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CAPTAINS TURN PLAZA RED TO STAND AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

STUDENTS, COMMUNITY COMMIT TO ERADICATING GLOBAL PROBLEM.

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | January 31, 2025*Read time: about 2 min*

As Kassidy Reed '25 carefully poured red sand between the bricks in front of David Student Union to bring attention to human trafficking, she thought about the countless victims who have fallen through society's cracks.

The red sand was symbolic, a way to show how critical it is to fill those gaps to keep people from getting tangled in the web of human trafficking, a global problem that is on the rise.

Reed joined fellow Captains, CNU faculty and staff, and Newport News leaders in the plaza as part of "Operation Breakthrough: A day of Action Against Human Trafficking," an effort to draw attention to the issue and provide an opportunity to come together with the common goal of education, prevention and eradication.

"It's very important to me," said Reed, who is majoring in [Criminology](#) and [Political Science](#) and is a [Bonner Service Scholar](#) who has interned at [Freekind](#), a community organization that works to end human trafficking. "I care a lot about this issue. It has stayed with me. I can see working on this project even after I graduate."

Reed is hoping to take her passion for the human trafficking cause into her career. Her goal is to work for the FBI and possibly attend law school.

The grains of the red sand represented human trafficking victims. The sand will linger in the plaza for months, serving as a reminder about dangers of human trafficking and the importance of being cognizant of the threat.

It is the second year Christopher Newport's [Center for Community Engagement \(CCE\)](#) has hosted the event in collaboration with the City of Newport News' Commissioner of Revenue's Office.

"It's an opportunity for our whole community to come together to show that we just won't tolerate abuse and exploitation," said Vanessa Buehlman, director of the CCE. "CNU is committed to community engagement and encouraging education about social issues."

The inspiration for the event came from Commissioner of the Revenue Tiffany Boyle, who learned about the [Red Sand Project](#), a national initiative, at a conference several years ago. With the rise in human trafficking, she felt it was important to bring the initiative to Newport News and to CNU to reach young people, who tend to be vulnerable to traffickers.

Pouring the red sand and working together toward eradication of human trafficking, Boyle said, "shows the power of us."

Later in the day, CNU hosted a screening of the short-form documentary, "Groomed," in partnership with Freekind. The film highlights the personal journey of a human trafficking survivor and explores how communities can work together to prevent exploitation. A panel discussion, with the film's director and the lead actor, offered an intimate look at a survivor's experience and an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about solutions to end trafficking.

The hope, said Adam Clyve, '25 [Computer Science](#), is that the day's events will initiate discussions and bring awareness about human trafficking. Clyve, also a Bonner Service Scholar who has interned at Freekind, is focused on making sure the message is heard loud and clear on campus and beyond.

"It's a major issue. We just have to keep educating young adults," he said. "We have to get involved. We're the next generation. It's up to us."
