

Stolen Hopes - Stolen Dreams

How we fail to see the horrors that children are facing all around the world, and how we can help them.

By Carey Ritter



My story - Your story

I walk down the creaky wooden stairs, down the hall and into the bright kitchen, alive with the radiant clanks of silverware being set on the table, the sizzling of the vegetables on the stove, and the warm inviting voices of my family.

Meanwhile 5,109 miles away in Lithuania a 15 year old girl named Oreta ignites her cigarette and steps into the cab, her skinny beaten legs cold against the leather seat. She and her friends are on their way to what they think is a fun night out with Oreta's sister, but it turns into one of the scariest moments of her life.

For most people some of the scariest things that we face are yelling at our siblings and waiting for our parents reaction or getting a bad grade on a test. Unlike us, Oreta's life has been one struggle after the other. Her parents were alcoholics, so she was sent to a children's home at a young age. There she was beaten, but at age 15 she was finally able to escape. Then was caught by a mysterious man and sold into prostitution. After she bolted away from the awful man, she went to live with her four friends.

Now she is pinned up against the cold metal wall of the dark and murky van, speeding off to who knows where. Yet again sold into prostitution. She is 15 and hopes to have a long happy life ahead of her. What could happen to make people want to do this? Little do we know that she is just one of the many girls that are forced and sold into prostitution. Child Trafficking is a significant problem today, and we can combat the silence by raising money and awareness to donate to the charity Stolen Youth.

It could be me - It could be you

So what is child trafficking? Is it really a problem? According to The Ark Of Hope For Children:

- 600,000 to 800,000 women, and children are bought and sold across international borders every year, and exploited for forced labor or commercial sex.
- It is estimated that 76 percent of transactions for sex with underage girls start on the internet.
- There are 20.9 million victims of trafficking worldwide as of 2012.
- 1.5 million of those are in the United States.

Imagine all of the people who live in Wyoming come to meet in one place, all of those people, and a couple thousand more have been bought and sold throughout the world. Five hundred and thirty two thousand of those people are underage girls, who were just browsing around on social media, when they get a text, "Want to meet up tomorrow?" They listen to the text and meet a man. He shoves them in a van and takes off. He is preying on their vulnerability. This proves that child trafficking is a problem because more girls than the entire population of Wyoming are being affected by this issue, and girls are being tricked into believing that this is a better life than the one they are experiencing.

Secure - Insecure

Child Trafficking has become a significant problem today since the majority of people are not acknowledging the issue. Child Trafficking must be stopped, but to do so we need to identify and understand the cause. "Abuse and indoctrination, mixed with alcohol and drug addiction, enable traffickers to enslave these children for years" (Busuttil). Drugs and alcohol are some of the world's biggest issues. When people and drugs meet, they can cause people to do awful, harmful actions, such as taking children away from their homes, and keeping them locked up for years.



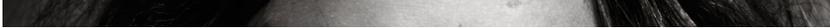
While I am playing soccer here in Jackson Hole, kids all across the world are being bought, and sold into prostitution. Child trafficking is still a major issue today because we have to know how to identify the perpetrator, and the things that are causing people to act, and do things like this.

My family - Your family

"I am free, I am finally free!" Now what? According to End Slavery Now:

"Society prescribed labels for those in the sex industry are often degrading, and children feel as if they can't live a normal life anymore. In some cases and in many cultures, children, particularly girls, that have been sexually violated are no longer accepted in their families or communities because they are seen as tainted."

To be degraded is to be looked down on, causing a loss of self respect. Most children who are forced into sex trafficking are not appreciated by their families or community anymore, and being called tainted, which means they are contaminating or polluting something. This is degrading for them, because they have just been forced to do



unimaginable work, and when they are finally free to go home to their own family, no one is there to help them move on with their life. This is affecting millions of children in our world and we need to be more aware, so we can help them gain their respect and normal life back.

Support - Neglect

If I were you I would be a little overwhelmed right about now.

Child trafficking is a real and current issue. Some people may argue that this issue is only happening in specific parts of the world, or it is in the past, but we need to face the reality that child trafficking is a current issue and happening all around us. In order to prevent this problem we can raise awareness, and help raise money for Stolen Youth.

“Upon our return, we realized that we have a horrific problem here in our own backyard. A recent study identified that Seattle has one of the top twenty worst records for the sexual exploitation of children in the United States. This was our call to action and Stolen Youth was born. If a tiny group of people in India can make a difference with the humblest amount of resources, then we must be able to effectively deal with this problem here where we have so many more resources. With your involvement, Stolen Youth can raise funds and awareness, advocate and educate, support and empower each and every one of these children who desperately need our help.” (Stolen Youth).

There are many solutions to combat child trafficking. Stolen Youth, an organization based out of Seattle, has some of the best solutions to help this cause. After some child trafficking stories all around the world got out, a lot of people realized that this issue actually exists, and it can happen anywhere in the world.

Some people took action. They started researching, and found out that their home city of Seattle was ranked the top city in the country to have issues with sexual exploitation. So the organization Stolen Youth was born. They do not go out and physically try to find the children, instead they raise money for the children. Sometimes the children find them. They ask for support, whether it is therapy, or issues at home. Stolen Youth has raised a lot of money, to support these children. They are helping children all throughout Seattle. We can't let this one organization do all of the work, we need people to be aware and start fighting for this cause.

Our work - Their work

In conclusion, raising money and awareness for Stolen Youth is the only way to rescue these girls from the horror they have, or are about to face. By raising money for these children who need help, we can work together and help put a stop to this tragic issue of child trafficking. You must understand that it's not just the responsibility of Stolen Youth to prevent child trafficking. If we want to stop this issue, then **everyone** must take a stand, and scare themselves silly. Stolen Youth not just symbolizes gut, but hard work, perseverance, and to fight for what is right.



Stolen Youth's Mission:

"Raising funds and awareness to support the rescue and recovery of our community's sexually exploited youth."

This organization is so amazing that my partner Sydney Wilmot, and I decided to have a bake sale, raising money for this organization.

It was May 6th, I thumped down into the hard metal chairs. Sydney and I had just set up. I looked at the cookies, brownies, lemon bars, cupcakes, banana bread, and rice krispies we had made this morning. My stomach churned, the nervousness that I had felt earlier today was rising again. What if no one came? What if people don't even care about this issue? I pushed those thoughts away, and thought about the poor children out there who need help. While we are here surrounded with baked goods oblivious to the world around us, Oreta is speeding off in a dark van with random men who just plucked her off the street. Sitting in front of the Whole Grocer for 3 hours, I handed out brochures, answered questions people had, and gave them delicious baked goods. Surprisingly in the end we had a total of \$324.69. Maybe people really want to do something about this topic. We received a ton of great feedback from our customers, and one man in particular could

really relate to our issue.



"I really appreciate the work you are doing! I have worked with troubled youth myself, so I understand why you are doing this." (Customer).

The money we earned will help some children find their families, or educate some schools about this issue. But this is not a one time thing, in the future I will continue donating to Stolen Youth, and raise awareness about this cause. Dalai Lama once said that,

"The purpose of our lives is to be happy."

If the purpose of our lives is to be happy, then everyone in the world deserves to be happy. The kids who are forced into child trafficking are afraid, abandon, and unhappy. We can help make them and ourselves happy by donating and raising awareness about [Stolen Youth](#).

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Photo Sources:

Photo One

Photo Two

Photo Three

