



United Way of East Central Alabama

Newsletter - September 2024



A Powerful Partnership for Protecting Our Children!



We are thrilled to announce that United Way of East Central Alabama's **HopeUNITED** has become an official **Community Education Partner** with the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**, the nation's largest and most influential child protection organization. This partnership is a significant milestone for us and underscores our unwavering commitment to combating sex trafficking and exploitation.

Why this Matters: As a Community Education Partner, HopeUNITED will now have access to NCMEC's vast resources, training programs, and educational materials, allowing us to amplify our efforts to protect vulnerable children and prevent exploitation.

About HopeUNITED: HopeUNITED exists to partner, collaborate, and provide services to help stop and prevent sex trafficking in East Central Alabama and beyond. Our work is twofold:

- **Prevention:** We focus on raising awareness, educating the public, and training community members to recognize the signs of trafficking and exploitation.
- **Intervention:** We connect victims with critical local and statewide resources, providing the support they need to escape dangerous situations and begin the journey to recovery.

Find out more about our *2023 Impact!*

bit.ly/uwecaannualreport

Did You Know?

In 2023, UWECA's **HopeUNITED Initiative** served **24 clients** preventing exploitation and offering recovery resources to those who had fallen victim to trafficking. It also provided prevention education to **1,725 individuals**. These numbers represent not just lives touched but lives changed—each client a testament to the power of hope and the impact of our work.



Upcoming Events



Randolph County: Campaign Kickoff & Day of Action • September 11 • 8:00 am
RSVP at: <https://www.uweca.org/randolph>



HopeUNITED: Introduction to Online Exploitation and Human Trafficking Class • September 12 • 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
RSVP by [Clicking Here.](#)





Focus Story:

A Ray of Hope

In a moment of desperation, Shayna reached out to HopeUNITED with a simple yet urgent plea: "I need help." This call, made from a hotel, marked the beginning of her journey toward safety and healing. Shayna was a victim-survivor of sex trafficking, and she courageously sought assistance while her trafficker was temporarily away. Time was of the essence.

HopeUNITED's team responded calmly, assessing Shayna's needs and assuring her that help was on the way. However, in the middle of the conversation, Shayna's voice wavered. "Listen," she said, her tone filled with fear, "if you find me dead, my trafficker's name is -----." This chilling moment underscores the terror and trauma that so many trafficking victims endure.

When Shayna was found, she had no clothes, was suffering from a panic attack, and was in desperate need of food. The collaborative efforts of HopeUNITED and Trafficking Hope in Birmingham ensured her safe relocation, and all of her immediate needs were met. Though Shayna chose not to enter residential care, she did agree to counseling for her trauma and returned to a place she considers home, supported by HopeUNITED.

HopeUNITED is honored to have been a part of Shayna's journey. As one survivor poignantly shared, HopeUNITED "kept the light shining on [her] darkest of days and spoke hope when [she] was sure there was none." Every individual deserves a life filled with hope, and through the HopeUNITED initiative, we strive to make that a reality.

Together, we can combat human trafficking and bring light to those trapped in darkness. Every action counts. Every life matters.

LIVE here.
GIVE here.
HELP here.



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PayPal: Give today by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR Code.

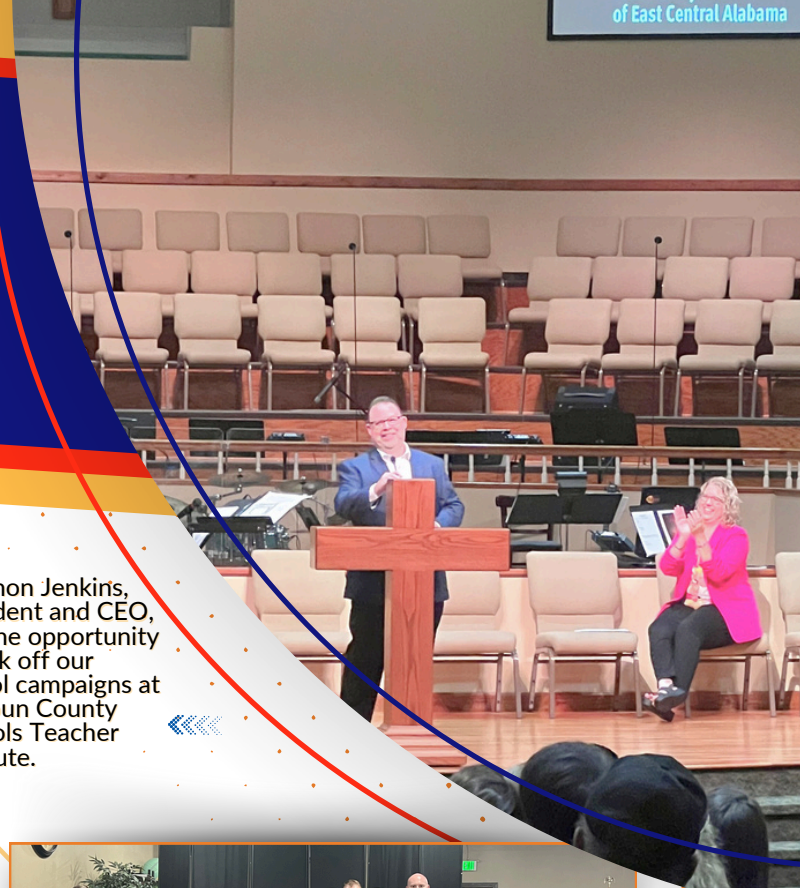




Recent Happenings:



Shannon Jenkins, President and CEO, had the opportunity to kick off our school campaigns at Calhoun County Schools Teacher Institute.

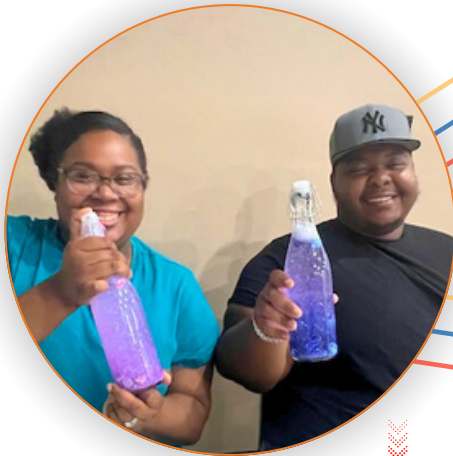


Our staff at United Way of East Central Alabama had the chance to gather for a staff cookout before our youth programs staff resumed with students for the new school year.

Hope UNITED



Our Women's Self-Defense class was a HIT to say the least! We are grateful to the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office and their incredible team for offering this event free of charge! Your dedication to empowering our community is truly appreciated! This event was brought to you by Women United on behalf of HopeUNITED.



Our Parents Summer Camp provided professional education on the vulnerabilities that expose their children to possible predators, as well as how predators gain access to your children, and how you can be a barrier to protect them! Needless to say, we had some fun and games along the way!



Recently, our very own Jessica Smith participated as a panelist in an impactful anti-human trafficking town hall in Oxford, Alabama. This crucial event brought together law enforcement, community leaders, and organizations to discuss the pressing issue of human trafficking and strategies to combat it.



Women United's quarterly meeting consisted not only of learning about how we can help our clients in need, but also a night of painting the "Angel of Hope."