



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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NEWS RELEASE

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From Instant Message to Instant Nightmare *The SRMT & Seven Dancers Coalition Co-Sponsor Ionkwahwatsire Summit Series*

Akwesasne, NY - The *Ionkwahwatsire* “All the Family” Summit Series started on October 14, 2014 to build awareness and provide education in a collaborative training environment focused on the evolution of human exploitation to human trafficking. Health, social, education and law enforcement professionals have been invited; participants are from Akwesasne and throughout the North Country, including Franklin County, St. Lawrence County and Essex County. The Summit Series planning committee intentionally promoted a multi-disciplinary approach addressing awareness, education and safety and the development of best practices among agencies. The professionals in attendance are those most likely to first encounter victims. The SRMT Social Services Division, Health Services, Family Advocate program, Three Sisters program, the Education Division, the SRMT Tribal Police and the Seven Dancers Coalition collectively dedicated their time and expertise to months of planning to host this critical event drawing experts from our region together. The series was funded through the Safe Harbor Fund, a grant received from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

“Human exploitation starts off with signs that may not be recognized by those closest to victims, including sending sexually explicit photos or sexting,” stated Karonienhawi Thomas, Director of Social Services at the Tribe and former sex crimes investigator with the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Police. “This happens in our community among our young adults and our professionals need to be prepared to recognize the signs and educated to provide intervention and assistance to keep our children safe. Our goal is to raise awareness and educate our professionals and then, through our Safe Harbor Campaign, to raise awareness and educate our community.”

Participants heard expert presentations on international and Tribal exploitation and trafficking. The expert accounts included awareness of trends and insights into how agencies can and should work together to maximize their effectiveness in coordinating cases of exploitation and trafficking. The first training session was filled with heaviness for the participants and closed with an interactive presentation on self-care. The SRMT Social Services Division simultaneously launched the first phase of the Safe Harbor campaign designed to bring awareness to the community; “from instant message to instant nightmare.”

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The first session, held on October 14, carried an awareness theme. There were 155 professionals from the region in attendance, a tribute to the collaboration the professionals expect of each other and the dedication to the safety of our communities. The agenda included presentations from the Sacred Hoop Coalition who spoke about basic elements of trafficking, the dynamics of trafficking and societal stigmas, as well as community organization on a systems and community-based level. The presenters outlined effective efforts in their work experience and focused on the importance of engaging the entire community in anti-trafficking work with Native survivors.

Special Agents from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Timothy Losito and Juan Adames, gave the audience an opportunity to hear from experts with eighteen years of experience in law enforcement, child exploitation investigations and human trafficking, both domestically and abroad. Human Trafficking Specialist, Gonzalo Martinez de Vedia investigates labor and sex trafficking through outreach to rural communities and low-wage urban industries. He also coordinates the North Country Human Trafficking Taskforce and is a member of all upstate regional taskforces. His responsibility is to facilitate inter-agency responses to trafficking cases statewide.

Chrys Ballerano co-directs the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault program, Building Connections. Chris is a survivor and social justice activist. She provides training support to rape crisis programs and teaches the importance of using trauma-informed approaches including the arts, when working to help individuals. Chrys closed the session with the importance of self-care for the attendees. "The significance of a trauma-informed approach towards patients in healthcare has been powerful. Equally important is our ability to recognize clinicians, educators, social workers and law enforcement can easily be secondarily traumatized while caring for others who are in crisis. Self-care is important for us to stay healthy emotionally and spiritually," remarked Chief Beverly Cook, Family Nurse Practitioner and opening speaker of the Summit Series

The second session is scheduled for November 5, 2014 and intended to focus on development of best practices through collaboration with other agencies.

The community event was promoted through CKON's radio show, *Tetawatheren*, and is on November 4, 2014 at the SRMT Seniors Center. Guest speaker Tina Frundt is a sex traffic survivor on a mission to help victims and raise awareness of human exploitation. Tina is the founder of Courtney's House in Washington, DC. In October of 2013, the SRMT hosted the Child Safe Summit, the *Ionkwahwatsire* "All the Family" Summit Series is the second annual event. Feedback from the Child Safe Summit both from attendees and Akwesasne, emphasized the necessity of including a community education component, including an event for community members to attend and gain a deeper understanding of signs, raising awareness and keeping families safe.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.