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**YWCA Northeast Kansas to Open Topeka's First Human Trafficking Drop-In Center**

TOPEKA – YWCA Northeast Kansas is proud to announce that the Center for Safety and Empowerment will expand services to include Topeka's first daytime drop-in center for victim-survivors of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. "While we have been providing services to victims of human trafficking since 2014, we served 118 individuals in our Center for Safety and Empowerment in 2018 alone, and this number continues to grow," YWCA CEO Kathleen Marker said. YWCA plans to start preparing the new drop-in center on October 1<sup>st</sup> and begin providing services later in fall of 2019.

YWCA Northeast Kansas has learned that there is a great need in our community to provide this particular type of service model. "Our staff has learned from first-hand experience that we can't meet the higher level of services such as case management and counseling until we address clients' most basic needs. The drop-in center will allow us to provide a safe space to rest and take a shower, enjoy a warm meal, have access to clean clothes and support from our specialized staff and the community," said Marker.

The drop-in center has been made possible by a generous grant from the Topeka Rotary Foundation. Foundation President Joan Wagnon stated, "While Rotarians across the globe continue to become more informed on this crucial issue, we felt that this investment would make a difference in the lives of victim-survivors of trafficking in our very own backyard. We are confident YWCA Northeast Kansas is up to the challenge."

The drop-in center will be conveniently located in central Topeka and easily accessible by public transportation. "Ensuring these services are available in the heart of the city will allow us to have the greatest impact," YWCA Center for Safety and Empowerment Program Director Michelle McCormick said. "Due to the complicated and severe trauma and a lack of trusting relationships, this will allow us to meet victim-survivors where they're at while delivering the highest quality of safety and support in our services. It is our hope that this drop-in center allows us to increase accessibility to our services while being a place of refuge that meets the tangible needs of victims with the help of community support and outreach."

The YWCA Center for Safety and Empowerment, formerly the Battered Women Task Force, has provided vitally important services to victims of sexual and domestic violence for over 40 years. Services include a 24-hour crisis hotline, emergency shelter, individual and group counseling, court advocacy, public education, and case management. The organization provides services to thousands of survivors each year, providing direct services to over 3,000 survivors, taking over 2,500 hotline calls and sheltering over 300 women, men and children annually. For more information on how to donate or get involved visit <http://www.ywcaneks.org>.

If you or someone you know needs help, please call the 24-hour crisis line: 1-888-822-2983.

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