



HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND FOSTER CARE . . . connecting the dots

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*Some of the most vulnerable people in our society are easily lured and willingly recruited into human trafficking. It's probably been going on for years. It's time to sound the alarm. It's time that foster care providers learn what to look for. It's time that **Court Appointed Special Advocates** know what to do when they suspect their mentees are being "groomed." It's time that child welfare organizations begin capturing images of the young people in their care so that at the first recognition that a child goes missing, the photo is uploaded into the national database of images of missing children, which significantly improves the child's chance of being recovered.*

*Vanguard University's **Global Center for Women and Justice** recently held their annual Ensure Justice Conference, where what many child advocates have suspected for years was confirmed: the majority of victims of human trafficking are current or former foster kids. In attendance at the conference were people active in the fight against human trafficking, people in ministry, nursing and psychology students, teachers, and a school bus driver. But glaringly absent were people from the child welfare community.*

*Conference speakers included Ernie Allen, CEO of the **International Center for Missing and Exploited Children**; Dr. Laura Lederer, founder of **Global Centurion**, a non-profit organization dedicated to eradicating modern slavery by focusing on the demand side of the problem; Lisa Thompson, the liaison for the Abolition of Sexual Trafficking for the **Salvation Army**, and the director of the **Global Center for Women and Justice**, Sandie Morgan. These esteemed experts in the field of human trafficking confirmed the facts, supported by the best available data, that foster kids are walking willingly right into trafficking. By the time these kids figure out what has happened, it's too late and they're unable to escape. They're held hostage, controlled by drugs, threats of harm to loved ones, and emotional bondage that comes from their inherent feelings of worthlessness.*

And please don't be one of the many people who dismiss child porn as "protected free speech" and prostitution as a "victimless" crime. Child porn photographs and videos are crime scene images—evidence of child sexual abuse. Our culture makes the commercial sexual exploitation of children acceptable when we assume that the young person pictured is willingly involved, when in fact, what is really happening is rape. Rape for the profit of the trafficker (formerly referred to as "pimp") who cashes in on the girls, and sometimes boys, in his "stable."

The Problem

The **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)** is a heinous crime that includes everything from the creation and distribution of child pornography, to live streaming video of violent acts against children, to people purchasing children by the hour from internet-based "menus of services."

Ernie Allen, co-founder of the *International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC)*, said that of the millions of pornographic images on the internet, 10% are of infants and toddlers and 76% are of pre-pubescent children. Just pause and let that sink in for a moment. The overwhelming majority of child porn involves young children. This is a problem that cannot simply be written off as eighteen-year old college students making extra money by posing for pictures, or by imagining that the youngsters in the photos are in their 20's dressed to look like children, or by the false belief that the images are somehow computer-generated imaginings. No, the children in the photos and videos who are subjected to the shame, humiliation, and physical pain of the violent sex acts being captured on film are real. Each little boy and little girl is a precious child.

And if there was any doubt in your mind about the extent to which children are forced to participate in degrading humiliating acts, Mr. Allen went on to say that 76% of all internet images involve penetration, often involving a foreign object, 44% include overt sadomasochistic bondage, 20% depict urination and/or defecation, and 4% involve bestiality.



Above: Laura Lederer, founder of *Global Centurion*
Right: Ernie Allen, co-founder of the *International Center for Missing and Exploited Children*
Below: Sandie Morgan, the director of *Vanguard's Global Center for Women and Justice*

Mr. Allen went on to say that the consumers are not who you would suspect—"They are doctors, lawyers, business executives, teachers, coaches and everyone in between. They don't look evil." Pedophiles have moved from isolation in a culture that shunned them and staunchly punished those who acted out their fantasies, to a worldwide, internet-based community of people who network and share images and techniques. Pedophiles now live in a culture that includes organizations like *NAMBLA, the North American Man/Boy Love Association*, which seeks the normalization of sexual relationships between adult men and boys and a justice system that often gives abusers minimal sentences.



Sandie Morgan, the director of *Vanguard's Global Center for Women and Justice (GCWJ)*, said, "Human trafficking is a business that is far more lucrative than the sale of drugs or arms because the children involved are considered 'reusable assets.'" It is believed that people involved in the commercial sexual exploitation of children range from organized crime networks, to a husband and wife team, to street gangs, to wealthy businesspeople.



Last year members of the Gambino crime family were indicted by the *New York District Attorney's* office. In Texas a husband and wife were arrested for collecting \$29.95 per month from over 70,000 people for images of rape and other violent crimes against children. With the help of the credit card company through which they processed the internet transactions, they were finally shut down. In Florida a ring of traffickers was arrested as they recruited foster teen girls from group homes. A trafficker in Orange County, California, recruited foster kids through social networking and texting; he sent bus tickets to the girls with the promise of a modeling career.

Sandie Morgan went on to say that street gangs recruit homeless girls, typically within 48 hours of the girls becoming homeless, with nothing more than a hamburger, fries, a soda, and the promise of a place to shower and sleep for the night. Morgan says that by the fourth time a trafficker brings food to a homeless kid and says, "See, nobody else is taking care of you like I do," the kid agrees and accompanies the trafficker right into a life of sex slavery.

There are *YouTube* videos that provide step-by-step instructions to would-be traffickers. One such video was of an attractive young college student who explains in detail his recruiting technique. In a calm, soothing voice, the young psychology student explains his use of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* to persuade young girls to willingly become one of the "sisters" in his family. He begins by explaining the importance of befriending a girl with kindness and showing a sense of genuine concern and protectiveness over her. Whenever she shares something that is bothering her, this is an opportunity to side with her and turn her against the subject of her complaint—usually parents, guardians, or foster parents. This system of agreeing with her and taking her side gives the girl the sense that she finally has someone who really understands her and genuinely cares about her, someone who will be her strong defender.

This *YouTube* video further explains that once the trafficker has earned a girl's friendship and gained her trust, he closes the deal by appealing to her need to belong, to be wanted, and to be a part of something bigger than herself. He offers her the opportunity to be part of his "family" and explains that each girl "must do her part" to earn money for the family. The trafficker explains that he'll be her "boyfriend" or "Daddy"; he'll protect her and make sure that she's taken care of. He takes her shopping, buys her new outfits and shoes, and then puts her "into service." This is where the instructional video ends, but where the nightmare begins for the girls, and sometimes boys.

According to Allen, a conservative estimate of American children who fall victim to human trafficking every year is 100,000. Mr.

Allen stated that some research suggests that the actual number exceeds 250,000. There is no accurate empirical evidence because within the multi-billion dollar industry that involves sex with children, traffickers don't file income taxes or issue reports on their operations and "inventory." But one thing we know for sure is that the majority of young people rescued from human trafficking report that



they have been sexually molested at home, many of whom went into foster care because of it.

Using the conservative estimate of 100,000 current or former foster kids and at-risk youth annually lured into trafficking, 60% of victims represent an estimated 60,000 kids who become sex slaves every year. That is 164 abused kids every day whose lives go from bad to worse.

A 2009 *New York Times* series found that many trafficked kids are not reported missing, and even those who are, are not being entered into the **FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC)** database as required by law. The **Justice Department's National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children** estimated nearly 1.7 million runaways and "throwaways" each year, of which just 357,600 are reported to police.

Pause for a moment and consider that last statement. A foster kid (a kid who has been abused and feels abandoned, unwanted, and unloved) goes AWOL. The foster family reports it to the placing agency. The overburdened government social worker hopes the kid returns, but sets the file aside to deal with the more pressing issues of his or her already unrealistic case load. In some cases, one wonders if some people aren't glad to be out from under the responsibility of trying to

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care for an extremely wounded and, consequently, very dysfunctional kid.

Now let's imagine what the foster kid is thinking. Can you imagine being lured in and held against your will (kidnapped), knowing that absolutely no one is looking for you? There's no search party being rallied. No detectives going door-to-door showing your picture or informing others where you were last seen. No SWAT team preparing to sweep in and save you. And there's no loving mother doubled over in the excruciating heartbreak that accompanies learning that her precious child has been abducted and could be in the hands of pure evil. You're in this alone. All alone.

Some might argue that it's really not kidnapping when the kid willingly gets into the car and rides off. But the same person wouldn't hesitate to call it kidnapping if his or her own child was lured away by someone who had no intention of ever letting him/her go free. Even if you willingly get in someone's car, when the doors lock and you can't get away, you're imprisoned against your will.

Some victims of trafficking report having been sexually abused as youngsters. They look at prostitution as a ticket out of the victimization they've experienced. Many kids speak of the adults who "took sex from them for free," and find consolation in now earning money for the

"family." These "compliant victims" feel slightly more in control than they did as powerless victims of their childhood molester. Some even see the trafficker as their rescuer, and are they are so willing to please him that they compete for his favor.

After a while, the warm and fuzzy sense of belonging and being protected wears off, usually not long after the first violent rape and beating. The victim quickly learns that

many of the people who purchase sex with kids her age aren't the shy, cute, friendly virgin who is so often portrayed in the movies. Real "Johns" often arrive with descriptions of or videos of violent acts that they expect him or her to act out. The buyer expects to "own" the child for the time purchased with no interference or restrictions on activity. The sexual appetites often include violent, painful, humiliating acts that literally change the child's brain according to the specialists in brain development of children at the **US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health**.

It doesn't take long for the new recruit to find out that the trafficker takes all the money he or she has earned. If she works up the courage to tell "Daddy" she wants to leave, she will typically be punished in a way that leaves a lasting impression and sets an example for the others. If she doesn't resign herself to her imprisonment by then, control through drugs and threats of harm to her loved ones usually lead to a sense of hopelessness. It's clear to see why most trafficking victims feel a deep sense of worthlessness and despair.

What's Being Done *The Innocence Lost Initiative*

The Innocence Lost Initiative was launched in 2003 by the FBI with the **Department of Justice Child**

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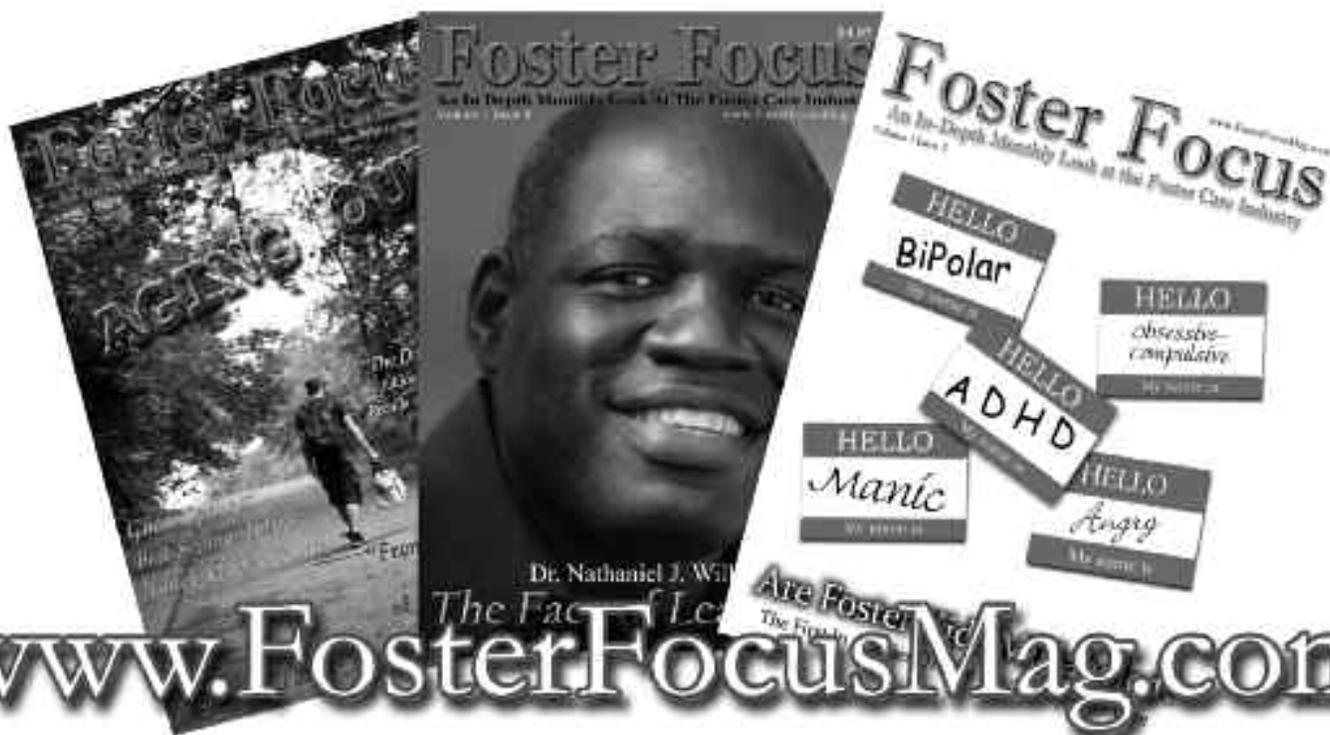
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Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**. It consists of 47 task forces that focus on arrest and conviction of the real people behind the commercial sexual exploitation of children. To date, they have made 1200 successful arrests and prosecutions; of those arrested, there have been 8 convictions with a life sentence. Of the 2300 kids who have been rescued, many had been reported missing, but most had not; most of those not reported missing were the foster kids.

Operation Cross Country Sweeps

Traffickers typically post ads online, schedule appointments in a specific city, and then move the children in vans from city to city, leaving town before law enforcement catches on. In response to their tactic, the FBI began *Operation Cross Country Sweeps* where traffickers are tracked as they move children from place to place and arrests are made.

National Photo Database

Pictures of missing children and of children thought to be “out of place” or “in the wrong place at the wrong time” are uploaded to the database and matched, thanks to a collaborative effort between *Microsoft* and Dartmouth College, those photos are electronically matched to images of child porn and violence that have been submitted by participating *Electronic Service Providers* by using *PhotoDNA*. Remarkably, the software created by the *Microsoft/Dartmouth* collaboration estimates that the likelihood of a false positive match is 1 in 10 billion. *Microsoft* provided this tool free of charge.

Anyone can upload an image or make a report of suspected wrongdoing any time of the day or night at www.missingkids.com/CyberTipline or by phone using the toll-free Hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) 24 hours a day.

ICMEC serves as a clearinghouse for digital images obtained from the www.FosterFocusMag.com

public and from *Electronic Service Providers* like *Facebook*, *Craig’s List*, and *Backpage*. Currently 80% of US internet companies remove images of child porn daily and upload those images to the database. The cooperating internet companies shut down users who upload these images based on violation of their terms of use agreements.

The national database wouldn’t be successful if *Electronic Services Providers* failed to cooperate. *FaceBook* was the first to use the *PhotoDNA* software, seizing over 81,000 images in 2011 alone. In 2010 *Craig’s List* removed all adult advertising content. The *Backpage* remains an international venue for purchasing child porn and for contracting for

and “new in town.”

Educating Law Enforcement

ICMEC and other organizations, like *Runaway Girl*, *FPC*, are educating law enforcement, juvenile justice, and child welfare about the special needs of trafficking victims. Some progress has been made in arresting the perpetrator rather than the victim, which has been the norm in the past, but there is much more work to be done. At present, ten states have enacted Safe Harbor laws requiring that victims not be treated as offenders.

The founder of *Runaway Girl* and author of the book of the same name, Carissa Phelps, was a twelve-year-old trafficking victim herself. She is now a lawyer who advocates for victims; works for their rescue, treatment, and rehabilitation; and encourages people to move from seeing the runaway girl as the “prostitute” who should be arrested to seeing her as the rape victim to be cared for, and the trafficker and consumer as the perpetrators to be arrested.

Runaway Girl also works to create employment and career development opportunities for rescued victims.

Following the Money

According to Dr. Laura Lederer, “The whole point of human trafficking is to generate a profit. It’s a business. If there was no profit in it, the people who now profit from it would find another way to generate revenue.” Dr. Lederer’s organization, *Global Centurion*, focuses on reducing demand. If the demand was eliminated, commercial sexual exploitation of children would end.

Obviously, all internet transactions involve an exchange of money for product. So it would follow that if you shut down the means of collecting payment, you effectively stop the sale and purchase of child porn





and trafficking of children. To that end, the **Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography** was created. The coalition includes 34 credit card companies, banks, payment companies, and internet companies, which cooperate with law enforcement by cutting off the ability of identified dealers of child porn and traffickers to process credit card transactions. The challenge is that merchant accounts with credit card companies typically give the merchant the opportunity to decide the way its company name shows up in credit card transactions. For example, a credit card transaction may say “XYZ Florist,” “XYZ,” “blooms,” or simply “flowers.”

It’s incumbent upon law enforcement to provide real time information on charges before the credit card companies can discontinue the merchant account. In an effort to do just that, many participating credit card companies donate accounts to law enforcement officials who then attempt to make illegal purchases using those accounts. When the purchase goes through, the credit card company shuts the account down. Unfortunately, this becomes like the game “whack-a-mole” because the traffickers simply start up a new account under another name without missing a beat.

When this attack at the trafficker’s ability to make internet transactions started to gain traction, the traffickers began to use alternate payment systems, like “Bitcoin” or BTC, which is an unregulated digital currency. Many have moved to a “virtual shadow economy” using “bullet-proof” hosting companies, encrypted storage, seemingly impenetrable fire-

walls, and “anonymizers,” which allow consumers to maintain complete anonymity. By all the traditional measurements, it would appear that the purchase of child porn and sex with children has been reduced dramatically. The reality, however, is quite the opposite.

Phone Apps

A number of remarkable phone applications have been, or are currently being, developed to help in the fight against these heinous crimes. One such application expected to be released before the end of 2013 is one that will be available to law enforcement throughout the US. The app scans the fingerprints of a suspected victim from as far away as six feet. The fingerprints are then uploaded into a national database, and within minutes the app advises if there is a positive match. If a match is made, the child can be rescued on the spot.

Another phone app, developed by a foster alumni in collaboration with the aerospace industry, uses GPS technology to direct homeless, lost, or trafficked kids to the nearest shelter and services.

Eliminating Law Enforcement Waiting Periods

Most police departments across the country have traditionally had a 24-hour waiting period before a child could be reported as missing. The *Adam Walsh Act* changed this by requiring that the report of a missing child must now be entered into the **National Crime Information Center (NCIC)** database within two hours of being reported missing. The

sooner a child is reported missing, the greater the likelihood of finding the child, especially if a recent photo is uploaded to the national photo database.

The Global Health Coalition

The **Global Health Coalition** is attacking human trafficking from the standpoint of it being a public health crisis. They are working to educate medical professionals on the myriad health issues surrounding the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including HIV/AIDS, STDs, mental health issues, drug addiction, and the consequences of forced abortions.

The **Coalition** is working hard to communicate that the rates of depression and suicide are exponentially higher among trafficking victims. They have a higher risk of heart disease, heart attack, stroke, headaches, chronic pain, and reproductive health issues. Their rate of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is estimated at four times higher than the general population and double that of combat veterans.

Reducing Demand

Global Centurion is actively involved in helping identify the perpetrators, exploiters, buyers, and end-users of human beings for commercial sex. Their goal is to eradicate **CSEC** by reducing demand. They gather data about laws, criminal justice and educational programs, as well as law enforcement techniques, with the goal of identifying and developing best practices to prevent modern slavery. They also advise policy makers and design training programs for going into “hot spot” areas where trafficking is likely to occur in order to enable others to identify victims, intervene, and create programs that help victims.

Sounding the Alarm

Foster Care Alumni of America is working to change the way the problem is viewed. They are working to help the child welfare community connect the dots between foster care and **CSEC**. Executive Director of **FCAA**, Adam Robe, says, “We are arming our members with the information to become spokespersons in their communities

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about the often invisible victims of trafficking (foster kids) and to encourage child welfare professionals and community leaders to take the steps necessary to eradicate these heinous crimes against their most vulnerable citizens.”

What YOU Can Do *PREVENTION*

Be Skeptical

Ernie Allen of *ICMEC* said, “Be skeptical.” If you don’t like or have a good feeling about someone who has access to the kids within your influence, act on that hunch. Don’t dismiss it as overreaction. It’s better to overreact and apologize than to lose a child. Allen went on to say, “If you see it, suspect it, or know about it, REPORT IT.” If average people pay attention, lives will be saved.

Create Relationships

Foster parents, social workers, teachers, mental health workers, medical practitioners, *Court Appointed Special Advocates*, neighbors, extended family, biological kids of the foster families, and classmates can all save lives by paying attention to the most vulnerable among us. We can all prevent a young person from being lured into trafficking by meeting that need inside of them to be loved and wanted and needed—it’s called RELATIONSHIP.

The obnoxious, defiant, or withdrawn

behavior exhibited by wounded kids is driven by an unspoken question, “Do you really care about me?” They suspect that if you are inconvenienced one too many times or are pushed a little too far, you’ll walk away just like everyone else has. To prevent them from being lured and trafficked, we must stick with these kids and not give up on them.

Helping to make a wounded young person feel loved and wanted can be difficult to do, but it’s quite simple. You find something good about him or her and point it out—again and again and again (caveat: avoid complimenting physical attributes). Finding the good characteristics about a person who has been abandoned, neglected, abused, or otherwise mistreated is like describing to a blind child her beautiful, shiny hair—she’s never seen it before. Foster kids may never have heard anyone tell them that they are strong, courageous, determined, tenacious, or resilient. They may not even know what those words mean; so in pointing out positive characteristics, you get the opportunity to explain and give examples of how the child exemplifies those positive characteristics. When the young person thinks better of him or herself, he or she will make better choices and, consequently, get better results.

Establish After-School Programs

Sandie Morgan of *GCWJ* pointed out that after-school programs can be part of

the first line of defense against traffickers. Not only does the after-school program physically protect the kids by keeping them in a safe place, but it protects them from predators because workers can educate the kids, get to know them, and create relationship, which is the best defense against the lure of predators. Building the child’s self-esteem bolsters his or her ability to steer clear of trouble.

RESCUING VICTIMS *Take and Upload Pictures*

Many people in the US have a cell phone with a camera at the end of our arm most hours of the day or night. We need to keep in mind that we can use that camera to capture an image of a young person who is alone in what looks to be “the wrong place,” or is out a little too late, or who looks to be under duress or under the influence. If we just have a feeling that things may not be quite right, we should act on our instincts. We can easily upload those photographs to the www.missingkids.com/CyberTipline or we can call 1-800-THE-LOST any time of the day or night.

Young Girls Seeking Birth Control or Abortions

One of the ways victims can be easily identified is when an underaged girl is brought in for an abortion. Many traffickers have brought in girls as young as 12



years old for an abortion without the abortion provider notifying the police. One abortion clinic worker said a man who looked well over 35 years of age accompanied a pre-pubescent girl for an abortion that was performed with no questions asked. At the very least, girls in those situations are victims of statutory rape. Abortion clinic workers have a clear opportunity to notify authorities.

We don't have to become vigilantes or get our Rambo on and risk getting arrested ourselves. We simply have to pay attention and report what we've seen, along with the specific location. Then we can let the PhotoDNA software do its job and let the trained professionals in the FBI Innocence Lost Initiative investigate the situation.

ADVOCACY

Everyone who works with children can be a spokesperson in his or her community to educate the public about the heinous crime of sex with children. Raising awareness helps to reduce demand. You don't have to be an expert to simply point people toward www.missingkids.com and www.netSMART.org.

Policy makers in child welfare can help by improving communication between stakeholders. People who interact with children should know what to do if they see or suspect something. When everyone is effectively communicating, the results can be remarkable.



Everyone who cares about kids can help mobilize our communities to become passionately indignant and to turn that white-hot indignation into action.

TREATMENT FOR VICTIMS

We must create real services for victims that address the unique needs and issues they experience on the long road to recovery and restoration. They need immediate shelter, longer-term housing, medical care, mental health services, education, and in many cases drug treatment. More than anything else, they need hope for a good future.

The good news is that trafficking victims are resilient. They respond remarkably well to Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). Research has shown that 50% of PTSD victims recover within two years. Another of the encouraging interventions with sexual exploitation victims is online therapy. One study reported that one hour of web-based therapy met the victims' needs better than traditional clinic-based counseling because it is accessible, anonymous and affordable.

REDUCING DEMAND

Our culture has made the sexualization of children acceptable. For example, in children's beauty pageants little girls are dressed to look like twenty-something models with clothes and high-heeled shoes manufactured in little girl sizes, and clothing retailers use provocatively

dressed children in their ads, all of which are evidence of the normalization of child sexuality in our culture. None of us individually can probably change this movement, but all of us collectively can effect change in our own circles of influence, which can converge into a powerful change in the way the world views children. If it doesn't start here, then where? If not with us, then who?

LET'S DO THIS

People active in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children are working hard to expose the seemingly upstanding citizens who think they are protected behind multiple firewalls and anonymizers as they peruse the catalogs of children available for sex. To effectively end this heinous crime in the US, law enforcement needs the active cooperation and collaboration of everyone who cares about kids.

The work of ending these atrocious crimes against children involves informing, educating, motivating, and mobilizing everyone. Every foster alum, every child advocate, every child welfare professional, every teacher, every coach, and every medical and mental health person who sees children must...

1. *be vigilant*
2. *report suspicions*
3. *educate others*
4. *empower kids*
5. *be a spokesperson in his or her community*

At the *Ensure Justice* conference, Ernie Allen closed his presentation with this poem by Helen Kromer, to encourage us in this fight:

*One man awake can awaken another.
The second can awaken his next door brother.
The three awake can rouse the town,
Turning the whole place upside down.
And the many awake make such a fuss,
They finally awaken the rest of us.*

WAKE UP

About the author:
Rhonda Sciortino, author of *Succeed Because of What You've Been Through*, is the National Child Welfare Specialist for *Market Insurance Company*. Rhonda is a foster alum who chairs the *Successful Survivors Foundation* and serves as a spokesperson for *Foster Care Alumni of America*. Her weekly radio show can be heard at www.rhondasradioshow.com.