

‘Gift box’ introduces Pan Am Games visitors to problems of trafficking

By Evan Boudreau

Catholic News Service

TORONTO – With thousands expected in Toronto for the July 10-26 Pan Am Games, Faith Alliance to End Human Trafficking’s gift box project is aimed at sharing with guests the horrors of selling souls.

Designed to resemble an open gift box, those who come upon it during the Pan Am Games and the Aug. 7-15 Parapan Am Games are able to step inside the structure’s 161-square-foot footprint, where they will be exposed to the plight of human trafficking, the hardships associated with the crime as well as information regarding who to contact if human trafficking is suspected.

The project “will educate people about the very real, local face of human trafficking and empower them to take action to end it,” said Kelly Colwell, the project’s coordinator.

The gift box is on the lawn outside of St. James Anglican Cathedral in downtown Toronto, where it will remain for the games’ duration and beyond. Students from the OCAD University designed the box, which stands almost 13 feet tall.

Those who visit the display between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. will be welcomed by volunteers armed with information and ambition to spread awareness.

“It is an incredible visual that people will stop and look at, and then we will have an opportunity to have a discussion,” said volunteer Kathy Tanel. “I hope that it is going to serve the purpose that we want it to.”

That purpose is driving home the reality that human trafficking happens in Toronto, in Ontario and across Canada. According to the federal government’s 2012 National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, about 90 percent of human trafficking within Canada involves domestic victims.

“Many people are not aware that human trafficking is a problem here in Canada,” Colwell said, explaining why Faith Alliance embarked upon the gift box project.

Gift boxes first appeared during the London Olympics in 2012. Launched by Stop the Traffik and the U.N. Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, the project has since appeared in about 100 locations across four countries.

Sister Therese Meunier, congregational leader of the Sisters of St. Joseph Toronto and a member of the executive of Faith Alliance, called the gift box project a step toward change.

“Each of us has the power to drive change,” she said. “Our desire to raise awareness

and to connect people with resources is a step in that direction.”

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