SIUE's Giddens Teams With Baylor Mentor To Combat Human Trafficking

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Laurie Giddens, PhD, has combined with Baylor University's Stacie Petter, PhD, to earn a $249,998 National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to fight human trafficking.

An assistant professor of computer management and information systems in SIUE's School of Business, Giddens will join with Petter, Ben H. Williams Professor of Information Systems and Business Analytics in Baylor's Hankamer School of Business, to form an interdisciplinary team to propose solutions and training to empower law enforcement and other organizations to more effectively combat human trafficking in their respective communities.

Giddens and Petter first crossed paths as Giddens was working toward a doctorate in Baylor's Department of Information Systems and Business Analytics. They discovered a shared passion for human trafficking victims and survivors.

Giddens had a desire to contribute to the fight against human trafficking. "I learned that technology is used in the trafficking and exploitation of human beings through the recruitment and grooming of victims, and by facilitating the sale and advertising of victims online. We want to use what we know about technology to understand how these trafficking networks work.

"My dissertation research is on ethical consumption. It was a realization that I could apply my expertise to help improve the world."

On a trip from Louisiana to Illinois in 2019, Giddens heard a podcast featuring [DeliverFund](#) founder Nic McKinley, a CIA and U.S. Special Operations veteran. His mission is to end human trafficking.

"He spoke about technology, artificial intelligence and providing tools for law enforcement to utilize in their investigation," Giddens said. "What really captured my attention were the ways they use advanced technologies to conduct human trafficking investigations. I called Stacie, and she was also excited about them. We reached out to DeliverFund and asked to collaborate on a research project. We have been working with them since."

Petter indicated their charge is to focus on understanding three important questions, "First, how do criminals use information technology in the course of criminal activity? Second, how is law enforcement using technology to find criminals? And finally, how can we create interventions and resources to help law enforcement be proactive in identifying criminal activity and addressing these problems?"

In their work with DeliverFund, Giddens and Petter learned the challenges faced by law enforcement, which range from shortage of time due to the prevalence of other criminal investigations, to lack of technology including not understanding how to maximize high tech capabilities.

Cases are complex and can be difficult to prosecute. "Victims get moved from place to place, so you have to work across jurisdictions," Petter said. "We can use existing technologies to help discover signs of human trafficking and create an evidence chain that requires less reliance on a victim's testimony."

Giddens and Petter will form a team of individuals from law enforcement, the legal system, information systems, engineering, social sciences, economics and the non-profit

sector that will analyze existing technology and training methods to help departments use resources that are currently available and effective when used properly. DeliverFund has provided free training to departments and will combine that insight with Giddens' and Petter's information systems expertise.

Within the NSF process, Giddens and Petter have 18 months of initial collaboration and analysis. After providing their results, they will apply for a larger grant to fund the installation of their recommendations.