



## Tattoo artists to fight sex trafficking

Tattoo artists could play a life-changing role in the fight against human sex trafficking.

In a novel approach to combat the sex trade, the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health is teaming up with community partners, Black Squirrel Tattoo and the Douglas County Sheriff's Department, to present "Human Trafficking and the Tattoo Industry."

A free meeting – open to the public – will bring the partners together on Thursday, May 23, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Old Mattress Factory, 501 N. 13th St., in Omaha and includes lunch. You can register for the free meeting [here](#).

The meeting will feature world-renowned tattoo artist Gunnar, who will talk about the tattoo industry on the eve of a national tattoo convention in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Gunnar is known around the world for his artistic style in tattoos, illustration and fine art. His tattoos are worn by models and musicians, and he is best known for his use of color and illustrative style. Josh Payne, a winner of Ink Master on Spike TV, also will

speak.

"We have a unique relationship with our clients. We spend a lot of time, one-on-one with them, so we'd be most effective if trained," said Mel Judkins, owner of Black Squirrel Tattoo.

"Many tattoo artists don't realize there is a connection (between tattoos and human sex trafficking), but once I explain it, they want more education on the topic. I'm hoping that once we get the ball rolling, we could teach at other tattoo conventions around the country."

Women who are sex trafficked within the U.S., are often made to get tattoos in the form of a bar code, dollar sign or the trafficker's name. This is how some traffickers maintain control and dominance over women and girls.

Shireen Rajaram, Ph.D., associate professor, health promotion, UNMC College of Public Health, received a community engagement planning award from the Great Plains IDeA-CTR Community-Academic Partnership Program, funded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, to

organize this meeting.

"Tattoo artists have a critical opportunity for detection, identification and reporting of any abuse, including sex trafficking," Dr. Rajaram said. "Through secondary prevention and the timely identification of survivors, they can help stem the violence and injury. They can connect survivors to support services in the community, so they can start to heal from the emotional and physical trauma and rebuild their lives."

At the May 23 meeting, Dr. Rajaram will present her research on survivors, and Chad Miller, deputy sheriff/ investigator, human trafficking, will discuss the business of human trafficking. A facilitated discussion will follow.

The meeting will be followed by a paid admission event featuring tattoo artists. There also will be a happy-hour fundraiser to support the Women's Center for Advancement in Omaha as well as a community organization that helps survivors of human trafficking remove their tattoos.