

Mayo Clinic, The Link launch one-of-a-kind gift registry to help victims of sex trafficking

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As game day approaches, Mayo Clinic and The Link have teamed up to announce the launch of RiseUpGifts.org as part of an effort to raise awareness about sex trafficking and inspire people to make a difference by helping victims who have been trafficked.

The Link is a Minneapolis-based nonprofit dedicated to helping youth and families overcome the effects of poverty and [social injustice](#), including victims of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Through the initiative with The Link, Mayo is offering an online [gift](#) registry, a site for people to purchase a gift of a daily necessity that will help victims of sex trafficking. A sampling of gift items includes socks, winter coats, basic clothing and blankets.

"This initiative has the opportunity to change the path of a victim's life," says Arne Graff, M.D., medical director of the Mayo Clinic Child and Family Advocacy Center. "Many of these items may seem minor, but to someone trying to escape sex trafficking, they may be necessary for survival. When victims are rescued, they often don't have any belongings except the clothes on their back. By offering support with these gifts, it allows victims to feel a sense of hope and to potentially become a survivor."

According to research commissioned by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and conducted by the University of Minnesota, there is a correlation between large-scale events and sex trafficking; however,

researchers note that it overshadows the fact that women, men and children are sexually exploited 365 days a year in communities large and small.

"There is no doubt that the hidden crime of sex trafficking is alive in the Rochester area, our surrounding communities, throughout the U.S. as well as globally," says Sister Anne Walch of the Franciscan Sisters of Assisi Heights of Rochester, who advocates for human trafficking awareness. "This growing tragedy strikes at the core of what it means to be human and our Franciscan tradition of respecting the dignity of all God has created. There are signs of hope as more people network with others such as Mayo and other agencies to raise awareness of this modern day slavery and support those who have been victimized."

Along with the Rochester Franciscan Sisters, Mayo Clinic participates in a broad coalition of Minnesota organizations to educate the public, train hospitality and transportation workers, and offer enhanced services to victims of [sex trafficking](#).

"This initiative brings together experts who work with trafficking victims and who understand the challenges they must overcome in order to escape and eventually thrive," says John Wald, M.D., medical director for Public Affairs and Marketing at Mayo Clinic. "I'm pleased that Mayo, as the largest private employer in Minnesota and a founding sponsor of the Minnesota Super Bowl Host Committee, is bringing this issue to light and collaborating with community groups to ensure that the Super Bowl leaves a positive, lasting legacy across the region."

"The Link greatly appreciates Mayo Clinic stepping forward to lead a gift drive to help us provide essential items to help youth transition out of a life of [sexual exploitation](#) and into safety and healing," says Beth Holger-Ambrose, executive director, The Link. "We feel incredibly inspired and thankful for their support of the anti-[trafficking](#) field."

To make a gift, visit riseupgifts.org, which provides a secure system for making purchases. The Link will distribute gifts to victims.

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