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# DA Leading New Human Trafficking Prevention Programs in San Diego Public Schools

## *New Collective Established to Protect All Students from Would-Be Traffickers*

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today a coordinated trio of new programs that aims to bring human trafficking education, prevention and awareness training into every public school in San Diego County and protect children from exploitation under the umbrella of the newly-established [San Diego Trafficking Prevention Collective](#). The announcement comes during national Human Trafficking Awareness Month and responds to FBI data showing San Diego ranks as one of the top 13 worst regions for human trafficking.



San Diego Trafficking  
Prevention Collective

The Collective obtained a three-year grant to fund the critical training, helping school districts comply with a law passed in 2017 requiring schools to provide a human trafficking curriculum. This first-of-its-kind public-private partnership will bring three unique programs to schools under the Collective's umbrella: PROTECT, Project ROOTS, and kNOw MORE.

The Collective empowers students in elementary, middle and high school and teaches them about human trafficking in schools and neighborhoods, through a three pronged approach: in-school prevention education, after-school intervention, and interactive multimedia training.

The grant has been funded by the [UBS Optimus Foundation](#), which identified San Diego as a region with opportunities to augment its approach to human trafficking prevention and education.

“Combatting human trafficking and protecting children from falling victim to this terrible form of modern-day slavery is one of my top public safety priorities,” **DA Stephan** said. “Human trafficking is the second largest criminal industry in the world in which traffickers profit by preying on unsuspecting children, luring them right out of their schools and homes with deception and lies. This first-of-its-kind human trafficking

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prevention education collective will arm our kids with the knowledge and tools they need to protect themselves and to engage with trusted adults to help them remain free of abuse and exploitation.”

Recognizing the unfunded legislative mandate that schools must provide human trafficking education, DA Stephan worked to secure a public-private partnership to properly fund the curriculum and she coordinated with various San Diego County school districts to implement the three programs included in the Collective’s programming.

[WATCH: The San Diego Trafficking Prevention Collective video.](#)

“UBS Optimus Foundation is proud to be a founding partner in this effort,” said **Sally Faiz, Program Director of Child Protection for UBS Optimus Foundation**. “Trafficking is a horror affecting over 400,000 people in the U.S. We see prevention as the most desirable point to intervene, giving children the skills and knowledge they need to protect themselves from threat and keep safe. This collective, as a partnership of San Diego law enforcement, schools, philanthropists, business, universities and community nonprofits, builds a strong and resilient community. UBS is honored to be part of this group here in San Diego and to continue its active work supporting human-trafficking prevention across the U.S. and across the world.”

San Diego County ranks in the top three areas in the state for human trafficking and research estimates an underground sex economy worth \$810 million a year. Victims can be anyone – women, men, children, U.S. citizens or foreign nationals. However, in the area of sex trafficking, minors are particularly vulnerable targets. Social media is one way traffickers access and exploit children.

“This investment allows the San Diego Unified School District to make sure our middle and high school teachers are fully informed and prepared for the fight against human trafficking,” said **San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Cindy Marten**. “We are deeply grateful to District Attorney Summer Stephan for supporting our efforts to keep students safe. Human trafficking is an issue San Diegans must confront together, and that is why we are proud to take part in this unique interagency effort being announced this morning.”

The ugly truth is that schools across San Diego County have confirmed that traffickers actively recruit children on or near school campuses and use social media to lure and manipulate victims. In fact, 90 percent of high schools studied in San Diego County identified cases of human trafficking involving students, according to a 2016 study done by Point Loma Nazarene University and the University of San Diego.

“We know that young people are especially vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking, which means schools must play an important part in addressing it,” said **San Diego County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paul Gothold**. “The San Diego County Office of Education is dedicated to supporting local school districts in prevention and intervention best practices to address the potential or actual victimization of our students. By taking a proactive approach to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, we are more likely to reduce the incidents of human trafficking in our schools.”

So far, the school districts are using the free curriculum include the San Diego County Office of Education, The San Diego Unified School District, Sweetwater Union High School District, Escondido Union High School District, San Dieguito Union High School District, Poway Unified School District and San Pasqual Union Elementary School District.

“The San Diego Trafficking Prevention Collective and our schools are working toward reducing the vulnerability of children in our schools through trauma-informed education and training,” said **Don Buchheit, the Regional Collective Director for San Diego**. “Combating exploitation and protecting children takes an entire community. In San Diego, we are blessed to have our community working side by side under the leadership of the District Attorney’s Office. An educated child is a protected child.”

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**PROTECT** (PRevention Organized to Educate Children on Trafficking) is a holistic classroom education program that provides teachers and students with a comprehensive understanding of the dangers and signs of human trafficking and exploitation. Online or in-person staff training, instructional resources and curriculum are available to teachers in elementary, middle and high school. PROTECT helps teachers identify vulnerable students and connect them to the appropriate resources.

**Project ROOTS** is an after-school program that addresses the root causes of gender-based violence, exploitation, and unhealthy relationships through group mentoring and social emotional learning. As a primary prevention program, it aims to build protective factors in elementary and middle school youth through the three central themes of empathy, equality, and empowerment.



**kNOw MORE** is a student-centered human trafficking awareness and prevention curriculum for middle and high school students. The program provides a drama-based interactive training for students and their families. Through role-play, discussion and information, participants develop techniques to recognize red flags and vulnerabilities around sex trafficking and what actions to take to prevent it.



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### **About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office**

*The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue justice and support victims daily across San Diego County. DA Summer Stephan has devoted her life to protecting children and families and providing justice to the voiceless and most vulnerable. She is a national leader in the fight against sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and has served as a Deputy District Attorney in San Diego County for 29 years.*