



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
OFFICE TO COMBAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

PRESS RELEASE

February 2, 2011

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THE NEW YORK CITY FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER HOSTED A PANEL DISCUSSION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING “STOLEN PEOPLE. STOLEN DREAMS”

On Wednesday, February 2, 2011, the New York City Family Justice Center Queens in partnership with the Greater Queens Chapter of the Links, Inc., hosted a panel presentation to raise awareness about and opposition to human trafficking. The event was attended by Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence Commissioner Yolanda B. Jimenez who opened a conversation that brought together survivors, elected officials, City agencies, law enforcement officers, legal experts, community based organizations and activists to discuss important aspects of this complex issue.

“Human trafficking is a human rights abuse that must be stopped. The Mayor’s Office is working with law enforcement, service providers, the private sector, and policy makers to raise awareness about this crime,” stated Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs, Carol Robles-Roman. “Through increased public education, enforcement of New York’s strong anti-exploitation laws, and provision of comprehensive services to survivors, we can call an end to human trafficking.”

During the event, Sheila White from Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), spoke about her personal experience as a survivor of human trafficking. Captain Anthony Favale, from the New York City Police Department discussed the work of the Vice Enforcement Division in investigating the organized promotion of prostitution. Assistant District Attorney Jessica Melton of the Queens County District Attorney’s Office Special Proceedings Bureau gave an insightful presentation about her work prosecuting trafficking cases under the New York State Human Trafficking Law, enacted in 2007. Lori Cohen, Esq., of Sanctuary for Families’ Center for Battered Women’s Legal Services, discussed the remedies available to undocumented victims. Rita Abadi, Operations Manager and Clinician from the Mt. Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program, discussed the Queens-based services available to all victims of human trafficking and highlighted the challenges faced by human trafficking victims, including under-age prostitutes. To close the presentation, activist and poet Jonathan Walton inspired the audience by reading an original work based on his experience as an advocate for underprivileged youth and exploited children.

“The Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence is committed to put a spotlight on the issue of human trafficking and provide victims with the services they need,” said Commissioner Yolanda B. Jimenez. “We want to assure victims that they are not alone and that help is available to them at any of our Family Justice Centers or simply by calling 311.”

This panel was presented in partnership with the Greater Queens Chapter of the Links, Inc., a branch of an international, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to link its members' talents and resources with agencies, companies and elected officials to address critical life, health and educational issues facing residents in the borough of Queens. “We are proud to once again partner with the Queens Family Justice Center to raise awareness of and solicit action from agency and governmental representatives to stop human trafficking, which like domestic abuse, exploits women and children and stunts their potential for having productive lives,” stated the Greater Queens Chapter of the Links, Inc. President, Pat Thomas.

The New York City Family Justice Center, Queens is an initiative of the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence. The three New York City Family Justice Centers in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens reduce barriers faced by domestic violence victims seeking help by providing easy access to comprehensive services and placing dedicated domestic violence prosecutors, essential community and City services under one roof. The City’s Centers also identify human trafficking victims and connect them to critical services. With both public and private support, these innovative centers assist victims with essential safety planning, case management, legal and housing assistance in just one visit – all in their language while their children play safely in the children’s room. To date, the three New York City Family Justice Centers have had over 110,000 client visits since opening.

The Links, Inc. is an international, not-for-profit corporation, established in 1946. The membership consists of 12,000 professional women of color nationwide. It is one of the nation’s oldest and largest volunteer service organizations of extraordinary women who are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry. The Links, Inc. has attracted many distinguished women who are individual achievers and have made a difference in their communities and the world. They are business and civic leaders, role models, mentors, activists and volunteers who work towards a common vision by engaging like-minded organizations and individuals for partnership. Links members contribute more than 500,000 documented hours of community service annually – strengthening their communities and enhancing the nation.

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