

Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department

WILLOWBEND FARMS
--restoring human trafficking survivors

VISION
HOSPITALITY GROUP



Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

July 24th, 2023

The Health Department and Community Organizations to participate in Red Sand Project to Raise Awareness of Human Trafficking.

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – The Hamilton County Health Department, [WillowBend Farms](#), and [Vision Hospitality Group](#) partner with local organizations to participate in the Red Sand Project during Human Trafficking Awareness Week, recognized July 23 - 29th, 2023.

The [Red Sand Project](#) uses sand artwork as a way for people to come together and connect, raising awareness about human trafficking, modern slavery, and exploitation. The red sand symbolizes the human trafficking victims that fall through the cracks of our society every day. Although Hamilton County makes continuous efforts and improvements, human trafficking remains a significant public health concern within our community.

“The Health Department’s Sexual Violence Prevention program uses a public health approach to prevent domestic and dating violence, sexual harassment, bullying, and human trafficking. We must continue to raise awareness of human trafficking and learn how to recognize the signs of trafficking or exploitation. Demonstrations out in public, such as the red sand, cause residents to stop what they are doing & learn more about how human trafficking affects their community,” says Monica Thompson, Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator at the Hamilton County Health Department.

“It is critical that we all work together to end human trafficking. Vision Hospitality Group has been at the forefront of providing training and other resources to help play a role in putting a stop to human trafficking,” said Jenelle Hawkins, Director of Engagement, Innovation, and Wellbeing for Vision Hospitality Group. “The Red Sand Project creates a new voice that publicly brings awareness. It has allowed us to create vital partnerships across Hamilton County with support groups, survivor services, and government agencies equally committed to this cause. We couldn’t be prouder to help host this event and look forward to the day when it won’t be needed.”

According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, human trafficking is a demand-driven crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex acts, targeting men, women, and children. Human trafficking is also one of the fastest-growing criminal industries in the country, with cases reported in all 50 states. According to the [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#), in 2021, 217 victims in Tennessee were involved in 152 reported cases; cases can have multiple victims.

“As a survivor, I understand the importance of decreasing barriers to victims seeking services and that having a continuum of care would provide survivors with sustainable restoration. During the Red Sand event on Friday, July 28th, we will launch “One Voice Collective.” This collective comprises five local counter-trafficking agencies that serve the Chattanooga region; they come together as one unified voice with a mission to support survivors and prevent human trafficking,” says Sarah McKinnis, co-founder and CEO of WillowBend Farms.

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If you know someone who needs help to escape trafficking, contact the **Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline** at **1-855-558-6484**. If you suspect you have encountered a victim of human trafficking, you may call the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** at **1-888-373-7888** or text **233722**.

As part of outreach efforts during Human Trafficking Awareness Week, a Red Sand Project event will be held Friday, July 28th, at 10 a.m. at the Aloft Hotel. Due to limited space, RSVPing for this event is preferred. Event information and the RSVP link are available at <https://bit.ly/44sDCEBRedSandProjectEvent>.

The Health Department's Sexual Violence Prevention Program will continue to raise awareness about human trafficking and the Red Sand Project at Nightfall on Friday, July 28th, from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. [Nightfall](#) is located in Downtown Chattanooga at Miller Park; everyone is welcome.

Additional resources

- For more information on human trafficking and the hotline, visit <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>.
- To learn more about the indicators of human trafficking, visit: <https://bit.ly/3K1Vm1v>
- For a complete list of resources, visit the [Tennessee Department of Health's](#) webpage.
- To read this information in Spanish, visit the Health Department's Spanish Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/SaludHamiltonTN>