

Human Trafficking In Your Own Backyard

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Robert J Marks:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your host, Robert J. Marks. With all the border crossings in Mexico to the us, we hear a lot about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a fancy word for human slavery. I one time thought human trafficking, okay, let's go on and talk about something else. But I met our guest today, Charlie Crockett. We chatted and he gave me a book called Surviving the Life, How I Overcame Sex Trafficking by Julia Walsh.

The book transformed my views on human trafficking. The book was by a girl with a loving upbringing in Texas who got caught up in sex trafficking. Human trafficking is pervasive and chilling. Let me offer a warning that some of the things we will talk about in this interview might not be suitable for younger children, but I would encourage moms and dads to listen.

Those who seduce young kids today into human trafficking use coercion using social media to bait their victims. And young people today are drowning themselves, of course, in social media. In fact, I got this one source, the US Government reports that the following statistic, "The average age the young person becomes involved in sex trafficking is 12 years old." The book Surviving The Life takes place in Texas. I live in the Bible Belt, Waco, Texas, where we're right in the middle of the Bible Belt.

In fact, driving to my church, I pass three other Christian churches. I passed the Landmark Baptist Church, a Bible Fellowship Church, and the First Methodist Church of Woodway. Nevertheless, in my community, there are kids being seduced into the bondage of human trafficking. I mentioned that Surviving the Life by Julia Walsh really shook me up. I want to read a quick passage from the book.

This is Julia Walsh talking. "While I was growing up. Our house was in the upper middle class suburbs, away from areas of extreme poverty and danger. My brother and I were carefree, often playing outside with the other neighborhood children. My dad helped my brother and me build a tree house in the backyard, where I fondly remembered many adventures. My family gave us wonderful toys and gifts. I was given the opportunity to learn music, to play the piano, read, and play sports. Sports like soccer, tennis, swimming, and volleyball. We were given everything an upper middle class family can offer."

This sounds like an ideal American childhood, but this young girl was recruited into sex trafficking. She had a brutal controller or pimp that would beat her if she did not do what he said. He even had her branded with a tattoo that told the world she belonged to him. Thankfully, she escaped this life and is now working with others that have been involved in her previous situation.

I told our guest today, Charlie Crockett, that I had a rough time preparing for this interview today, because it covers a lot of troubling things that are happening in our backyard. And that's our guest today. Our guest today is Charles Crockett. He goes by Charlie. Charlie is head and educational trainer for Unbound Now. He graduated in 2019 from Syracuse University with a bachelor's degree in human development and family science. He has used his degree to serve adults with severe disabilities in Boston, Massachusetts, and now to educate youth and professionals on human trafficking prevention is what he does with Unbound Now. Charlie, welcome.

Charlie Crockett:

Thank you, Bob.

Robert J Marks:

First of all, just give me an overview about your ministry Unbound Now. Tell me in a few sentences what your purpose is, what you're doing, what you're trying to accomplish.

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. We started out of really just seeing the issue of human trafficking happening overseas, doing different missionary trips and things like that. And then were birthed out of that hurt that you experienced reading that book and just being the opening up to the awareness of being like, "Wow, this is really happening." And then seeing it in our community in Waco, Texas.

And so our whole mission is to end human trafficking in Texas. And then, we have 10 offices, so we've offices internationally now and offices across Texas. We're starting an office at Phoenix, and so respectively in each of those communities just see human trafficking end in those places. And we do that primarily through education, training our kids to prevent this crime so they can protect themselves, training professionals so that they can protect their respective areas, law enforcement, doctors, teachers, nurses, hotel workers, motel workers, things like that.

And then we serve survivors. So any victims that have been already victimized by human trafficking, we can serve them with resources, provide advocacy for them, and then connect them with partnering resources to get them holistic care.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. Human trafficking is nothing more than a fancy word for slavery. I thought the 13th Amendment, the United States ended slavery in the US, but I read somewhere that there are about 313,000 victims of human trafficking in the state of Texas alone. Does this sound like a correct number to you? And how pervasive is human trafficking in the United States?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, unfortunately that is true. That's what we know is it's around 313,000 people that are just trafficked in Texas. I think it's estimated around 40.3 million worldwide. And it's one of those things that we just immediately think, especially in the states, we just immediately think that this happens overseas. That again, 13th Amendment, this is something that was ... that's just not happening in the US anymore.

And that's just unfortunately not true. There's about, out of that 313,000, there's about 79,000 of that are minors and youth that are being sex trafficked just in Texas. So it's a big, big number. And that's kind of what we were opened up to when we first started about 10 years ago, saw people getting sold on Backpage, Craigslist, right out in the open in Texas. And so-

Robert J Marks:

Wait, they were being sold? What would that consist of? What would they do?

Charlie Crockett:

I think for the longest time they've been able to operate in plain sight, just hidden in plain sight. And so we first started, it was Backpage, it was Craigslist. There were just ads posted just for as a covering. I think most people probably assumed it was some type of escort or prostitution or something like that. But you find out that these victims were a lot younger or whatever the case may be. It was actually trafficking situations most commonly.

Robert J Marks:

I see. I see. When I think of human trafficking, I think that the thing that comes to mind is sex trafficking, but there's other types of human trafficking. Could you kind of unpack the spectrum of what human trafficking covers?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. In human trafficking, it's really just made up of, there's sex trafficking and then there's labor trafficking. And so there are different types of trafficking, but when we're talking about human trafficking, it's typically sex trafficking and labor trafficking. And labor is really just going to be anytime someone is forced, lied to, threatened or coerced or blackmailed or anything like that to provide labor or service.

And then sex trafficking is any one of those same things. Again, this is all definitions pulled from just what we know is what the law defines as human trafficking. But it's anytime someone's forced lied to threaten or coerced to perform sexual service in exchange for something valuable.

Robert J Marks:

So these human traffickers, what's the power that they have over their victims? We live in a free country, yet they must have some way that they're blackmailing them into the servitude.

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely, absolutely. Well, one thing we know, I think a big misconception, something that I definitely would want to talk about here is I think a lot of, because of media, because of movies and TV shows, when we think of human trafficking, typically we think of kidnapping. We think to watch out for white vans, we think of people even maybe kept in a house or kept somewhere tied down physically with ropes or chains or something like that. When in reality, the majority of these situations aren't like that. We have one of the top human trafficking detectives in the country here in Waco, and he said that it's around less than 1% of these situations happen from kidnapping, and he's only worked one kidnapping cases in his whole career.

Robert J Marks:

Oh my goodness.

Charlie Crockett:

And so really these things that the power that the traffickers have over their victims is things like fear. They instill a lot of fear in their victims, threatening their lives, threatening their family's lives, the people they care about. It's threatening with pictures and blackmail. They try to get them to send them pictures or videos of themselves, and then will blackmail them with that.

It's drugs. They'll try to get them addicted to drugs so that they can eventually withhold that once they get them addicted and keep them coming back with an addiction. It's this trauma bond. We call it a trauma bond that forms when ... because the majority of these start out of a relationship. And so they build this loving, trusting, what feels like loving and trusting relationship with this person, and then break that with abuse, but keep the manipulation going, keep the confusion going. And so we see victims go back to their trafficker many times because of this confusing relationship that's built.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah, that's my next question. When you rescue somebody from this bondage, from this blackmail, clearly if they step out of the life, if they step out of this threat, that blackmail and that stuff still lingers over them. What do you say to these people? Do you say that you just have to swallow the embarrassment that you're going to get by seeing these pictures splattered all over the web? What do you say to them?

Charlie Crockett:

Well, thankfully, there are some efforts that we can give to remove images or do the best we can, especially if it's something that is still early on. If pictures haven't been posted yet or if that's just something that's being held over them, we can do what we can to try and get those back. I think it's really just to ... we just try to instill hope in the victim and tell them, but they're just going to try and leverage this, and we can do the best we can, but odds are they're going to release it whether that person complies or not. And so it's really just try to encourage that victim to not just do what they say, I guess.

Robert J Marks:

So you mentioned, and see if I got this right. Sometimes you rescue somebody who is a victim of human trafficking and they say, "Okay, I want out." But then they go back in. It's almost like an addiction, like they're addicted to a drug or alcohol or something like that. You have a recurrence.

Charlie Crockett:

Yes. Yeah, they say it's actually an average of three times that a victim will go back to their trafficker before they fully get out of it. So we've had many situations where victims that are involved in some type of a relational trafficking situation will come to us, will get services, will start working with us getting better.

We've even had victims that we'll help recover to the point where they're getting in an apartment and we're helping them get set up an apartment, and then they'll go back to their trafficker. They'll just leave, go back to their trafficker. And that's an average, just an average of three times. A lot of the times it's more than that.

Robert J Marks:

Oh my goodness. Yeah. That's one of the things about addiction, some of the drug addictions, some people have number of relapses before they finally recover, and they basically have to hit bottom before they recover. Do you find that is your experience, do they in some sense hit bottom eventually?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, I can't speak too much on that. I work with our advocates, but our advocates are really the ones that are working directly with victims. I would imagine it's something like that. But you got to remember too, it's with trafficking, the traffickers will integrate drugs as well. And so it's the combination of this relational, what feels like a relational drug, the pulling back relationally. But then it's also a combination with a substance they're addicted to as well. It's a combination that makes it really, really difficult to get out of.

Robert J Marks:

I learned from the Julia Wash book that a lot has to do with law enforcement attitudes. She was sex trafficked all around the state of Texas. Her handler, her pimp would drive her from town to town, where she would do what she did, and she would often be arrested for prostitution. And she was always treated like a criminal. And she said it was only here in Waco, Texas where she was taken aside and she was asked, "Is this what you want to do? Are you a victim?"

She was recognized as a potential victim for the first time here in Waco. And she was with another girl, and she was afraid to confess to it, because she was afraid the other girl would betray her, would rat her out to her pimp. She would probably get beaten, but they finally took her into an isolated room and ask her again, and she says, "Oh, I'd love to get out of this." And there began to be taken steps in order to get her out of the so-called life. So how does Unbound Now educate law enforcement agencies that human trafficking is sometimes a victim as opposed to a criminal?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, that's a good question. The thing that we've seen the most useful is to just build relationship with our law enforcement. I don't think any law enforcement wants to admit that there's a new issue or something like this. It's easier to go with what we've always thought, to continue in that this is just prostitution. It's easier to just slap on the wrist. But in reality, what we're seeing is that these victims are oftentimes getting harsher sentences than their traffickers, and we're seeing the traffickers adapt to this being a common thing.

So traffickers know this. They know that in a lot of places, they can just put their victims out in the open so that they'll get picked up. They oftentimes will turn their victims into recruiters. They'll tell them, "Hey, if you don't want this to keep happening to you, you have to go out and get me some more people." And they know that, so they'll put them kind of on the front lines so that they get picked up and they get the charges, they get put away, they get the slap of the wrist, all of that. And then the traffickers never get the heat for it.

And unfortunately, that's what it's been in a lot of places. And so the antidote to that we've seen is just build relationship with law enforcement, educate them on what we know and educate them on the signs. A lot of law enforcement may just have never begotten training for this, and so we'll provide that for them for free, just on what to look for, how to identify a survivor, and then where to go.

We at one point, we were creating a hotline for them so that they can have their own hotline just to call if they're on a traffic stop or something like that and they see something, they can respond to it, call and just call the hotline, and it can connect them with all people that can already tell them what they're looking at. And so we try to provide all the resources we can for them, but it's really going to be the relationship and say, "Hey, we're going to walk this through with you. We're going to be here to help you when you do encounter a victim, so that you don't have to be a counselor and advocate or anything like that, as well as a law enforcement agency. We can come and partner with you in that, so that you can do your job, we can do our job and really come alongside each other."

Robert J Marks:

Wow. So how can listeners learn more about Unbound Now and maybe contribute to your ministry? I'm sure you're probably a nonprofit and there has to be a way where they can support what you're doing.

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. So all of that is going to be, the best resource you're going to find is on our website. It's at unboundnow.org. And through that we have all of our offices, all of our things, and Unbound Now Waco

is going to be us, but any of our offices will be accessible through that website. That'll have our vision, our statement, what we do, and then all opportunities to serve, all opportunities to give.

You can become an, we call it an Ignite member, where you can be a consistent giver. We have different fundraising opportunities with different events we host. We have a 5K event we always put on every year. And so any of those are great opportunities to give. And you can see the work we're doing on that website as well. We have training videos on our YouTube. I'm on there as well as some other trainers. And so sharing that and spreading awareness is something that we always encourage and that helps our work drastically as well, so any of those things.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. You mentioned a hotline. Do you want to share that number and maybe tell people what they should call you about? What are the topics that you would be interested in becoming involved with?

Charlie Crockett:

So we have two numbers that we'll put out there. We have our number, which is our Waco number, which we cover six counties around our area. And so if you're in the Waco area, our hotline number is 254-414-0814. And then we also encourage that people will just keep the National Human Trafficking hotline number on them. I have it in the favorites of my phone. It's one of those things where you never know when you're going to run into a situation where you see something like this.

Robert J Marks:

Sure.

Charlie Crockett:

Where you identify something, you get that gut feeling on the highway or something like that, that you're looking at something you don't want to, don't know what it is, and you want to call. And we always encourage that you keep this in your favorites, because you don't want to be looking up something with bad service or in the moment and then miss an opportunity to share a license plate number or whatever that is. And so the national number is 1-888-373-7888.

Robert J Marks:

7888. Let me repeat those to make sure I have them down. We're going to put this information in the podcast notes, but sometimes when you hear a number once, it isn't good enough. So the Waco number is 254-414-0814. Is that right?

Charlie Crockett:

Yes, sir.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. And the national line is 888 ... is it 3737?

Charlie Crockett:

Yes.

Robert J Marks:

888? Okay, great. Great, great, great. And what are the things which people see that they should call up this number? I think clearly it's the victims of human trafficking, but if you're an observer of something, what is it that you observe that you should call this hotline?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. The biggest signs is if you see someone that's just overtly controlling over somebody else, if you see someone not allowing someone to pay at the grocery store or at a convenience store or any place, they're kind of withholding that person's documentation. They're in control, looks like they're in control of their money.

Robert J Marks:

Wait, let's talk about this. So somebody comes into a convenience store and they want to pay for something, for example, with a credit card and somebody's prohibiting them from using that credit card. Is that what you're saying? Or did I miss that?

Charlie Crockett:

Or I'm more thinking if there's, say two people there and one person seems like they're very overly controlling over that other person. And so we see this a lot of times in our hotel trainings that we give, we'll tell the hotel workers that this may happen where we both need to share names, but that person's talking for them. That person is kind of keeping that ... not letting them talk or give money or give ID, anything like that is going to be a pretty big indicator.

If there's just an overall feeling, it's one of those things you can put words to sometimes. Sometimes you just get that gut feeling that, "Hey, I think this person's controlling this other person. Any controlling indicators are going to be huge. And again, you mentioned with Julia that there was a tattoo that her trafficker had given her.

Robert J Marks:

Well, yes. They branded her just like a cow.

Charlie Crockett:

And so anything like that, the big indicator is going to be if you see somebody hiding something. So if a trafficker's put a tattoo on their victim, there's oftentimes going to be shame there. And so if someone is ... you see someone covering up a tattoo or trying to hide it, that's going to be an indicator that there's some type of a story going on. The tattoos that we see most commonly in trafficking are going to be the traffickers name or a crown to say that they're king over them or something like that.

We hear, pop culture will tell you it's something like barcodes or numbers. And that's really ... we don't ever really see that. It's mostly going to be something like a name or a crown, but it's also going to be the biggest indicator is them hiding it. And the same thing's going to happen with signs of abuse. So any type of bruises or scars, marks, or anything like that, and people hiding that is a huge indicator.

Robert J Marks:

I see. Because yeah, one of the terms I learned from Julia Wash's book was a Gorilla Pimp. There's different types of pimps, and one of them is the Gorilla Pimp, which actually controls their victims with physical beatings. So if you see bruises from that, you can say, "Ah, something is happening here."

Well, thank you, Charlie. Our guest today has been Charles Crockett. Charlie is the head educational training for Unbound Now. It's a ministry that helps free victims of human trafficking. And I want to talk more in our next podcast about the use of social media in human trafficking recruitment. We'll do this next time on Mind Matters News. Until then, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

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