**Moorhead police charge two with sex-trafficking 13-year-old**

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Prince Antonio Dequante Jones

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MOORHEAD, Minn. – It took just 12 hours.

Moorhead Police Detective Ryan Nelson responded to a suspicious online ad for an “escort” at a south Moorhead motel Wednesday afternoon.

Just a half-day later, police arrested two suspects in Fargo on criminal charges of prostituting out that so-called escort – a 13-year-old runaway from Brooklyn Center, Minn., who allegedly was brought to the area by the suspects.

The victim has since been reunited with her family, while the suspects, Prince Antonio Dequante Jones, 24, of Fargo, and Eyeesha Nicole Hinton, 24, of Minneapolis, sit in Cass County Jail in Fargo. Each has a previous felony conviction for other crimes in Minnesota.

“This job is not always one that’s satisfying,” Moorhead Police Chief David Ebinger said at a Thursday news conference. “But there was a little girl being sold 24 hours ago, and now she’s back home with her family.”

Jones and Hinton are being held for court and will be arraigned in Fargo before being brought over to Clay County on warrants, said Clay County Attorney Brian Melton.

Both face charges of first-degree sex trafficking. State sentencing guidelines call for a prison term upon conviction for first-degree sex trafficking from 7½ to 20 years, depending on an offender’s criminal history.

Ebinger said Nelson checks online ads on a regular basis to look for illegal activity. This ad was found on backpage.com, and the detective probably didn’t know the victim was a minor based on the ad alone, the chief said.

“This unfortunately is not an unusual occurrence,” Ebinger said.

The chief said Fargo-Moorhead is becoming a stopping place for pimps and johns between Minneapolis and the oilfields, and Melton called websites like backpage.com the “street corner of the modern day.”

Once police met the victim at the Moorhead Super 8 Motel, she initially said she was 18 and that her sister and her sister’s boyfriend were waiting outside the motel, according to the police report.

The victim pointed to a red four-door car outside, but that car fled the scene after she used a cellphone to notify the suspects that police were in the room.

Using GPS and cellphone data from calls made between the victim and the suspects, Nelson tracked the suspects to the Grand Inn in Fargo, where police spotted the red car and arrested Jones and Hinton on Thursday.

Ebinger credited his detectives for good “shoe-leather detective work,” and he said local officers got help from Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension agents who arrived overnight to assist in the case.

“I’m not going to get dewy-eyed about it. This kid’s probably got a lot of tough stuff she’s got to deal with,” the chief said. “But she’s at least in a position where she’s safe, and that’s a pretty good day’s work on the part of the officers that applied themselves to this. I’m proud of them.”

After the arrest, Hinton told police she and Jones came to the F-M area from the Twin Cities on Monday or Tuesday, and that they got a room at the Super 8 on Tuesday, according to the police report.

Hinton first told police that she had found the victim crying in a CVS in Moorhead and invited her back to the motel. Hinton said she had never used backpage.com or been involved in prostitution.

Hinton later admitted to driving the victim and Jones to Moorhead from Minneapolis, but said she was not involved in any prostitution of the victim, the police report states.

Jones denied ever being in Minneapolis and said he lived in Fargo, the police report states.

Jones was convicted in Hennepin County in 2010 for possessing a short-barreled shotgun, a felony. Hinton was convicted in 2013 for aiding and abetting in a felony theft in Ramsey County.

Although Jones told police he lived in Fargo, the police report notes that the ID that he used to register at the hotel had a Brooklyn Park, Minn., address.

Ebinger and Melton said in a news conference Thursday that prostitution is not a “victimless crime.”

Ebinger called it “modern-day slavery” and said even if the victim is of consenting age, he or she is often under the influence of force or drug addiction.

“The stock and trade of prostitution is a despicable, just a contemptible dehumanizing, victimizing thing,” he said.

Melton said working with businesses and training hotel owners and staff to be able to spot warning signs is crucial.

“I expect you’ll see that here in the future,” he said. “It’s something they’ve done pretty well in the Twin Cities area.”