



BARCLAY FERNANDEZ/The Facts

Community members watch on a computer what is being displayed on the virtual reality goggles Friday at Lake Jackson Civic Center.

## Virtual

CONTINUED FROM COVER

trafficking, everything that can lead up to it — sex abuse, spousal abuse, physical abuse, psychological manipulation, Stockholm syndrome. All these things that surround trafficking.”

At the time, the successful video game developer had started searching for a way to use virtual reality technology — or VR — to educate people. After his personal disaster, he made teaching people about sex trafficking his first project, he said. By 2016, he and Kevin Reinis, a technology expert, had co-founded the Radical Empathy Education Foundation.

“When you’re a kid, everything is normalized,” Cain said. “So, if there’s screaming or abuse in the house, you may not know that is bad. So we want people to recognize what is going on that is not healthy.”

“And most people seem to think this happens to poor people in other countries, but this is everywhere. This is happening inside families. It’s not like a panel van that drives up. This slowly creeps into your family. Someone needs to throw a red flag up because these kids need help.”

According to the Texas attorney general’s office, an estimated 25 million people are enslaved worldwide, and Texas has been a hub for all kinds of human trafficking for decades. An estimated 79,000 children are being sex trafficked in Texas at any given moment, the office states.

The scale of the problem is why Cain decided to take the Austin-based project on the road. His first stop was a return to his hometown, Lake Jackson, where the Civic Center hosted the debut of his sex trafficking simulation Friday. At the free event, people put on a special pair of goggles to see a virtual reality and “walk” in the steps of a 13-year-old girl who fell victim to trafficking.

In “Trapped: VR Detective Story,” players see where the girl is being held and interact with objects to find out how and why she became a victim. Through the experience, players will learn the average age for a child victim is between 11 and 15. They’ll also learn who is most vulnerable to being trafficked — anyone. Anywhere. From any background.

## TRAFFICKING NUMBERS

According to a University of Texas study:

- In Texas alone, there are more than 300,000 victims of human trafficking, including almost 79,000 minors and youth victims of sex trafficking and nearly 234,000 adult victims of labor trafficking.
- Human Trafficking reports grew 35 percent between 2014 and 2015.

Source: radiclempathy foundation.org

“It was kind of scary,” 10-year-old Brianna Humburg said after trying a demo of the simulation. “I think it helps learn how it actually feels and how to learn more about it and how it would actually be if it were to happen.”

Brianna’s mom, Missy Humburg, said she brought her two children to the event because they recently moved to Texas from Minnesota and she heard sex trafficking is an issue in the South. California, Texas and Florida are the three worst states for trafficking, according to the Hotline for Human Trafficking, and more than half of trafficking victims are U.S. citizens.

“I think the VR experience for this is great,” Humburg said. “It puts them into the situation. I think they got something out of it.”

Going forward, Cain is teaming with Donna Wenzenreid, another Brazosport High School graduate and founder of Y.I.E.L.D.ing Arts, a nonprofit that uses martial arts to teach kids how to gain self-confidence and exercise self-control. Together, the two groups hope to start implementing the project in schools.

“For now, we’re focusing on business people and testing to see what they want,” Wenzenreid said. “It’s something people have to personally experience. People bring their kids — daughters, even sons. Once they experience this, there’s no going back. I have no doubt that a parent can make that connection between their child and the child in the game.”

Ultimately, their goal is to make the game free for schools, law enforcement, nurses and any other groups that might benefit from the simulation. Wenzenreid also said she hopes to spend more time in the Lake Jackson area working with law enforcement to help them better recognize victims.

## Justice

CONTINUED FROM COVER

five years ago, said guidelines now in place aim to provide broad support to victims and extensive training to help them.

Today, the state requires advocates for family violence centers to go through at least 20 hours of initial training in victim-related services. Moore said the Women’s Center requires potential advocates to go through a 250-page manual, after which they take a comprehensive exam, all within 30 days of employment. Throughout their time there, they go through continuous training offered by either the Women’s Center or by the state.

“Obviously, our main objective is to help someone that’s been traumatized to move forward through victimization. We help them set goals to move away from that. We help them move forward if they filed criminal charges,” Moore said. “With victim services, the core thing we try to do is just to believe the victim and believe their story ... whereas prosecution has to look at it as a case and how to move a case forward in order to put bad people away.”

A detective interviewed Amy, the man she claims assaulted her and other witnesses from the party, including the friend who she says found her in the woods that night naked and barely able to move. The information investigators gathered was passed on to prosecutors to present to a grand jury.

In January 2002, without a rape kit from a hospital to provide DNA evidence and likely because Amy and others had been heavily drinking that night, the grand jury determined the evidence as insufficient to take the case to trial.

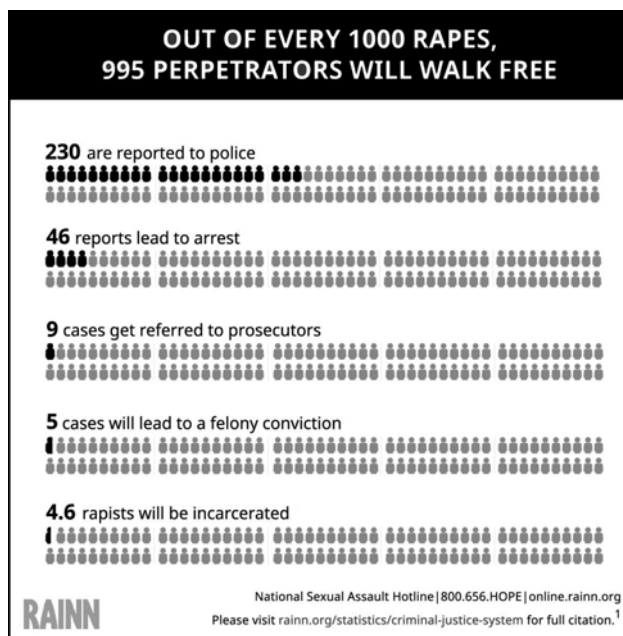
### COLLECTING EVIDENCE

While the absence of a rape kit doesn’t necessarily mean a sexual assault can’t be proven, it is one of the strongest pieces of evidence a victim can have. And, in the case where DNA doesn’t match the person accused of the assault, the DNA can be stored for decades in case a perpetrator later turns up.

Moore said exams by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, or SANE exams, are especially beneficial to victims because they make cases stronger and nurses can testify in court on behalf of the victim.

However, there is a shortage of these specially trained nurses across the state. In Brazoria County, the closest place for most residents to get this exam is at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, and wait times are from three to eight hours, during which victims cannot shower.

“Every emergency room is required to do a



## HELP AVAILABLE

- The Women’s Center of Brazoria County has two 24-hour hotlines where a trained specialist can help if you or a loved one has been assaulted. People can call 1-800-243-5788 or, for the northern end of the county, call 281-585-0902.
- Anyone suffering PTSD or with a loved one who is suffering can go to www.myptsd.com, an online forum providing community support and a 24-hour chat room for those in need of immediate help.
- If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or know someone who is, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

rape kit, but SANE examinations can only be by nurses trained for that and trained to testify in court,” Moore said. “We lost those programs in Brazoria County about six or seven years ago, and nobody’s picked them up since.”

The shortage has been a huge problem for not only the county but all of Texas for a long time, Brazoria County District Attorney Jeri Yenne said. There are many obstacles to getting nurses trained, starting with the high cost of the training, which adds no additional pay for these nurses.

“The training takes a huge period of time,” Yenne said. “Nurses have to be on call, the hospitals have to pay for extra time, and what’s required in those circumstances in the training is prohibitive for them and the nurse because it requires an extreme time commitment.”

### HARD TO PROVE

Sexual assault cases are notoriously difficult to prosecute, Yenne said, but that doesn’t mean prosecutors don’t make an effort to bring charges.

Of every 1,000 sexual assault in the United States, 230 will be reported to police, according to data compiled by the Rape, Assault and Incest National Network. Of those reports, roughly 1 in 5 will lead to an arrest.

However, showing the difficult in prosecuting sexual assault cases, only 1 in 50 sexual assault victims will see their attacker serve prison time, the data shows.

When alcohol or drugs were involved, getting a conviction is even more problematic, Yenne said, emphasizing that would be true for any crime.

“Truth of the matter is, each case should be reviewed on its own merits,” Yenne said. “The legal definition of intoxication is when you have lost the normal

use of your mental and physical faculties.

“Does that affect your version of events? Absolutely. Otherwise, you would think driving while intoxicated was OK,” she said. “When an officer picks you up for intoxication, they’re going to testify you lost your mental and physical faculties. If someone witnessed a murder, I’m going to ask, ‘Did you consume alcohol or drugs?’ because I need to know if your recollection is reliable.”

“I have a hard time vouching for a witness who was intoxicated,” Yenne said. “I don’t care who it was. If it was a witness to a burglary, that affects it.”

### FALSE ACCUSATIONS

A major fear for Yenne or anyone investigating a reported sexual assault is falsely accusing an innocent person, whether it’s because the report is made-up or, more likely, because the victim named the wrong person due to the fogging of their memory, she said.

A 2012 analysis of FBI data by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center estimates 2 to 7 percent of reports are

false. That statistic is inflated due to inconsistencies in why a department classified a report as false, such as insufficient evidence to give to prosecutors, delayed reporting or victims deciding not to cooperate with investigators.

While the share of reports found to be false is small, Yenne points to an article by Texas Monthly detailing the cases of 37 innocent men falsely convicted in the state for sexual assault. Ultimately, DNA testing proved their innocence.

The wrongful convictions were caused by victims misidentifying their attacker or being coerced into accusing someone else, but it might be years, sometimes decades, before it’s discovered someone is behind bars for a crime they didn’t commit.

A thorough investigation, including proper DNA testing, could have saved those men from losing their time and their reputations, Yenne said.

“I don’t take just the alleged victim’s word. We check out the facts and the circumstances,” Yenne said. “We’ve had falsified events, so we screen them and we’re not going to apologize for that. Thirty-seven innocent men were convicted in the state of Texas. We want to make sure our victims get justice. At the same time, we want to make sure we never accuse an innocent person for any crime in this county, not just sexual assault.”

Yenne habitually has an independent third party review sexual assault cases. These third parties review information gathered by detectives and can subpoena additional evidence, such as phone or medical records, before determining whether a case has enough substantial evidence. This protects both the accuser and the accused, she said.

“I want that independent body to have every piece of information it needs to make a decision. I keep an open mind because that’s the only way that justice ever occurs,” Yenne said.

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