

How Human Trafficking Flourishes in the Age of Social Media and How We Can Push Back

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Announcer:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. Charlie Crockett is head educational trainer with the organization Unbound Now, which aims to fight human trafficking and help its victims. Today we talk with Charlie about modern human trafficking and what can be done to help. Now here's your host, Robert J. Marks

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, quote, "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. We're right in the middle of the Bible Belt. In fact, driving to my church I pass three other Christian churches. I pass 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 remember 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 giving 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 that 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, an 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 we're birthed out of that hurt that you experienced reading that book and just opening up to the awareness of being like, "Wow, this is really happening." Then seeing it in our own community in Waco, Texas. Our whole mission is to end human trafficking in Texas. We have 10 offices. We've offices internationally now and offices across Texas. We're starting an office in Phoenix. Respectively in each of those communities you just see human trafficking in those places. 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. Then we serve survivors. 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, it's around 313,000 people that are just trafficked in Texas. I think it's estimated around 40.3 million worldwide.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Charlie Crockett:

It's one of those things, especially in the states, we just immediately think that this happens overseas. That, yeah, again, 13th Amendment, this is something that's just not happening in the US anymore, and that's just unfortunately not true. Out of that 313,000, there's about 79,000 of that are minors and youth that are being sex trafficked just in Texas. It's a big, big number, and that's 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.

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. We first started, it was Backpage, it was Craigslist. There were just ads posted just 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. 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 unpack the spectrum of what human trafficking covers?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. In human trafficking, there's sex trafficking and then there's labor trafficking. There are different types of trafficking, but when we're talking about human trafficking, it's typically sex trafficking and labor trafficking. 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 sex trafficking is any one of those same things. Again, this is all definitions pulled from just what we know what the law defines as human trafficking, but it's anytime someone's forced, lied to, threatened or coerced to perform sexual service in exchange for something valuable.

Robert J. Marks:

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 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 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 because the majority of these start out of a relationship. They build this 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. 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 stepped 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. 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. It's really just trying to encourage that victim to not just do what they say, I guess.

Robert J. Marks:

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. 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. 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 an apartment. 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. It's 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 a number of relapses before they finally recover and they basically have to hit bottom before they recover. Do you find that 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, with trafficking, traffickers will integrate drugs as well. It's the combination of this 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:

Okay. I learned from the Julia Walsh 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. 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." There began to be taken steps in order to get her out of the so-called life. 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 good. That's a good question. The thing that we've seen the most useful is 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. 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 on the front lines so that they get picked up and they get the charges, they get put away, they get the slap on the wrist, all of that. Then the traffickers never get the heat for it. Unfortunately, that's what it's been in a lot of places. The antidote to that we've seen is just build relationship with law enforcement and educate them on what we know and educate them on the signs. A lot of law enforcement may just have never begun training for this, and we'll provide that for them for free. Just on what to look for. How to identify a survivor, and then where to go.

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 and just call the hotline, and it can connect them with all people that can already tell them what they're looking at. 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, an 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. 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. 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. Unbound Now Waco is going to be us. 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. 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. 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. Sharing that and spreading awareness is something that we always encourage, and that helps our work drastically as well. 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:

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. If you're in the Waco area, our hotline number is 254-414-0814. 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:

Or you identify something. You get that gut feeling on the highway or something like that, that you're looking at something that you don't know what it is, and you want to call. 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. The national number is 1 8 8 8 3 7 3 7 8 8 8.

Robert J. Marks:

7 8 8 8. 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 2 5 4 41 48 1 4. 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. 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 sign is if you see someone that's just overly 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 withholding that person's documentation. It looks like they're in control of their money.

Robert J. Marks:

Wait, let's talk about this. Somebody comes in 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:

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. 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 you both need to share names, but that person's talking for them. That person is 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. Again, you mentioned with Julia that there was a tattoo that her trafficker had given her.

Robert J. Marks:

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

Charlie Crockett:

Anything like that. The big indicator is going to be if you see somebody hiding something. If a trafficker has put a tattoo on their victim, there's oftentimes going to be shame there. If 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. We don't ever really see that. It's mostly going to be something like a name or a crown, but the biggest indicator is them hiding it. The same thing's going to happen with signs of abuse. Any type of bruises or scars, marks, or anything like that, and people hiding that is a huge indicator.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. One of the terms I learned from Julia Walsh'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. If you see bruises from that, you can say, "Ah, something is happening here." Social media is being used to recruit for human trafficking. My colleague at Baylor, Pablo Rivas, just got a \$300,000 grant from the National Science Foundation for identifying human trafficking recruitment on social media. The basic

idea is this, we're all familiar with email, where you get an email and it decides whether it's going to go into your spam folder or your regular folder. What Dr. Rivas is doing is much more sophisticated than that. He's going to be looking at social media and deciding whether a post has something to do with human trafficking.

I think that that's a very worthy undertaking. We're going to be monitoring this, and as he starts to get solutions, we'll keep you up to date on that. Today we continue on the topic of human trafficking. Let me offer a warning that some of the things we'll talk about in this interview might not be suitable for younger kids, but I would encourage moms and dads to listen.

The average age, according to a US government document I saw, for beginning trafficking is 12 years old. This is just chilling stuff. By the way, I'm going to be offering some statistics and all of these statistics, if you want to find out more about them, we're going to provide links on the podcast notes. We talked about Julia Walsh. She was raised in a great family. It sounds like she had a great upbringing in an upper middle class. Her family went to church. She was involved in all sorts of extracurricular activities. She had loving parents, and yet she was a victim of human trafficking. That to me was just chilling. We're talking about the book by Julia Walsh, which we'll also post a link to on the podcast notes. What should parents know about the social media and human trafficking? What should they do and how could they become involved in their children's lives and prevent what happened to Julia Walsh?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, I think a lot of the ways that you mentioned are still great ways to create a good relationship between... Any way that you're going to create a strong trusting relationship between you and your child is going to be one of the best ways to prevent this. We know that now with the boom of social media, there are so many different places. When we first started this, there were a lot less opportunities for social media. There were not as many apps, not as many platforms, and we could list out, "Here are the ones to look at."

And now with the boom of all these different places, endless opportunities for social media, we've shifted to thinking more how do we educate these kids on how to use this and how do we keep trusting relationships between parents and kids or school counselors or mentors or whoever that is, a trusting relationship when something is happening. If someone does say something to you that you can have a place to talk about that freely as soon as possible. That's going to be the number one way to keep a child safe, is to educate them and have them and keep a trusting outlet for them to talk about it.

Robert J. Marks:

If I could expand on this a little bit. I heard a talk about the impact of social media on kids, not necessarily only human trafficking, but all of the other stuff. All of this other garbage that is poured into their brain. This was exactly the way the guy emphasized that you should deal with this. You need to talk with your kids. I actually asked a question, now I'm embarrassed that I ask it. "Well, can't you put tracking software on their phone to figure out what they're going to do and know what they're going to do at all the times?" He said, "No, absolutely not." He said, "Because as soon as your kid turns 18, if you're forcing them to do something, they're going to want to..."

If you prohibit something, it encourages them to want to do it. And when they turn 18, they don't have to follow what you're doing anymore. I even remember when I was a kid, there was a show on television. Shows my age. It was an old black and white weekly show called The Untouchables, and my mom said, "You can't watch this. It's just too violent." And even today, I think, "Ooh, I really like watching The Untouchables." Because it was something that was prohibited. The communication with kids seems to be very important, and that's what you're emphasizing here. Is that right?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. I think there is going to be an element of safety where you don't just open your child up to everything all the time, especially as they're really young. We know that kids are getting recruited online early.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, yes. Well, that's the other thing that he did mention is you do need to control the apps that they install on their phone.

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. And just be aware of them, for sure. Just be aware of them for sure, but that trusting relationship, keeping an outlet open for them where they feel that they can trust you, they feel that they can talk to you, is the most important thing, for sure.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, social media, what's going on in social media? How can my teenager be attracted into human trafficking with social media just by something that people write down.

Charlie Crockett:

The best way that I've found to describe this to people... Because, again, the indication for most people, especially in the United States, is that the thought of human trafficking is someone getting kidnapped, picked up off the street in a white van. And as a result of that thought process, that's what we're looking for, and that's how parents are often teaching their kids is, "Avoid white vans, avoid people offering you candy, and you'll be fine. Don't talk to strangers in person and you'll be fine." What's happening is that these kids are going on social media, they're going on these platforms, and they don't have any guards up. They don't have their senses going because as long as they don't see any white vans or candy or strangers trying to talk to them on the street, they think they're safe. What's happening is if you're a trafficker, pre-internet, pre-social media, the way that you're going to try and recruit a victim is you're going to go out, drive around and look for people's vulnerabilities.

You're going to scan for those, and then you're going to try and take advantage of those. If you see someone that's ran away from home, you're going to see that they need food, money, place to stay, relationships, things like that. But now with all social media, it's not productive for traffickers to go out and drive around anymore. Now, all they have to do is stay at home, make, say, an Instagram account, and then scan profiles. And typically on these profiles, kids are posting about their vulnerabilities. They're posting about how they just broke up with their boyfriend or girlfriend, trouble at home. Traffickers can message them freely as often as they want. And as a result, we're seeing kids starting to build relationships online, starting to talk to people, strangers, they don't know, and it's just becoming normal too. Kids have their guards down, and that's where all these relationships are starting off.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. What is it specifically that traffickers look for? Could you lead us through, I don't know, the sequence of steps that a trafficker would use to get somebody committed to human trafficking?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, it's really going to be... The primary thing that they're going to try and offer is going to be relationship. The reason for that is because it's a vulnerability that's shared amongst all people. It's something that they don't have to even know a whole lot about you to know that that's something you desire, whether it's friendship, whether it's a romantic relationship, someone who doesn't have a strong family relationship, anything like that, that's what they're going to try and offer you. It's a vulnerability that guys, girls have across ages, across cultures, across whether your family makes a lot of money or not.

People want that. That's the first thing, the main thing that they're going to offer. It could also be you see somebody that they come from a lower income neighborhood or family or background, and they can offer them money or a fancy lifestyle. We're seeing a lot of kids getting calls or... Not calls, but more messages, offering to be their sugar daddy or something, offering to pay them a lot of money or offer them fancy vacancies or a fancy lifestyle that they maybe don't have. Various different things. They just identify places where these kids have lack, either in a desire they have or a need, food, water, shelter, things like that, and then offer that to them is really their goal.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, I know also, a lot of these recruitments come during the teenage years when the hormones begin to kick in. My daughter, one day she just changed when she became a teenager. She just became rebellious, and she was really, really rough to deal with. And I think anybody that's had a teenage son or daughter knows what happens here. It got so bad, my wife and I joked that we might have to call in an exorcist. But then one day when she was, I don't know, 18 or 19, she came to us and she says, "Boy, did I screw up. I have a loving home. I have loving parents, and I'm sorry for everything I did." One thing she told me, Charlie, which I pass on to other parents, which surprised me. I used to give her advice. I would say, "First of all, don't make any irreversible mistakes. Don't make mistakes that you can't undo."

She would sit there and she would roll her eyes and not say anything. But when she did have her rebirth, when she came back to us, she said, "Dad, I want you to know that when you were talking to me and I was looking like I wasn't listening, I was listening." She was listening all the time. I tell this to parents because I think it's important that even if your kids roll their eyes while you're talking to them, that they're listening to you and you do have an impact on what they do. Charlie, what should parents do? Give me a list of things that parents should do beyond establishing that relationship with their kids.

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, I'd say make yourself aware with what your child's involved in, just the fact like what they're enjoying, what kind of platforms they're using. Because as long as you have that trusting relationship where you feel like they can come to you, you don't want to be too invasive to where that trusting relationship is compromised.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Charlie Crockett:

But to a level where you have an idea of where they are. If they're gaming, if your child's on gaming, the sites that I would always... One site that I do advise against that is a red flag is using Discord. It's a chatting platform for gaming specifically, and it's one that's very, very secured. It's got this ton of code that was created by computer hackers and other things that made it really, really difficult to track IP addresses, to track conversations, and to note who that person is you're talking to. You can remain

really, really anonymous on Discord. And it's really common that we're seeing, well, these traffickers or people that have bad intentions, in conversation, they'll say, "Let's just talk on Discord instead." You'll talk on there, and then they can't be traced nearly as well.

And the same thing, I think there's a feature on there where you can delete conversation from both sides, and so they can talk about whatever they want, share pictures, share all this stuff, and then delete all the evidence from your side and my side. There are similar features on WhatsApp. Any social media where someone says, "You know what? Let's just talk on WhatsApp instead." I always tell kids that Discord and WhatsApp are going to be two red flags for anytime you're in conversation with somebody and they say, "Well, let's just talk on here instead." That's a pretty big indicator. I would just, as a parent, be aware of things like that, Discord and WhatsApp specifically. Then also just who your kid's talking to, what those conversations are like, and then just keep an open relationship of communication, that they can come to you when something's weird.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Okay. WhatsApp, do they have that capability of erasing conversations also? Do you know?

Charlie Crockett:

I don't think that you can do that on WhatsApp, but WhatsApp does still have a lot of code security where it's really difficult to trace who somebody is, where they are, and IP addresses, things like that. It makes it really difficult on law enforcement to figure out any information on that person.

Robert J. Marks:

It sounds like these traffickers, getting back to the traffickers that are recruiting these young people, they're almost psychologists. They get on there and they know how to manipulate the emotions and such of the people that they're talking to. Eventually though, they have to bounce off of an internet platform and meet. Is that right? And when they meet... Where do they meet and what happens next for the grooming for the human trafficking?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, a lot of the time they will meet, but in today's age, you don't even need to meet to start becoming trafficked. This is a perfect example of how easy this happens. We had a case just a few years ago that we were helping with where this girl was just at home. She was, again, like Julia in a trusting relationship with her family, just not involved in trafficking whatsoever, but had met somebody online, talked to them for a while, and they groomed her to become... Felt like she could trust them. Nothing crazy was going on, but felt like she was in relationship with this person but hadn't met him yet. It was just a classic, you're dating somebody that you haven't met, but they're just online. What happened was he requested pictures. He requested that she send him nude pictures.

She felt like she trusted him, so she sent them. Then instead of now telling her that he loved her, wanted to care of her, all the things that he had been saying, then he blackmailed her for those pictures. He said, "If you don't show up on these webcam calls at this time, I'm going to expose these pictures to your friends, family, school." Et cetera. On these webcam calls, people would pay and request for her to do different sexual actions on these webcams. She started being trafficked right out of her room without even leaving her house. It can happen that easily, and that's where a lot of this is starting, for sure.

Robert J. Marks:

That astonishes me that you can be put in this sex trafficking position without even meeting your controller, your pimp, if you will. Boy, that's really chilling.

Charlie Crockett:

And it was very likely... Thankfully in that case, we were able to intercept. Heard that that was happening from one of her teachers who noticed that she was falling asleep in class, and we were able to intercept that. But it would be very likely that as that would go on, she would feel a lot of shame. She would feel a lot of hopelessness, and he would use that against her to then meet up in person, would be the next step. It's trafficking, but it's also... Can be like the first part or a step in the grooming process to meet that person in person. That could just be a stepping stone as well, for sure, in the process.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. Our guest today has been Charlie Crockett. Charlie is head educational trainer for Unbound Now. It's a ministry that helps free victims of human trafficking. They have a hotline number, and I'm going to share it, 254-414-0814. That's the number in the Waco area and surrounding areas. Let me repeat it, 254-414-0814. And there's a national number too for human trafficking. It's 1-888-373-7888. That's 1-888-373-7888. And, again, Charlie, could you share the website for Unbound? In case somebody would like to learn more, become involved or make a donation?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, that'll just be unboundnow.org. From that website, you can access all of our different offices internationally within the US. And I'm specifically in the Waco office.

Robert J. Marks:

You mentioned before we started recording that you guys are really, really busy. Are you also looking for people to help you out?

Charlie Crockett:

We do offer volunteer opportunities. I teach in middle schools and people can volunteer for that. I go in once a week to teach in juvenile detention centers to talk to kids. Both of those are opportunities to serve, and we have various opportunities, again, to get involved. We'll accept help in various different platforms as the skill sets of people vary. We can fit people in as well.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. That's great. Anybody can help, but I guess if you have some background in counseling or some sort of ministry, that would probably really be an advantage, I would imagine.

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, any type of teaching or love for kids or counseling, anything like that where you feel you can get across to these kids that they're valuable, worth everything, and that they're worth protecting is a huge thing.

Robert J. Marks:

First of all, a little bit of background. I'm going to go down a rabbit trail here, but we're going to bring it all together. This has to do with some of the work that I'm involved in as an electrical engineer, and it's

as follows. Increased demand for wireless communication continues to increase. Everyone is tethered to their cell phones and the demand continues to increase. I was separated from my cell phone for 12 hours the other day, and boy, you don't realize how much you rely on your cell phone until you're separated from it. Now, mobile communications needs spectrum. It used to be that spectrum was assigned for specific use, and there's a certain spectrum assigned for broadcast television, another for AM radio, and another one for military use. The US military uses its spectrum for radar and communications, but the spectrum is a finite natural resource. Use it up and it's all gone.

Because of demand of mobile communications, no longer is the federal government assigning some bands for exclusive use by the US military. Because of demands, the US continues to auction former federal frequency bands to mobile companies like Verizon and AT&T. They auction off this spectrum, and the auctions bring in billions. Because of these sales, the US military is now forced to share spectrum resources with civilian companies. And now comes the really sad part, or I should say the sadder part. One of the biggest uses of mobile devices is porn. 75% of pornography is watched using mobile devices. 10% of the top 50 websites is dedicated to streaming porn. The top porn website has more exclusive content than Netflix. More people view internet pornography every month than watch Netflix. Not only that, people view internet pornography more every month than watch Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined.

Every second \$3,000 is being spent on pornography. The prevalence of porn has hurt the US military by forcing them to compromise the use of spectrum. The military now has to share. And one of the large reasons they have to share is because of the increased demand for pornography. What does this have to do with human trafficking? We continue our conversation with Charlie Crockett.

Okay, Charlie, a large part of human trafficking is sex trafficking. Young girls are controlled both emotionally and physically by their controllers. The controllers are called pimps. And this is documented in the book that really changed my perspective about human trafficking happening in my own backyard. The name of the book is *Surviving "The Life": How I Overcame Sex Trafficking* by Julia Walsh. We'll make a link available to this to Amazon.com in the podcast notes.

In Julia Walsh's book, she offers definitions of terms used in what she calls the life or the game. That's the life that you live when you're under the control of one of these controllers in sex trafficking. The life refers to how she lived under the thumb of her controller. One of these words was grooming. The word grooming has been banned by some social media because they don't like the idea that kids purporting gender dysphoria or attending drag queen readings were being groomed for a life that deviated from traditional sexual identity. In human trafficking what is grooming? Charlie, could you address that? We know what grooming is in the general definition, but it has a specific meaning in human trafficking. What is grooming?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, grooming is really just the preparation for victim to be trafficked. It's the breaking down of what a victim already has, their resources, their relationships, the securities they have, and then building connections to the trafficker. I like to think of it as the traffickers building strings to that person so that all of the things that they need, all the things that they desire are all linked to this one person. That means breaking down their relationships until everything that they need relationally is coming from their trafficker. That means providing them a place to stay, their food, their money, possibly getting them addicted to a drug and then providing that for them so that the drug they need is now only provided by their trafficker. The food they need is only being provided by them. Money, relationship, protection, and love, now the only place they're getting all of those things is from this one person. And to leave then means to leave everything that they need. And it makes it really hard for them to do that.

Robert J. Marks:

I wanted to ask you about the role of pornography and grooming and preparing kids for human trafficking. The average age, the kids watch porn is really low. In fact, I have a relative, I'm not going to reveal his name. He was a teenager. I'll call him Frank, just for purposes of discussion. I went to him and said, "Frank, it's not good. You got to stop watching porn." Now, I had no idea whether he was watching porn or not, but I just threw that out there. His eyes got big and he looked from left to right, and he said, "Ooh, whatever you do, don't tell mom." It's humorous in one way, but very disturbing in another way that these young kids are watching pornography. What is the impact of porn on grooming?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, well, there's a lot of components to this. Pornography is used in the grooming process for victims to be trafficked, but it's also the main contributor to buyers. There's a lot of components to this. It's a very intricate kind of deal where... We know that 90% of these pornography videos is either verbally or physically abusive. What that means is the majority of this content is going to be overtly abusive. Any consumer of this, whether it's someone that the trafficker's grooming, whether it's someone that they're preparing to victimize, watching this is going to make them think that any type of abusive sexual nature or sexual... Any type of action is going to be normal. Any type of abusive sexual stuff is going to be normal. Them thinking that is preparing them to be abused sexually in the later future.

But also as someone watching this, you're now desiring, right? Because we know that just from different studies on how the brain works in response to pornography, is that it responds similarly to how your brain responds to use of cocaine, right? It's highly addictive. Really, you're drawn in by this novelty. You're drawn in by what you're watching, and then similarly to drugs, you're watching until you want to move on to something else. And that next thing we see it's usually going to be more abusive and it's going to be younger. And it creates these buyers, because at a certain point you can't build this addiction by videos anymore, and you seek out encounters and these encounters are typically violent, abusive, and young, unfortunately.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. Does pornography make it easier to recruit young people who have watched porn?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. Just normalizing porn means normalizing just young sexual content. Normalizing that younger people should be involved in just sexual behavior. But it also normalizes, again, this violence in sex, but it also normalizes the poor treatment of women specifically. There's a lot of young guys, even with good intentions, thinking to themselves, "Is this how I'm supposed to be treating somebody? Is this what people want?" A lot of young guys are even watching this and saying, "I just want to please somebody, but I guess this is what is normal. This is how I'm supposed to do it."

Robert J. Marks:

I've actually heard that porn is helping increase... Oh, how should I say it? A sexual dysphoria, because a young girl might watch porn, an early teenager, and she might think, "I'm not like that. I don't submit to violence and domination like that, so I must not be a woman." Therefore, they cross over and think, "Well, I must not be a woman. I must be something else." And they screws up their sexual identity. Charlie, given how the controllers or pimps coerce their stable of girls to perform deviant acts, it seems to me they could also coerce them into being in videos taped for viewing on some of the porn sites. Is this true? Is this prevalent at all?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. This is just another component to how these two industries are linked. Really, in human trafficking, a large, large number of these victims are having videos and pictures made of them. And because of the way these porn sites are set up, the majority don't have any screening for who's posting these videos, and they don't have any real verification of age. Actually, for those reasons, some of these sites, especially MindGeek, Pornhub, these big sites, are getting a lot of scrutiny, a lot of backlash and different legal issues right now because these are being brought to the light that there's been no verification of age. There's been no screening for who's posting. And a lot of these videos are people that are actively being trafficked. And what happens as a result of that is that the consumption of these videos, even if it's in the most innocent of senses. Someone just gets curious. Someone clicks on an advertisement that popped up out of nowhere and it brought them to this video or to this site.

Even just the views of that video, the time spent watching that video is actually giving those producers, those people who posted those, it's giving them money. Even those views that time spent is contributing to human trafficking. One of the things I always say when I give a presentation and talk about pornography is I tell the kids like, "Hey, even if I talk to you this whole time, even if I spent this next hour and a half talking to you about how to prevent trafficking, and then I went home and watched pornography, I very well could be contributing to the same cause that I'm telling you not to do." It's just that these two industries are completely linked. They work together to contribute to each other for sure.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. A couple of years ago I saw a post that the top porn streaming site, you mentioned Pornhub, removed 80% of its videos because of this backlash. The videos were submitted without verification and included children and rape victims. Now, when this happens, if you are a victim of this, do you have any recourse? Can you sue these big companies with the big bucks? I know that suing costs a lot of money, but is there any way that this can be addressed and brought to justice?

Charlie Crockett:

I actually don't know too much about this. I would hope so. I don't know exactly. I know it's tough when it's involved in pictures, media that's put on the internet. It's really hard to get some of that stuff back. The recourse is not linear, it seems like. I can't speak on too much of what your opportunities are in legal recourse there.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. It seems to me that there should be a lot of volunteer law firms that would participate in that. Just thinking and knowing about some of the people that are out there that are good people. Do you have any idea whether porn sites are currently using any sort of scrutiny in order to make sure that the videos that they are airing are not children or rape victims?

Charlie Crockett:

I know the vast majority isn't. I don't know if there are that are trying to take a more productive approach there, but the vast majority are not going to be doing that. I like to think about pornography sites and pornography, just the industry itself, if human trafficking had a marketing department, this is really what they're going to do, the way that they're going to advertise for what they're doing. Human trafficking makes over \$150 billion a year.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Charlie Crockett:

This is bringing in a lot of money. And the pornography industry brings in over 100 billion every year. And without having TV commercials, without being able to, again, post ads or billboards and say, "Hey, come and buy people." Instead, what they're doing is they're normalizing people to be abused online, and then creating this highly, highly addictive content for free that's unbelievably accessible, unbelievably easy to hide. And, again, like you mentioned, it's on your mobile device. It's like having the thing, the drug you're addicted to, always free, always in your pocket, and really easy to hide. That is a very, very dangerous combination. That's really how they're selling it. As a result, these porn websites are going to do whatever they can to make it as accessible, to make it as consumable for people. We're not seeing a whole lot taking a productive approach here.

Robert J. Marks:

You know, it's an old saying, but there's a special place in hell for these people. My goodness, what terrible things they do. Pimps and controllers in human trafficking for sex trafficking have been around for a long time. They use abuse in order to keep their stable of girls in line. And this used to be for individual sex acts. Now they're forcing these, I don't know, slaves, because that's what they are, into pornographic videotaping. They do this by coercing with love or purported love, and also gorilla pimping. Now, you were involved in Unbound... You mentioned to me, and I'd like you to repeat it. It's very interesting. It seems to me that you would encounter occasionally a gorilla pimp, somebody that had a propensity for violence if you were to try to help one of the girls out of the so-called life, out of the game. But I think you're not allowed to do that. How do you incorporate law enforcement then? Have you yourself ever become involved? By the way, I met Charlie Crockett. He's seven foot tall. He's very intimidating. I think in a conflict he would be. You would be good in a physical altercation, but you don't do that, do you?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny you say that. When I got into this work, my heart for this issue, and again, my size and just being a very larger guy and having the capability to probably win in an altercation or something like that if it came up. My heart for this issue, seeing this kind of stuff breaks my heart. Hearing about women, children, people that I really care about being trafficked and being taken advantage of and abused in this way, it really does make me want to do things like kick down a door or take out a trafficker or something like that. And the funny thing is that that's actually not going to be helpful in a situation where you run into somebody. Our protocol is always call the hotline, get in touch with law enforcement if it's dangerous, let them handle what they're handling and then just play your role. Right?

I've had one instance where I responded to a hotline call with somebody else on our team. And typically, if it's a situation where we think that there may be a trafficker present, there may be a dangerous situation, or we're not sure, we would respond with law enforcement or let law enforcement respond. We let them do it, and then they'll contact us when we can be involved. In this particular instance, we weren't sure and decided let's just go for... The victim was saying, "I'm in a safe place. I'm not with anybody." And we said, "Okay." I think it was 10:00 PM, 10:30 PM, something like that, and showed up. Everything seemed fine. Then as we went back to the hotel room where they were staying at, ran into the trafficker. While it's one of those instances, I had to remember my own training and refrain from any

type of altercation or saying something that could put the victim in more danger than they were in. Because the reality is, if I were to respond the way I wanted to in a violent situation or an altercation or some type of physical response, I could be putting that victim in more danger than they were in.

There may be way more components involved than I know of. Law enforcement may already have things set up or people that have been working on this that I could just never know of. The best thing to do for that situation was to remain calm, not send off any red flags for that trafficker, and then get that victim to safety as soon as possible, which in that case was the following morning. The best thing, we were able to meet up with them and that victim has been in recovery since. And it really is the best course of action to continue to just call the number and then, for us, get law enforcement involved as soon as we think something is dangerous so that they can handle what they do and then we can work with the victim.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. You met the guy, but there was no threats from him at all?

Charlie Crockett:

There were not. It was obvious that he was the trafficker, the one that was controlling and abusing her. You could see those things that we've talked about where it was obvious that he was controlling her. I don't know if he was sure or unsure who we were, but there was no type of threats on his end or anything like that towards us.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Something interesting. I talked to a bunch of phlebotomists. I give blood a lot. Phlebotomist is a fancy word for somebody that takes your blood, like little vampires, if you will. I used to be afraid of needles. It was stupid to be afraid of needles, so I just decided to look at my arm and watch the needle go in to take the blood. You know, it's not that bad. I asked the phlebotomist who the big chickens were when it came to giving blood. I have a son that just hates to give blood. It just destroys him. And she said, "Well..." And I've had more than one respond this way. They said, "It's usually the big burly guys with all the big tattoos." The ones that are huffing around trying to make themselves into big men. I imagine that some of these pimps are like that.

Some of these controllers are like that. They are really big around controlling and beating up the women in their stable. But when confronted, they are going to be just chickens, like the big burly guy being afraid of the needle. Look, Charlie, we've talked about some depressing stuff. We've talked about the pornography compromising, the military readiness. We've talked about use of social media in recruiting people for human trafficking. We've talked about the porn industry. We've talked about relapses. Let's end with some good stories. One of them was Julia Walsh's story where she recovered and she's out of the life and now she's helping people that have been involved in human trafficking. I wonder if you could share maybe some of the success stories that warm your heart and that keep you in the ministry.

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. I think that's a great point. All of the work we do is hope driven. We don't use anything like a fear tactic or a scare tactic to do our teachings or prevention, anything like that. That's not just an educational tactic, that's more just the truth, right? We come against a lot of these things. We see a lot of darkness in this work, but the overwhelming feeling leaving all of these instances with the victims is there is hope. We see recovery stories. We see victory stories in this stuff all the time. And whether it's walking with someone for years and years and watching them slowly, slowly recover and go back and

forth, back to their trafficker and back to them. It's forward progress. And I remember... In fact, one of the biggest moments for me in this work was we had worked with a victim who came in and he was about five years old, came into our office, and that was hard for me to experience, to see that that was someone we worked with and thinking it through. Yeah.

Robert J. Marks:

How old, again?

Charlie Crockett:

Five years old.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh my gosh.

Charlie Crockett:

And seeing that and thinking that through, most likely a family trafficking situation. That's the kind of stuff that's just pure evil, right? But thinking that through, one of the worst things you could see is that now the way I have to see it is like, "This person is now in our care. This person is now out of that life. It could have been years and years that they could have been in this, but now they're on the road to recovery." And that's just what it is. Even in the tough days where the victim goes back to a trafficker, and again, it's an average of three times, which means after that third time on average, they're staying in recovery. While it feels like relapse, it feels like a step backwards, we still see all of that as moving forwards in the progress. Even if it's not a linear line, it's still progress. We'll be consistent and we'll stay with somebody, and we see a lot of the time that there's victory on the other side. We don't get discouraged. We keep working with them and we're going to keep doing the work.

Robert J. Marks:

And I think probably a lot of your success might be unseen. Your purpose is to educate people about human trafficking, and possibly through that education you have prevented a lot of people from maybe going into that terrible area. The prevention is also a success, but one that's more difficult to measure, I believe. One of the things I think you do is you probably give talks to schools and things of that sort. Is that right?

Charlie Crockett:

Absolutely. Yeah, I talk in schools. I train high school students, middle school students. I go into juvenile detention every week. Talk to kids there, boys, girls. Yeah, talking to students all the time.

Robert J. Marks:

If somebody wants to get ahold of you or somebody else from Unbound, because as you mentioned Unbound Now has offices all over the country right now. If they would like somebody to come in and talk to students about human trafficking, is there a way that they can get contact with you or somebody else about this?

Charlie Crockett:

Yeah, the easiest way to do that will be to go to our website and you can request a training. You can look at our board and choose me. I'm Charlie Crockett, and so you can choose my information there and get in contact with me directly. And if you go under Unbound Now Waco, you can see all of our specific resources and get us over there. We can do trainings. All of our trainings are for free to provide resources to your school, to your community group, whatever it is, and get y'all prepared and trained. We do parent groups. We work with nonprofits, afterschool groups, CISF/FCA, all of the different things. We're pretty flexible.

Robert J. Marks:

Who is the most vulnerable? Would you say high school students, college students? Or is there no demographic that's more in danger than another?

Charlie Crockett:

I wouldn't say there's heavy... Being specific on one group like that. We see this happening early. As soon as someone's going to be on social media, again, that's where it's happening. Someone who's on social media, at any age, is going to be open to be talked to to be groomed. As soon as they're on there, the younger are typically more naive and more easily recruited. This happens across all ages, across all demographics and college, high school, middle school. I wouldn't say there's any specific age more so than others.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Well, Charlie, is there anything else you'd like to talk about or have we covered things pretty well?

Charlie Crockett:

I think we've touched on all of the important stuff that I would say right off the bat I think this is great.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, great. God bless you, Charlie Crockett. Man, what a ministry and what a difficult ministry. I imagine that this is one of those ministries that it's difficult not to take home with you after a day's work because you see so much human suffering and such... Wow. Our guest today has been Charlie Crockett. Charlie is head educational trainer for Unbound Now Waco, a ministry that helps free victims from human trafficking. Until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

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