



ASU-trained civilians to help staff Department of Public Safety statewide tips line

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Callers experiencing human trafficking have access to victim-services workers who can connect them with

multiple sources of assistance

Someone experiencing human trafficking lives a complex and often violent life. The decision to reach out for help may be a difficult one, and once it's made, that person will need plenty of understanding and reliable sources of support.

Starting this month, civilian victim-services workers trained at Arizona State University will join state troopers on an Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) tips line to help people dealing with that life.

The partnership with DPS, funded for the next five years by a \$1.35 million grant from the state agency, marks the first time that civilian workers have joined a statewide tip line in Arizona, said ASU School of Social Work (<https://socialwork.asu.edu/>) Assistant Professor Dominique Roe-Sepowitz (<https://search.asu.edu/profile/276287>), director of the university's Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (<https://socialwork.asu.edu/stir>) (STIR).

Roe-Sepowitz said she and her colleagues have readied civilians to work with state troopers on the Arizona Tip Line, 1-877-4AZ-TIPS (1-877-429-8477).

Callers will have access to people who can specifically help assess their safety, connect them to local resources and provide supportive engagement, she said, adding that some of the civilian workers have experienced trafficking themselves.

"DPS realized some victims might not want to talk to law enforcement, but instead to someone in victim services to connect them to people in their Arizona communities who can help," Roe-Sepowitz said.

Since 2007, the Arizona Counter Terrorism Information Center (ACTIC) has been home to the Arizona Tip Line. ACTIC receives reports of suspicious activity via phone and their website (<https://azactic.gov/>), and tips are assigned to investigators throughout Arizona.

Until the new partnership began Feb. 1, callers had spoken only with sworn DPS troopers, who will continue to staff the line.

DPS Major Jennifer N. Borquez, ACTIC director, said the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family suggested working with ASU in a partnership that began last fall. If successful, Borquez said DPS plans to work with ASU and the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 1-800-373-7888, to inform other states about the process.

The collaboration created what the agreement between the university and DPS calls a "victim-centered, survivor-led crisis response to the initial call," followed up as appropriate with a call back within 24 hours for further social work case development.

“The people providing hotline support include a survivor who is now a leader in the anti-trafficking community who can help with how to build trust with callers who are afraid to trust,” she said. “We’re also connecting with rural communities and Native tribes to recommend where clients can go for housing and case management.”

ASU has trained a project director, a supervisor and an experienced case manager, as well as other staff and interns who will make sure one of them is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Roe-Sepowitz said.

ASU will assist with promoting the hotline to the public through virtual and in-person contacts, and will work with ACTIC to produce a quarterly report containing the number and types of contacts the line receives, the types of support provided and the referrals given, among other data.

Borquez said the partnership resulted in a new, evolving program, including coordination with the national hotline.

“We have personnel that are helping create processes for the tip line, which includes how tips are handled, initiating criminal investigations where possible and ensuring victims of human trafficking are connected to invaluable resources,” Borquez said. “Additionally, we started with the national hotline being the connection for those victim resources and have transitioned those calls to ASU, now that they are available. With those changes come additional processes and checklist changes to ensure our staff handle these calls consistently. To ensure we are using best practices, our discussions with ASU and the national hotline are ongoing.”

Borquez said DPS is offering the ASU hotline as a resource for victims of human trafficking to other law enforcement agencies.

“Following the Super Bowl, money has been set aside for ongoing media attention regarding human trafficking awareness, seeking help and how the public can report tips,” Borquez said.

Non-emergency assistance in Arizona is provided at 1-877-4AZ-TIPS. Victims needing immediate assistance should call 9-1-1.

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