

## YOUTH CORNER

This is Life; Make the Change

By: Kennedy Moore

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Human Trafficking is a perpetual danger that, shockingly, doesn't get the action it deserves. To be truthful, I didn't know much about it besides the basics of people being taken away from the lives they once knew to do sex and manual labor. I would've never imagined it to be the dark and evil web that it is, nestled into every crevice, even within my town. To truly understand, you **MUST** listen to those who dealt with it first hand. The pain, sadness, heartache, and emotional wear and tear are unsurmountable. When they speak, it's like it's only you and them and nobody else. I assume it to be this way because of the very real possibility of you being a victim and the realization that you're not so separated from this evil. It's critical to realize that this is a compounded issue. When pimps target girls, they look for those that are insecure, and self-conscious, those that "don't have the confidence to look [them] in the eye and say thank you" to a compliment. We also need to address the fact how generational trauma feeds into trafficking and makes it easier for the trafficker.

Generational trauma can include a slew of things ranging from drug and alcohol abuse, child neglect and abuse, and domestic violence. These girls and boys are hardly told that they are enough, that they are worthy of love, beautiful, and strong.

All they know is a family that is supposed to care for them, yet doesn't show it. As said at the UNT Anti-Human Trafficking conference, "the trauma of others dictates our actions for the future." Not to say that it is right, or should be this way, but it is undeniable to say that we as humans are creatures of habit and we simply do not know what we don't know. We fall in pattern with those we are surrounded by. Those generational traumas, especially in minority groups, fall onto us. Like chains, we are expected to bear. In this vulnerable state, those normal teenage feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness are amplified times 1000x. We begin to ask ourselves, "why did my mother not care enough for me to stop doing drugs." "He says he loves me yet he hits and abuses me." "Is this what I deserve?" To combat this issue we need to focus on Education. Not only for survivors but for those that haven't had to deal with this. Many times people dismiss the voices of those being oppressed because they simply don't understand.

Secluded by their privilege, they look at the world and assume that it's not a problem, or more scarily, it could never happen to them or their loved ones. Again, I fell into the latter category. My benevolence and lack of education blinded me from the realness of an encounter I had.

I was approached by an adult janitor in the middle of swim practice. It was just me and him in a locker room. I tried walking away because my gut was unsettled by his presence. He walked towards me and told me how beautiful I was, proceeding to ask me how old I was and where I was from. I was stunned. I regard myself as a confident and loud person and believed that if ever in a situation like this one, I could easily stand my ground. I couldn't. I was scared, stammering quite literally. I ran. That day I went immediately back to practice as nothing happened. I thought about it and deep down I felt gross. I was trying to convince myself that I was being dramatic. I was angry because why couldn't I take a compliment? The grooming process plays on the little encounters. Traffickers look to find a need. To see what you crave and give attention to that.

Kara Doan, the co-founder of Restoration 61, talked about the strategy of a pimp she talked to. Stalking at the local mall, observing the crowds of young girls. Seeing who was pushed to the back, tugging at her clothes and hair. He finds any way to intervene. Usually "bumping into them at a food kiosk." He asserts himself by saying sorry and then proceeds to compliment her on her hair, eyes, and clothes. From there he begins to be your confidant. Slowly building trust and a relationship. Over time they isolate you from your loved ones, telling you how "they [ your family and friends] couldn't understand you, but I could." Later on, the abuse sets in, at first, little things, but with the accumulation of isolation and a record of petty crimes, they're the only ones you got. We need to educate young people about their predatory behaviors. Like a lion on the prowl, a trafficker stalks its prey,

lurking in the background when you don't even notice it. I realized, then, that that man was always in the background. He always went out of his way to acknowledge me and say hi. I dismissed his constant presence and attention to causal, nice behavior and doing his job. In my head, he was doing the thing he was hired to do. I didn't know then what his true intentions were. It's truly disappointing how society doesn't protect the ones that need it. Time and time again, the government fails to ensure the safety of those that it says it will "serve and protect." Native American people are more disproportionately trafficked than any other race group. Their constant neglect is at the hands of whatever underwhelming reason. "40% of women involved in sex trafficking identify as AI/AN [American Indian/American Native]," yet natives represent only 1.3% of the US population according to the US Census Bureau. With natives living on the reservation, they have a tribal government that handles all their smaller issues on the land, but in cases of homicide, rape, and abduction, that is in the hands of the state and US government. Many speakers at the UNT Anti-Human Trafficking Conference spoke about their experience dealing with law enforcement and living on the reservation. Many times law enforcement will wash their hands clean from the issue because there are, apparently, too many bylaws, or in cases of homicide, rape, or trafficking, blame the victim because of records of running away or petty crimes, and, furthermore, would mess up the evidence, invalidating the entire case and the family of the victims never receiving justice. We search to find an explanation for this indolence, hoping for something that makes sense in light of this issue, but it's

crystal clear that the only factor keeping these victims from receiving proper action and justice is because of them being native. It is bold to assume that there are racist intentions, but it is a fact that native people have been abused, oppressed, and underrepresented time and time again, and sadly, history proves to be right again. This is an unnerving topic and it feels safer to push it aside and ignore it, but said concisely and perfectly by speaker Summer Flores, “this is life and has been for years,” and the change starts with you.

