

MORE TO LIVING SUPPORTS OP SHIELD TO RECOVER 163 MINORS IN STATEWIDE EFFORT TO IDENTIFY AND INTERRUPT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

More To Living by More Too Life (MTL) Helps Lead Critical Advocacy Logistics and Multi-Organization Coordination Alongside Florida Law Enforcement;

SARASOTA, FL, UNITED STATES, August 31, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- More To Living by More Too Life (MTL), a survivor-led anti-trafficking organization with more than 22 years of experience serving victims and vulnerable youth, played a critical leadership role in advocacy logistics and partner coordination during

Operation SHIELD, a statewide Florida Department of Law Enforcement recovery effort that resulted in 163 children and young people being recovered or located. More Than 70 Percent of Youth Encountered Experienced Conduct Consistent With Federal Human Trafficking Definitions plus prevention.

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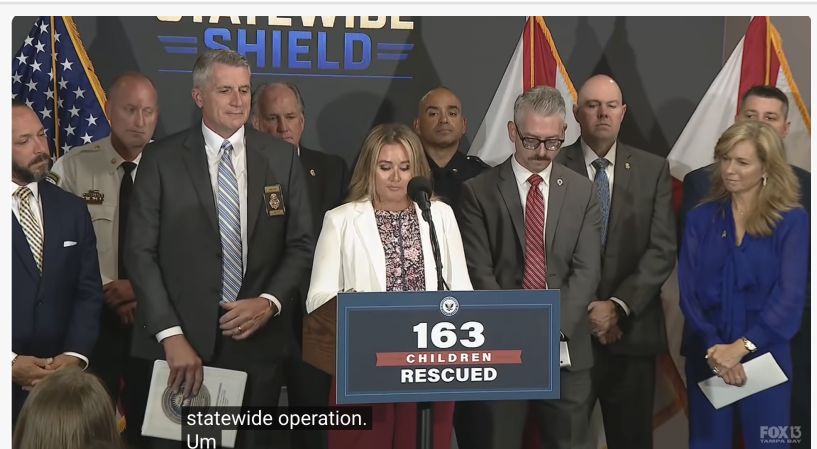
The child is not the crisis.
The crisis is what happened
to the child.”

Brook Bello

Working alongside state and local law enforcement and an extensive network of victim advocates and service organizations, MTL helped lead the advocacy logistics required to connect recovery with assessment, services, safety, and longer-term restoration.

The operation reinforced a truth MTL has witnessed for more than two decades: The child is not the crisis. The crisis is what happened to the child, and what continues to happen when the rest of us mistake survival for rebellion.

Young people experiencing exploitation are too often labeled troubled, defiant, delinquent, or simply “bad.” Yet many are responding to trauma, abandonment, violence, exploitation, and



Kim Figueroa of MTL shares after the Florida AG and others.

repeated adverse childhood experiences while their brains are still developing. Some have experienced foster care and repeated displacement. Others entered the juvenile justice system at extraordinarily young ages. A child's response to terror can be an alarm sounding from a life in danger.

MORE THAN 70 PERCENT IDENTIFIED WITH TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES

During Operation SHIELD, MTL's team, led on the ground by survivor champion leader Kim Figueroa, MTL's Law Enforcement Director, worked alongside law enforcement, victim advocates, government agencies, and nonprofit partners while helping coordinate the engagement and logistics of dozens of organizations.

What emerged cannot be softened.

More than 70 percent of the young people encountered disclosed experiences or presented circumstances involving conduct consistent with the federal definition of human trafficking.

They had been exploited and deeply violated. Some endured extreme violence and abuse in their lives. Many were running, hiding, missing, or trapped inside cycles of trauma that began long before anyone stopped to ask: What happened to this child?

"After 22 years with our doors open, this still rings true, and these 163 young people are no different," said Dr. Brook Parker Bello, CEO and Executive Director of MTL. "The child is not the crisis. The crisis is what happened to the child. We cannot continue criminalizing the language of survival and then wonder why children run from the very systems meant to protect them."

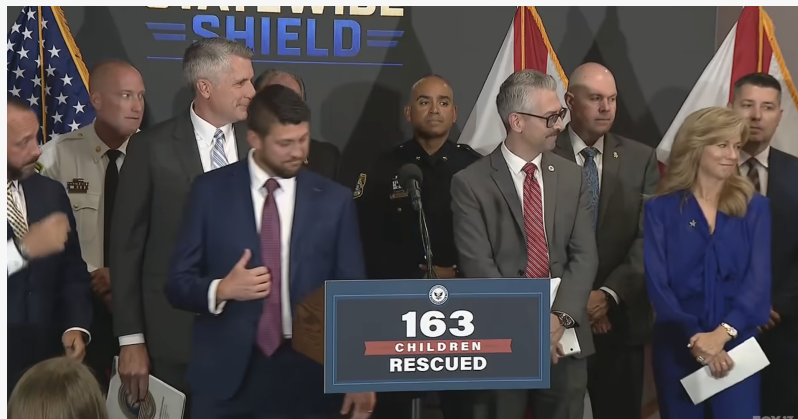
Bello continued, "Why are they angry? Why do they run? Try taking a lion cub from its mother, a bear cub from her protection, or a young gorilla from the safety of its family and then calling its struggle to survive aggression. Too many of these children have had to become their own lioness, their own shelter, their own warning cry."

WHY RECOVERY OPERATIONS MATTER

Operation SHIELD, led by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, with support from MTL



MTL Logo



James Uthmeier Attorney General of Florida Mentions More To Living by More Too Life

demonstrates why multidisciplinary recovery operations are essential. The mission cannot end with locating a missing child.

Recovery creates an opportunity to interrupt exploitation, identify trafficking, uncover what may be hidden beneath behavior, connect young people with trained advocates and services, and begin building a path toward safety and stability.

For MTL, recovery is not the end. Recovery is where restoration begins.

“Our advocates have to be prepared for what happens after that child is found,” said Figueroa. “A recovery can open a small window of trust. What we do in that window matters. Law enforcement, advocates, prosecutors, child welfare professionals, service providers, and community partners must work together so a young person does not simply return to the circumstances from which they were recovered.”

A STATEWIDE COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

Operation SHIELD required extraordinary collaboration across law enforcement, government, victim advocacy, child welfare, prosecution, safe housing, behavioral health, and community organizations.

MTL celebrates this coordinated response possible, including the op's Leaders at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and its victim advocacy professionals, Florida Sheriffs Association, Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, statewide prosecutors and victim advocates from the Office of the Attorney General, Miami-Dade victim advocacy partners, United Abolitionists, Bridging Freedom Safe Home, Door of Hope, Citrus Health, One More Child, DWPC, and the many additional law enforcement agencies, advocates, service providers, and organizations who answered the call.

No single organization can solve human trafficking and child endangerment. Operations of this magnitude show what becomes possible when multiple disciplines unite around one central priority: the child.

THE 163 CANNOT BECOME A NUMBER

The public may remember 163. MTL is asking the public to remember something more important: They are 163 lives.

They are children and young people with names, histories, fears, gifts, intelligence, potential, and futures that cannot be measured by what happened to them.

Some will require months or years of support. Some may run again. Some may distrust adults because adults have failed them before. Healing rarely moves in a straight line. That does not

make them unsuccessful. It makes sustained care essential.

"We cannot celebrate finding children and then disappear when healing becomes difficult," Bello said. "The real measure of recovery is what happens next. Do they have someone who stays? Safe housing? Trauma-informed advocacy? Education? Mentorship? Treatment? Opportunity? A community that sees who they can become instead of defining them by what they survived?"

MTL will continue working alongside law enforcement and community partners through recovery operations, survivor advocacy, prevention, intervention, mentoring, education, court-connected services, and long-term restoration.

After 22 years, one truth remains unchanged:

Survival is not their identity. Pain is not their destiny. And the child was never the problem.

ABOUT MORE TO LIVING BY MORE TOO LIFE

More To Living by More Too Life (MTL) is a survivor-led anti-trafficking and victim services organization with more than 22 years of experience working across prevention, direct services, recovery, juvenile justice, advocacy, education, technology, mentoring, and survivor-informed systems change.

Brook Parker Bello

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