

## **Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva's Anti-Trafficking Initiative: Model for other Clubs**

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The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva has had an amazing biennium (2004-2006), headlined by our work on human trafficking. We believe the foundation of our success was our strategic plan, which aimed to put the positive Zonta circle in action-- good service projects leads to results and recognition, which leads to member satisfaction, to retention of members, and the recruitment of new members. Our experience is proof that the circle works! Although we, like every Club, have some unique characteristics that contributed to our success, we believe that every Club can put the positive Zonta circle in action and believe that human trafficking is a great service project to put this model to the test.

Another part of our strategic vision was to form a connection with Zonta's international mission and organization, and have a sense of being part of a global community. Through the Club's research, we found that trafficking in persons was one of the largest international crimes and that Florida was one of the top US destinations for persons being trafficked. Thus the club chose as its major strategic focus the eradication of human trafficking, both locally in Southwest Florida and globally. In addition, the Club wanted to go beyond a traditional service project concept to a more comprehensive approach, including education and advocacy, to further advance the causes we were supporting.

In sum, our strategic vision gave the Club **focus** (our mantra), allowed us to feel that we were making a real difference in the lives of women in our community and beyond; brought us closer to the international parts of Zonta, provided a blueprint for the continuity of the club over a 3-year period; gave Club members a feeling of ownership and involvement; made us a more cohesive and dedicated group; made Zonta a highly regarded household name on Sanibel and SW Florida, allowed us to raise substantially more money for our grantees, and gave us new energy to move forward. Our successful service projects and accompanying visibility have resulted in an increase in membership of 21% during this biennium—from 56 to 68 members over this period, with prospects of even larger gains in the coming year. One of our goals was to take our Club to the next level, and we've succeeded beyond our wildest expectations.

Our human trafficking initiative has four components:

- to raise public awareness,
- to partner with a nonprofit organization with expertise in this field,
- to assist in coalition building,

to advocate for legislation, policies, and resources at all

As a result of these efforts, 22 human trafficking investigations have been initiated in Southwest Florida, over 10 traffickers have been arrested, 6 victims have been certified under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and services and assistance have been provided to these victims to help restore a normal life. With the heightened public awareness and involvement of a broad coalition of community partners in Southwest Florida, more cases are likely and many more

victims will be rescued. We are working with Florida State legislators to enact legislation to strengthen state anti-trafficking statutes, to provide funding for local efforts, and have been advocating for a statewide coalition. We are hopeful that the level of commitment to eradicating this crime in our area will ultimately lead to the prevention of human trafficking.

The Club has been recognized by local and regional newspapers, law enforcement officials, County Commissioners, City Council, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a “role model of citizen activism” for its public awareness campaign to fight human trafficking in Florida.

From the beginning of our project, we have sought to involve other Zonta Clubs in the fight. At the 2004 District conference, the Club introduced a resolution to encourage all Clubs to make the eradication of human trafficking a goal and to take action at their level to raise public awareness about the problem. The District delegates unanimously approved this resolution and over the past 2 years, many clubs have sought our advice and assistance about taking our model and implementing it in their community.

If your Club is interested in implementing a local anti-human trafficking project, the following are seven things your Club can do to launch a project in your own community:

1. Make a commitment (resolution) to take on human trafficking as one of your service projects. This can be done as part of your strategic planning process or by passing a resolution to adopt this theme. Think in terms of a multi-year initiative that goes beyond providing a grant to a nonprofit.
2. Educate yourselves (research & bring in speakers). You don't need to have any expertise to get started, but you do have to commit to educating yourselves about the problem both globally and locally. There is a wealth of information on Federal agency websites, nonprofits, newspapers, books, etc. We created a website Anti-Trafficking page with lots of links that can help other clubs get smart fast. Give yourselves the time to educate yourselves—this is the foundation needed to do public awareness in the larger community. We took much of the first year of our project researching the topic, bringing in a series of speakers, hosting courses and training sessions to educate our members.
3. Find a partner. Part of your research will be focused on the definition of the problem in your community and an identification of the players. We live in a small community thus we needed to look at regional players. We interviewed several groups to find the partner that best

matched our interests. Our club selected the Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking (FCAHT), headed by Anna Rodriguez, and supports this organization with money and people. This organization is dedicated to raising public awareness, providing training services to law enforcement and service providers, and assisting victims of human trafficking throughout the State of Florida, with a focus on Southwest Florida. By partnering with Anna Rodriguez, we were associated with one of the most highly regarded individuals in the field, and recognition she has received at the national and international levels has allowed Zonta's contributions to be acknowledged on a larger stage than we would otherwise be able to accomplish on our own. At the same time, our partnership was of critical importance to Anna and her start-up organization. Our grants, as well as our hands-on assistance, played a critical role in the initial success of FCAHT.

4. Develop goals and an action plan. Once you've educated yourselves and found a partner, you're ready to develop goals and an action. How can you best contribute to the fight? What leverage do you have in your community—with elected officials, law enforcement, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, the business community, and the media? What are the interests of your Club members? What do you want to accomplish the first year, the second year, the third year? What specific actions can you take to meet those goals?
  
5. Focus on Community Awareness. Based on our experience, a good way to start is to focus on community awareness. Public awareness is the cornerstone of getting various players to take action. In many communities, there is ignorance or denial about the existence of human trafficking. Local officials, law enforcement, the media, and other community leaders must be educated about the problem and then educate their staffs and members, and then the larger community. Our Club developed an extensive webpage on human trafficking that was part of our Club's website. It provided information and tools to many of our partners (media, other clubs, our club members, etc.) and helped raise public awareness in our community. We also initiated a speaker's bureau to further the education campaign and to build support for a community focus on eradicating human trafficking. We developed educational materials, including several PowerPoint presentations and fact sheets. We trained club members to become speakers on human trafficking and made presentations to local community groups, the editorial boards of area newspapers, local service providers, church groups, service clubs, banks, the school board, and other Zonta Clubs.

The U.S. Department of Health, and Human Resources has launched a national public awareness campaign, "Look Beneath the Surface", and

has developed excellent public education materials, including brochures, posters, fact sheets, etc., all of which are free and are written in several languages. These materials provide any Zonta Club or organization with great tools to raise public awareness in every community. For example, our Club raised awareness in the local business community by hand delivering packets of information about how to recognize the signs of human trafficking, using HHS materials along with a letter from our Club President. (Note: there are links to the HHS website on our Club's Anti-Trafficking website page ([www.zontasancap.com](http://www.zontasancap.com))).

6. Engage the community; law enforcement, media, etc. Human trafficking is a problem that requires a broad community coalition. It involves law enforcement, an array of social service agencies, faith-based groups, elected officials, community activists, etc. No one organization can fight this problem alone, but it helps to have one organization that is willing to take the lead. In our case, it was the county Sheriff's office. We had a newly elected sheriff and we brought his attention to the practice of human trafficking in Southwest Florida. As a result, he agreed to raise awareness about the problem within his office and provided training to his staff. As a result of this increased awareness and training, the Sheriff agreed to our recommendation to set up a Human Trafficking Task. Setting up this community coalition/task force should be a key objective in your community, as it provides a mechanism for sustained focus and commitment to addressing this problem on a community-wide basis.

Another key component in the success in our community was the Sheriff's establishment of a Human Trafficking Unit within the Sheriff's Office. With both the community task force and the sheriff's unit now in place, the Sheriff's Office was awarded a major Federal grant to support its anti-trafficking work.

The media is key to any public awareness campaign. Our Club fostered media attention to the issue through briefings, education efforts, and co-sponsorship of a national conference on human trafficking. The media wants "hooks"—they want actual cases, real victims, etc. so they can write stories of interest to readers. The fact that there was a very high profile case in the community last year got the media interested and then they decided to commit resources for more in-depth reporting. The other thing to remember is that newspapers are competitive—once one paper starts covering a topic in-depth, other newspapers in the area start covering it, too. Club members wrote numerous articles, commentaries, letters to the editor, to elected officials about human trafficking, which contributed to media attention and created an opportunity to talk about Zonta and our

work in the context of human trafficking. The cumulative impact of this strategy resulted in a remarkable amount of media focus on human trafficking in SW Florida.

National and international media attention also creates opportunities for raising local awareness. For example, the Lifetime cable TV, award-winning 2-part movie on Human Trafficking created an opportunity to educate and energize local communities.

Once the news media is focused on human trafficking, they can play a critical role in educating their readership, providing a mechanism for public recognition of those fighting against human trafficking, for providing accountability of public officials charged with various aspects of human trafficking—from catching the traffickers to providing services to the victims.

7. Advocacy. The last element of your strategy should be advocacy. As Denise Conroy (past Chair of the ZI Advocacy Committee) told us at the NYC 2004 Convention, Zonta is limited in the money it can contribute, but our ability to advocate is unlimited.” Using all the media attention and heightened public awareness, our Club is now urging elected officials to support strengthened State legislation to fight human trafficking and better protect and serve the victims, to provide financial support to community task forces set up to address this problem, and to increase resources for agencies and organizations providing services to victims and promoting public education and prosecuting cases. In addition, we are pushing for the Governor to establish a State-wide Task Force to coordinate and provide support to local anti-trafficking efforts, and are using the PR surrounding the conference to press the Governor in the more public forum to take action on this suggestion.

Start by checking into whether your State has enacted legislation to fight human trafficking. There is Federal legislation in place, and the U.S. DOJ has developed model state legislation that you could suggest that your state consider. (see our website for link) If state legislation is needed, consider teaming up with other Zonta Clubs in your state to press for this action, build a coalition with other organizations that support this legislation, ask your local legislative representatives to press and cause, and find sponsors to introduce this legislation. We think you’ll find that this is a bipartisan issue that is not controversial and there are plenty of lawmakers that would like to be associated with fighting human trafficking.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva wants to help other Zonta Clubs to replicate and/or adapt our models to your Clubs. Through our website, our large e-mail

communications network and other events, we have shared information about our efforts on an ongoing and frequent basis. We are now working with ZI and the District 11 leadership to determine how best to support this effort. Feel free to contact us at [zontasancap@lycos.com](mailto:zontasancap@lycos.com) with questions and ideas for your community. We are committed to maintaining and building on the momentum we've achieved to make an even greater difference in more women's lives in the future, and we think the Zonta network is the best way to make a difference in eradicating human trafficking, both locally and globally.

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