

Impact Maker

2019 \$100,000 Grant Recipient

Palm Beach Dramaworks' One Humanity Tour: Raising Awareness about Human Sex Trafficking

By Sandi Schwartz

Did you know that Florida is the third-largest hub for human trafficking in the country and that Palm Beach County consistently records the third-highest number of cases of human trafficking in the state?

Human trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of another person for the purpose of exploiting that person for either commercial sex activity or labor services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. There are an estimated 400,000-650,000 victims of human trafficking in the United States, and shockingly 13 is the average age of children forced into these horrific situations.

Traffickers tend to target vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing isolation, emotional distress, homelessness, family dysfunction, substance abuse, disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ, poverty, neglect, history of foster care, and history of juvenile justice involvement. Victims are often reached through social media and online game portals or public apps. In fact, approximately one in seven youths (10 to 17 years old) receive a sexual solicitation or are approached by adults over the internet at some point.

This uncomfortable topic is often swept under the rug because nobody expects it to affect their family or community. That is why Impact 100's grant in 2019 for Palm Beach Dramaworks' One Humanity Tour is so vital and powerful for our local community. With the motto "Theater To Think About," Palm Beach Dramaworks is a professional theater company in West Palm Beach that has an educational engagement program focused on using the power of storytelling and performing arts to provide free, engaging programs to students around pertinent ethical dilemmas and social topics.

Palm Beach Dramaworks received the grant to develop a play and program for local 7th graders to raise awareness about teen human sex trafficking. Experts focus on this grade because the average age of sex trafficked children in Palm Beach County is 12-13 years old. Also, puberty is the time when children tend to turn away from their parents and start exploring their sexuality.

Not only did the grant pay for playwright Eric Coble to write the play *Live to Tell*, but it also covered hiring a director and cast, purchasing tech equipment, and developing portable sets to easily transport to local schools. Gary Cadwallader, Director of Education and Community Engagement at Palm Beach Dramaworks, explained, "We are committed to our motto to provide performances to young people to make them think. The play teaches kids about the dangers of social media and helps them think more critically."

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Director of Education
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The play involves three vulnerable teens sharing their firsthand stories of being trafficked. "The play is so powerful because these dialogues are based on real stories from interviews with trafficked women," Gary said. In addition, Live to Tell was created with assistance from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Human Trafficking Task Force, the West Palm Beach Police Department SVU, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Human Trafficking Coalition of the Palm Beaches.

The program is more than simply a play. After students watch the performance, there is a group discussion to explore key messages and what students can do in such situations. Students leave the production with a heightened awareness of vulnerabilities and risk factors, including the dangers of social media and other online interaction. A teacher resource guide with extension activities is also provided to schools. What's more, the program addresses Florida State Standards including responsible decision making, relationship skills, social awareness, self-management, and self-awareness.

Several Impact 100 Palm Beach County leaders had the opportunity to view a dress rehearsal of the play. They were blown away by the performance and realized how compelling and powerful the stories are. "We all had such an emotional reaction to this, but it is hard to put into words," shared JoAnne Greiser. "The danger is so different than obvious stranger danger from years ago. Social media makes it much more frightening," Lisa Mulhall added. The founders all agree that they are so grateful for the education this program provides to our community since it could happen to any of us.

Although the project hit some schedule changes due to Covid, over 3,500 students have seen Live to Tell so far and provided feedback about how impactful and eye-opening it was. While the grant period is over, Impact 100's involvement will live on. JoAnne explained, "The fact that we didn't get many performances during the period of the grant doesn't negate the value of what was produced because Palm Beach Dramaworks will continue to support the play and it will be performed in a future season for more students."

Several Impact 100 PBC founders attended a dress rehearsal of the play. "The danger is so different than obvious stranger danger from years ago. Social media makes it so much more frightening," Lisa Mulhall added. Lisa Mulhall is one of the Impact 100 PBC's founders who attended, along with Tandy Robinson and Cindy Krebsbach.

"Palm Beach Dramaworks is fully committed to doing this annually and in perpetuity," Gary acknowledged. They continue to receive support, such as a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to expand the play to the northern part of the county. Gary shared that there is also a very exciting opportunity on the horizon, as a publisher has expressed interest in licensing Live to Tell so that everyone in the world can have access to it. "It would be very exciting if what Impact 100 helped create was available for the entire world to see."

To support Palm Beach Dramaworks, please visit palmbeachdramaworks.org.

Resources to report human trafficking:



- youcanstopit.com

- 24 Hour Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or text the BeFree Textline Text "BeFree" (233733)

- 211: A local Community Helpline and Crisis Hotline. The caring staff members at 211 provide crisis intervention, information assessment, and referrals to available community resources and services. Visit 211palmbeach.org for additional information.