**Dr. Susan Inman – *this is my story***

My educational background includes a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Business Administration at Southern Oregon University, a master’s degree in Educational Administration from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, and a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Oregon.

Throughout my career, I have served in a variety of roles in the field of Education, including classroom teacher, building-level administrator, district-level administrator, state-level director, and professor supporting the learning of aspiring educators. In each role, it was clear that some children in our school/district/state-level community lacked the empowerment to determine their life pathways and reach their full potential. There are a variety of reasons and barriers to the success of our students, and I became aware of one particularly alarming crime and tragedy that affects so many in our communities – either directly or indirectly – human trafficking.

When I first began addressing the topic of human trafficking, I ran into a series of roadblocks and realities including the denial that it happens in the U.S., much less in our town, and the belief that it is not a topic that is appropriate for anyone to discuss. It was clear that blaming the victim is a common practice.

Once I heard from the victims of human trafficking, I felt empathy and a strong sense of urgency to help and support those who had experienced such a life-threatening experience. And I still believe that we need to help and support survivors. Almost immediately, I wondered why it keeps happening in our communities, in some cases right under our noses. So, I began a campaign to proactively provide our youth with the knowledge and skills they need to avoid becoming a victim.

My strong sense of urgency resulted in brief education programs (usually a class period or two), began much too late (usually in a student’s junior or senior year of high school), and didn’t provide the explicit information that children need to avoid becoming a victim. Parents expressed concerns that we were giving students “ideas” that might corrupt their young minds and were unwilling to “allow their children to be exposed to such trash”. Then came the internet. Suddenly, children seemed to know more than their parents, and communities found it difficult to regulate the information and individuals invading from unknown places.

Fast forward to *Knowledge is Power – Creating Awareness to Combat Human Trafficking.* Working with professional educators, community leaders, parents, and students, we’ve developed a toolkit that effectively empowers our communities to combat this horrendous crime.

Communities and school districts are now asking to use this comprehensive tool kit so that shared knowledge and empowerment for our youth might keep them safer. Law enforcement agencies want to team with educators and informed community members to slow down and eventually halt the human trafficking incidents in their communities. Human Trafficking Awareness has become a movement synonymous with the empowerment of our youth. Awareness is truly the key to lessening the power of those who would victimize our children and bringing the issue out of the shadows has the effect of blaming the perpetrator instead of the victim, which can create a deterrent from future crimes.

What can you do to stop human trafficking in your community? Become aware of the signs, help children develop and implement safety plans, be someone safe that children can come to in case they find themselves in a dangerous situation, connect with law enforcement, and believe that yes, terrible things happen in every community. Becoming a part of the solution is to further the mission of Soroptimist International.