

National Conference Shows Sex Traffickers Targeting Middle School Students
News

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Have you talked to your middle schoolers about the dangers of sex trafficking? That was the question at a national conference on child sex trafficking in downtown St. Louis.



Organizer Molly Hackett says many young teens who end up in prostitution are first chatted with online, groomed to trust a stranger, and then meet their new "friend" in shopping malls where they are lured to run away.

"It's just not fair that middle school kids don't know about the topic," Hackett said, "They don't know it exists. Yet we have stranger danger. We talk to them about drugs. We talk to them about crossing the street. But we're not really approaching this issue."

The conference coincided with today's conviction in federal court downtown of a Chicago man convicted of sex trafficking two metro area girls. The teens, ages 16 and 17, were found by Collinsville police in a St. Louis County motel room with 29-year old Reginald Williams. Williams had already led the 16-year-old into prostitution and was recruiting the 17-year-old, according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

Hackett says St. Louis is a busy hub of child sex trafficking because of its central location, its many highway connections and motels.

Experts say sex traffickers often seek to recruit young teens who might be going through tough times.

"Maybe low self-esteem, they're having problems at school or they're isolated in some way," Hackett said, "It could be a language barrier, or gay lesbian communities. We find that being isolated is the common denominator."