-depth topic and brought a lot of details to a huge concept."

Grace's mother, Jane, also attended the event to learn more about the issue and support her daughter's interest in the topic.

"People around here are not aware that this goes on in our own country," she said. "This is an injustice and this is something (my daughter) wants to be aware of and could possibly find an avenue to make a change. I think she's just beginning."

They both agreed that those in Rochester have the means to help and that eradicating the problem starts with bringing awareness to the issue.

Friedman's 18-year-old son Brandon, who will travel across the country with his father talking about human trafficking, is hopeful that the world-wide crime will end.

"I asked my dad a long time ago if he thinks slavery will be gone in my lifetime," Brandon said. "His response was that he thinks slavery will be gone in *his* lifetime. I'd like to see that happen."

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