

Connecting The Dots Of
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
From Foster Care
with
Rhonda Sciortino & Sandie Morgan

**In This
Edition:**

**Keeping Our Kids
Off The Streets**



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Live2Free.org

There is an old story about villagers who were out having their annual picnic near the river. They were eating and playing and laughing when suddenly one of the villagers looked at the river and exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, there's a baby floating down the river!" He quickly waded out into the water and rescued the baby, after which everyone rejoiced. He no sooner handed the baby to his wife to include in their family than another baby came floating down the river, and another, and then two more, and soon many more babies were floating down the river.

Before long, all the villagers had formed a production line of sorts, plucking babies out of the river and passing them to people along the line until they were with a family that would include the baby as their own. The villagers were working hard to save all the babies when one woman noticed that two of the villagers were walking away. It looked as though they had quit the work of saving babies. Wasn't it important enough to them? Wasn't it the noblest work?

The woman continued saving babies while she watched the two villagers getting smaller and smaller as they walked along the banks of the river. Before long, the number of babies floating down the river diminished, and soon there were no more. As the villagers were celebrating their good work and the blessings of their expanded families, the two villagers who had walked away returned. They told of how they had walked up the river until they found the source of the floating babies, and then they helped resolve the issue at its root.

That story, particularly that of the villagers who walked upriver, is symbolic of the work of Sandie Morgan and Vanguard University's Global Center for Women and Justice. Sandie and her students study the issues to identify root causes. She and the GCWJ bring key leaders together to strategize on actions on the pivotal points at which a change can mean everything.

I appreciate the good work of the villagers who give their lives to help rescue children who've been abandoned, neglected, and abused. People like Mark Tennant and his team at Arrow Child & Family Ministries who care for kids and families through Arrow programs and who rescue trafficking victims at Freedom Place, and good people like Dr. Jeremy Kohomban at Children's Village in New York, Connie Clendenan at Valley Teen Ranch in California, and Amelia Franck Meyer at ANU Family Services in Minnesota and Wisconsin, all who work with kids and families. And I cannot emphasize enough the amazing selflessness of good foster parents like Irene Clements and so many others throughout the US who quietly provide what I call "radical hospitality" to kids who have been abandoned, neglected, and abused.

Let's walk upstream for a moment to try to connect some additional dots. We know that the majority of rescued domestic minor trafficking victims report having been abused as children. We also know that traffickers look for homeless kids, presumably because they're the easiest to recruit. So, let's turn our attention this month to the homeless kids in communities all over the country. Why are they homeless? How can we prevent them from becoming homeless and thereby reduce the chances of them being trafficked?

California Homeless Youth Project reports that homeless kids overwhelmingly cite "family conflict and breakdown, including neglect, alcohol or drug addiction of a family member, pregnancy, and rejection over sexual orientation" as the major reason for their homelessness. They also report that one in four of California's emancipated former foster youth are homeless, and that 20% or more of foster youth nationally become homeless. Other studies have shown that a far higher percentage of former foster kids become homeless after leaving the system.

Let's stop right there. Kids in our nation are homeless because of the breakdown of the family. Period.

So, if we're going to go upstream and do something to stop the flow of children onto

the streets of our communities, we have to help families.

Some of the most powerful things we can do to help children and families are some of the least celebrated. For example, inviting a working neighbor's kids to come over after school for homework, snacks, and play rather than stay alone can change the trajectory of the lives of those children. Including other people's kids in your family's activities, such as taking them to church, paying for them to play soccer or to belong to a scouting troop, etc., can make an enormous difference. Becoming a Safe Family and taking a child or a family in for a time will help them to get on their feet. All of these are the things that each one of us can do.

I heard the leader of a national church denomination say that if every church just opened its doors to the local kids and provided PB&J sandwiches after school, they would change the world. I agree.

So, what are your ideas for helping families? How can we each be part of the solution?

From Sandie Morgan's Perspective

Although we accept that homeless youth are at a much higher risk for being exploited either in Labor Trafficking or Sex Trafficking, others often question my reports that significant numbers of youth recovered from Commercial Sexual Exploitation were homeless. After some research, I began to understand that their questions were well founded as they were basing statistics on Point in Time (PIT) counts of homelessness. Last year, the California Homeless Youth Project released a report called, "Hidden in Plain Sight." It identified the countless youth not included in the PIT counts. It made some recommendations that policy makers are working to integrate at every level.

One thing you can do is ask your local community leaders how that is being addressed in your area. Additionally, I especially believe that when we understand the bigger picture, we can begin to work to collaborate with school homeless student liaisons. Yes, the first time I heard that job title, I thought it was an oxymoron. But again, when I did a little more research, I was very glad to learn that the McKinney-Vento Act requires every school district to have a homeless student liaison.



Let's consider what that means and how we can respond. This is so important that I want to pull this directly from the report:

"The Mc-Kinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (TITLE VII-B) provides for assistance for homeless youth in school and is administered by the Department of Education (DOE). The definition of homelessness under this act includes the following youth (U.S. Congress, 2002):

- Children and youth who are:
 - sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up);
 - living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - living in emergency or transitional shelters, abandoned in hospitals, or awaiting foster care placement;
 - Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
 - Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above."

Now, consider those conditions and imagine a child living in a motel with the entire family in one room. To do her homework, she sits outside on the steps; and when someone offers her a way out, she's more likely to accept that offer without considering the risks. What she is leaving behind is noisy, it's crowded, and there's no security. In some school districts there are hundreds and in some, thousands of students living so close to the edge that the offer of something even a little better is attractive. Where are those children in your community? How can we connect the dots to secure placements for youth separated from their families and provide transitional and rapid rehousing for children still in families? This is one way to reduce one of the leading risk factors for a domestic victim of human trafficking, homelessness!