

Human Trafficking Case Studies from the Bay Area

Angela was recruited in the Philippines by the owner of a nursing home in the U.S. She needed to earn money for her family, and was promised a “good salary,” more than she was able to make at home. On arrival in Santa Clara County, she was told she was in debt for her flight and all the arrangements made for her, so she had to work without pay. Her work was expanded to include a second nursing home. She was also required to do house cleaning for the owner (her trafficker), and his family members. Sometimes she was loaned to their friends for domestic service. Additionally, she had to clean debris for construction work the trafficker was doing, and provide massages to him at night. Her health suffered greatly. Just when she thought she could take no more, she was left alone one day and was able to use the phone to call for help.

Daniel and Sofia were recruited abroad to work in a restaurant in San Jose. They both had elderly parents, and planned to send money home from the good wages they were told they would get. On arrival in the U.S. they were told that they were in debt to the restaurant owners, who said they paid for recruitment fees and airline tickets. The owners also began deducting from their wages for other supposed costs, so that they ended up receiving almost no pay for the hours they worked. Once their visas expired the traffickers used their illegal status to keep them working, telling them they would be arrested if they told anyone about their situation. When they asked how close they were to paying their "debt," saying they just wanted to go home, the traffickers implied that their people back home—police and mafia—would find them and harm them if they left and returned to their country. A restaurant patron helped them reach the authorities, and they were eventually able to return home.

Three young women and a teenager in San Francisco answered ads for a job for modeling. They each hoped it could lead to a real career. When they arrived for their interviews they were taken to a hotel on South Airport Avenue and forced into prostitution. The traffickers, a couple from San Francisco, gave the women drugs and withheld food to keep them compliant. The front desk clerk, who had received training on human trafficking, noticed things didn't seem right--the young women seemed afraid of the couple, who brought many men to the hotel--and called the police. The two were arrested on suspicion of human trafficking, pimping and pandering, and the young women were referred to service providers trained to help survivors.

Yvonne, who grew up in San Jose, was a young single mother who sought a job as a receptionist in response to a newspaper ad. Since she did not have a car, the “employer” offered to pick her up for her interview. Instead of taking her to an office building, he took her to a motel and forced her to have sex with him and another man. He subsequently forced her to provide sex around the Bay Area, and took the payments. He controlled her through threats to the life of her young son. Ashamed, she could not tell anyone she knew. A police sting operation enabled her to regain her freedom.