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Ventura County is Breaking the Chain of Human Trafficking

VENTURA, CA – Community leaders, advocates and concerned citizens attended the sold out viewing of the groundbreaking film *Break the Chain* at the Museum of Ventura County on Wednesday night. The film gave a detailed look at how sex and labor trafficking goes unnoticed and is happening in our backyard. In attendance was producer and co-director, Laura E. Swanson; Interface Children & Family Services' Human Trafficking Program Manager, Christan Perez; VC Coalition Against Human Trafficking, April De Pretis; Ventura County DA Investigator II, Michael Munn; The Acorn Project Founder, Junemarie Justus; and Ventura City Councilmember, Cheryl Heitman.

When asked their perception of the prevalence of human trafficking in Ventura County, Mike Munn responded “[Human trafficking is] definitely here. We’ve identified it. If we don’t combat it, it’s going to just fester; it’s going to be like a cancer because the pimps are going to know that they can operate in the county that’s not going to enforce those human trafficking laws.”

Since the start of the human trafficking program last year, Interface Children & Family Services has served 36 human trafficking survivors in Ventura County. Situated between major trafficking hubs of Los Angeles and San Francisco, the U.S. 101 freeway through Ventura County serves as a corridor for human trafficking activities along the central coast. Interface’s human trafficking program provides a trauma-



informed and confidential shelter for adult survivors of trafficking. Survivors are provided a safe and supportive residential setting to begin healing from their trauma and work towards reclaiming their independence. Immediate, in-person response is available when requested by law enforcement or medical providers, to emotionally support adult survivors of sex and/or labor trafficking (both U.S. born and foreign nationals). The advocates assess for basic and immediate needs, provide referrals and linkage to supportive services, inform survivors of their rights and discuss options for safely exiting their trafficking situation.

Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin will be hosting a second *Break the Chain* screening at California Lutheran University, titled *Combating Human Trafficking: Local Efforts on a Global Issue* on March 28, 2018. "When people think of human trafficking, they often associate it as something that doesn't occur in their community," said Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin. "Recent sting operations have captured human trafficking suspects in our own backyard. Events like these engage our community on how to better identify and respond to human trafficking cases."

Similar to the Museum of Ventura County screening, this film will be followed by a panel of speakers made up of members of the community who are experts in the battle against human trafficking in Ventura County. Undersheriff Gary Pentis will be on the panel, as well as Interface's Human Trafficking Program Manager Christan Perez, and Debbie Gohlkie from Soroptimist International of Oxnard.

For community members who would like to further support human trafficking efforts in Ventura County, Interface Children & Family Services will be hosting the 5th annual Love is Brewing at the Kentucky Derby Champagne Luncheon & Tea on May 12, 2018. Proceeds from this inspiring and educational event will be used to directly support domestic violence, child abuse and human trafficking prevention, intervention



and awareness programs. Tickets go on sale March 1 for \$100 per ticket/\$1,000 per table and sponsorships are still available. For reservations or for more information, visit icfs.org or contact Laura Everest at 805-485-6114, Ext. 628 or leverest@icfs.org.

Confidential support is available to adult victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking, concerned loved ones, community members and service providers by calling Interface's 24/7 Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-800-636-6738.

About Interface Children & Family Services

Interface Children & Family Services is Ventura County and surrounding community's most comprehensive non-profit human services safety net. Founded in 1973, Interface works to prevent and heal the effects of child abuse, neglect and abandonment; domestic violence; family conflict and mental health issues.

Interface has 24 distinct programs representing six core service areas, including mental health and trauma treatment, domestic violence and child abuse prevention, youth crisis intervention, human trafficking and justice services.

Serving approximately 42,000 local individuals annually, plus assisting 150,000 callers through the 2-1-1 helpline across the state, Interface offers effective solutions to the urgent needs of families and individuals in crisis. This important work is sustained through donations and grants from individuals and organizations, as well as by the work of dedicated volunteers and staff. For more information please contact Interface Children & Family Services at 4001 Mission Oaks Blvd, Suite I, Camarillo, CA 93012 by telephone at 805.485.6114 or visit www.icfs.org.