

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 161: Helping Stop Sex Trafficking & Keep Kids Safe With Operation Underground Railroad

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This podcast is brought to you by Plant Therapy. I'm often asked where I get my essential oils, and Plant Therapy is my go-to place these days. They offer many certified organic essential oils, including many kid-safe blends at really affordable prices. I also love that they offer bigger sizes of many oils so I can order our favorites in 100-milliliter bottles and they last longer, and then I throw fewer bottles in the recycling each month. Many of you also know that not all essential oils are safe to use on babies and small children, and that certain dilution ratios should always be followed. Plant Therapy takes the research and guesswork out of this, since they work with Robert Tisserand, who is the author of "Essential Oil Safety," to make sure that all of their kid-safe oils are truly safe for kids. They are offering a 10% discount to "Wellness Mama" listeners and you can grab the discount by using the code WELLNESS10, all one word, WELLNESS10, at wellnessmama.com/go/pt. That's wellnessmama.com/go/pt for Plant Therapy.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Healthy Moms" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I'm here today to talk about a really important topic that is a hard one to talk about but super important. I'm here with Kelli Houghton who has a master's degree in social work from Arizona State University. She's a licensed clinical social worker, and she's been actively involved in the international community for the past 18 years, developing programs, advocating for policies related to preserving families and protecting children.

And today, we're going to be delving into that and into the statistics around sex trafficking. And she's served as the director for several international programs as a hospital administrator and currently is the development manager for Operation Underground Railroad, we're going to hear that story today as well. She's presented all over the world, even at the United Nations on topics related to this and is such the wealth of knowledge. So Kelli, welcome and thanks for being here.

Kelli: Thank you.

Katie: So like I said, this is not one of those easy topics to talk about but an important one, I think also because when you speak about something and, like, understand it, it also can cut down on the unnecessary fear. We're also giving you hopefully some actionable and practical advice to move through that.

So listeners, know that I come from very much a free range parenting-type idea, I hate that term actually, I would just call it like unstructured free play time for kids. And when I've written about this in the past the one pushback I get a lot is that with sex trafficking being on the rise, it's really not safe for kids to play. And I know that statistically, when you look at the Department of Justice and some other statistics, the world is actually safer for kids than even was 50 years ago, but that doesn't mean that sex trafficking is not a very real thing.

And I know that kidnapping and sexual trafficking are huge fears for many parents. So I'd love to, like, today as we go through this, to really delve into the actual statistics and what's going on out there and also give parents some actionable, practical ways to keep our kids safe but without keeping them locked in the house all the time. So, to start with, can you just, kind of, talk about the current statistics and the current problem we're facing with human trafficking?

Kelli: Sure. And the one thing about human trafficking is, unfortunately, it's an area that hasn't been studied a great deal yet, and thankfully though, the international community and even domestically, they're engaging a lot more in trying to understand the scope of the numbers of what's happening but it's also on the rise. So sometimes, it's hard to capture a number when it's increasing.

And unfortunately, one of the reasons why it's on the rise is because of the access to the internet, right? And you can pretty much access the internet anywhere in the world now, even on a smartphone if you're in the village of India or a village of Africa. Children have access to the internet and predators have access to the internet.

And also, there are studies that are being released that are showing a correlation that as pornography has increased, just sometimes the way pornography addiction happens, it kind of turns into other...like you need more and more and more alternative-type pornography. It could become an addiction to some individuals. And so then, they become addicted to child pornography. And there's more addictions to child pornography than there ever has been.

And unfortunately, in the United States, the United States is the number one producer and the number one consumer of child pornography. Caucasian males from the United States are the number one buyers of children around the world too. So I think sometimes, we wanna think this is an international issue that happens outside of our borders, but unfortunately, we are part of this problem right now.

So statistically, if you just talk about human trafficking in general, the recent study from the United Nations put the number about 40 million. That's 40 million individuals in human trafficking. In regards to children, there is about 5 to 6 million children who are slaves. So the average age of a child enslaved is about 12 to 14 years old. So of that if you wanna talk about, you know, Operation Underground Railroad, we specifically focus on child sex slaves, and that number right now is about two million children are child sex slaves. So every 30 seconds, a child is being sold into the sex trade, which to us, is a horrifying number.

So if you want to talk though, domestically, right, that we are unfortunately increasing here in the United States. And again, the problem is that before predators could have access to children and teens through just, you know, you had to come in contact, human contact. And now, a lot of the predators are accessing the internet. So where the vulnerability really is, is children online, and being accessed through smartphones, through internet, sometimes through friends connecting them online to people, social media obviously.

So in the United States right now, we know that there are 8 to 10 thousand children that are smuggled into the United States specifically for trafficking to become slaves. And again, most of the trafficking in the United States through...if we were talking about children that already live in the United States, it's really for the most part, children who are more vulnerable that maybe have lower self-esteem, that they come from broken homes, there's maybe violence in their homes, there's substance use. A high percentage of the children trafficked in the United States are your homeless children or ones that just feel displaced in society. So that's kind of just a general overview of what the statistics are showing right now.

Katie: Wow. I think there were so many important points you just made but it's hard to realize, it is really hard to realize that it's happening in our own communities and especially that children are being brought here and, like, taken away from their families. This is actually happening, and I think you made an important point with balancing that. And this is how at least the statistics, I had seen in researching as well, that it's not so much that a child is at risk playing in their own front yard so much as they are when they're online. And that's why in our family, we've taken a really hard line with social media and with the internet and making sure that the children are safe there. But we also do try to balance out and let them have safe places to play outside because it's truly, like, we also have an obesity crisis that's happening as well, it's like balancing these two things.

But can you talk a little bit more about...because I've seen those statistics as well, and it seems like, within the U.S., the majority of children who are targeted, they're targeted online through social media, usually by, like, an older or more attractive person of the opposite sex who then, may not even be that person, but who then eventually, like, convinces them to meet up. Is that kind of what we're seeing happen and how can parents then, kind of, navigate this to keep kids safe online?

Kelli: Right. And that's a very true point. And, you know, unfortunately, and you know, there's one I had...this was several years ago, but I had done an activity at a local school and I put up pictures of individuals and asked them, like, "Who is the predator," right? And, of course, they normally pick the older, more, kind of, unkempt, older man, right? But the reality of it is, it's just like what you said, is that they're being groomed by false identities, right? So there's a picture out there, say of a young, attractive, 20-year-old guy, but really behind that picture, you know, is maybe 60-year-old man who is a pedophile.

But the interesting fact that is happening right now is traffickers are changing...the image is changing, right? So trafficking right now, unfortunately, is becoming the number one criminal industry in the world. It's gonna surpass drug trade. It is \$150 billion industry. It's very, very lucrative. So anyone who loses their sense of, you know, moral direction or integrity is drawn to this industry because of how lucrative it is. And a lot of times, what they're selling and buying is a commodity that they never even purchased, right?

And so with that, what you're finding is you're finding, like, teen high school girls who are becoming traffickers. You're finding...there was just an article this past week about an actress who does not look like a trafficker who was arrested because she was a trafficker. Again, it's the money that is driving this. So you can hold, you know, eight pictures of a range of ethnicities, genders, ages, and sometimes, you won't be able to tell who the trafficker is anymore.

And so in regards to children, it is only teaching them that you only are friends with people on social media that you absolutely know. And unfortunately, the social media trend is you're friends with all these people that you don't know, right? It's a friend of a friend of a friend kind of deal. And we really need to get our

children, our teens, our college students to only have friends that they have met in person on their social media.

And grooming, you know, the grooming tactics are very...the predators are very, very skilled. Traffickers are incredibly skilled at what they do. And sometimes, what we're finding...and again, here in the United States is a little bit different because I would say, you know, internationally, more children will be actually removed from an area to be trafficked. Here in the United States, what we're finding is a lot of the children, teens, they are trafficked actually in their own area.

So sometimes, they're being trafficked, and maybe families don't even know. And usually, then you're talking more, like, junior high, high school, or college students, that they are being sold but their friends and family may not know because the threat is the trafficker will go hurt people that they love if they say anything. So communication is so critical with your children, and talking about these topics and letting them know that there are people who will try to engage them in conversations.

We have seen cases where they will groom a year to year-and-a-half, and so they just act like the friend, the boyfriend for a long time until they build that trust. I mean, they spend time, and they're very patient until they, kind of, feel that they have that trust of that individual. And of course, what they try to do then is break their...within that year, year-and-a-half, they're trying to break that relationship that they have with the family and friends so that they become the most important person. So sometimes, I think what's important for parents is to understand the strategies that are used, the tools that are used, and talking to children very openly about that. And again, lot of talks about internet safety for sure.

Katie: Yeah, I think that's hugely important point. And it turns my stomach to think that, like, this is actually happening to kids that young and that it's so effective. But also it's good to know that the internet is, in a lot of ways, the most dangerous place when it comes to that. And I think, like, there's so many aspects that we should be forming strong communities and having, you know, solid friendships and relationships with our kids and also with other people who we trust to, kind of, just keep all these eyes out. But also, I think, like you said, protecting them online is a huge, huge, important thing and one that maybe a lot of parents don't take that seriously. So, definitely, I'll make sure all those steps are in the show notes because I think, like you said, that's the most dangerous place for kids.

Kelli: Yeah, and I was gonna mention too that as child pornography is continuing to be on the rise here in the United States, and again, we're the number one consumer, right? Which I think a lot of us here in the United States were shocked by that, truthfully. But they need children to film, to produce child pornography. So sometimes, in regards to, like I said, sometimes children are taken from an actual, like, state to state. Sometimes they're being exploited in their own communities by being filmed by somebody in the community for child pornography and then that child goes back home, right? And parents, teachers, people in the community may not even know that that's ever happened. So I think the United States, obviously, child pornography is an issue that needs to be talked about very openly and about why the United States is the number one producer and consumer. It's very, very alarming.

Katie: Yeah, definitely very alarming. Are there any ways that we can combat this as a society that you think would help to stop that problem?

Kelli: Now, I think the first thing is exactly what we're doing right now. I think with child pornography, and

pornography in general, and also on human trafficking, I would say here in the United States has not been discussed very openly. And again, part of that is because these are newer issues. You know, this is a new generation of issues that really, we haven't needed to talk about as openly as we are right now. I think especially child sex trafficking, who wants to talk about that? But we have to because it's on the rise.

And I think if you start...I know Operation Underground Railroad will collaborate at times with an organization called Fight the New Drug. I don't know if you're familiar with that organization, but they're trying to create awareness about pornography and the effects pornography is having on our community. I think for the longest time, there was a part of our society that wanted to believe that pornography was, kind of, an innocent activity but what we're finding statistically is that's not the case. It's having a huge impact.

And especially as the addiction becomes more progressive, and goes into child pornography and then children get involved in that. And so again, it's kind of a new issue. The internet's new to our society, and kind of, some of the negative impacts it's having on our...obviously, has some very positive impacts, but we're seeing also some of the negative impacts that are coming out of that.

Katie: That makes sense. And I would assume... I mean, it's not something I've had any experience with it all, but I assume it's not even just women and child pornography, I'm assuming that even with adults that trafficking happens and that it's harmful to, like, everyone involved.

Kelli: Well, what happens...Absolutely, and I'm glad you mentioned that because as pornography, and not everybody gets addicted to pornography, it's like drugs. Not everybody gets addicted to drugs. But the part of society that is becoming addicted to pornography, it's just like a drug. Again, you need more and more and more and more of it, and then you need harsher, maybe, versions of it. And then eventually, you wanna buy the product. So any time we're producing a demand for a product, like children, and like you just said, even adults, more of that product needs to come into the market.

So for the most part, people do not choose to be sex slaves, you know, nobody. I mean, even if you talk about prostitutes, if you actually get in an interview, majority of prostitutes are sex trafficked. And I think that's, kind of, a newer idea to a lot of people because I think people think that there are women in the industry that are choosing it. And there are some, but for the most part, they were runaways, and then they got trafficked into it. And so again, pornography is producing the demand for those products.

Katie: Wow, that's so sad. And like I said, I mean, I think it's hugely important we all start at home with this, and protecting our own children, our own families. But I also think when you have a problem this widespread that's harming so many people and especially children, that it's also something that we as a community in large should be addressing. And that's the other reason I wanted to have you on today is because I think this is something that we all need to be able to, kind of, actively tackle. So with that said, can you, kind of, explain, you mentioned it, but what is Operation Underground Railroad, and what kind of work do you guys do?

Kelli: Sure. So Operation Underground Railroad was founded at the end of 2013, so a little over four years old. And it was created by Tim Ballard, and I'm also going to say his wife, Catherine, because they did it jointly. And Tim used to be an agent, a Homeland Security agent for Internet Crimes Against Children. And what he was starting to understand was that the government was doing some really, really great work with identifying children that needed to be rescued from sex trafficking, and would go in to do the rescues. But at some times, especially when they were trying to do the work internationally and rescue children in certain countries, there

were some obstacles in place, whether with budgeting or with restrictions.

When the government goes in, they're under different laws than, say, a non-profit when they go in. And Tim just understood that there were children out there that could be saved by a non-profit a little bit easier. And so he and his wife, to me were incredibly brave. They had six kids at the time at home, six young kids. They now have nine kids, so they are pretty busy. And they just felt very strongly that they needed to create a non-profit that could access some of these areas that maybe larger government agencies could not in order to rescue children that were there were sex slaves. And so he left a profitable, secure job and, to me, he and his wife are extremely...to me, they are modern-day heroes because they left security, and they decided to try to start up this non-profit.

And thankfully, it has received a lot of support and lot of people have rallied behind the organization and we, again, have been functioning for four years and things are just moving forward. So it's really, I don't even know how to explain it, but it just makes us all just incredibly happy with the amount of support that's coming in for this cause. That people are talking about it like we are right now, that people are putting money behind it, that people are putting resources behind it.

And what we do is we go in. We have, like, several, kind of, areas that we work in. But one is, we will go in and do direct rescues, and so far, we've been in over 16 countries, and we have rescued about 1200 children so far. And with the rescue, so what we do is, we work with the law enforcement and governments on the ground.

So we support the teams that are on the ground, so we're providing technology, we're providing the training, we're trying to help the law enforcement there learn the skills that they need to find predators and how to arrest predators. And then, once the children are rescued, we place them in vetted aftercare homes that are already in place in those countries so that the children can receive the needed services to help them, kind of, get back on their feet and live productive lives.

And here in the United States, we helped support Internet Crimes Against Children when they come to us for support. So depending on the state, if they need certain training or resources and they would like our assistance on that, we will provide that. And then we also have been working on some education pieces, and I'll talk maybe a little bit at the end. So those are things that we've been involved with, and the work is just on fire, there's so much work to be done. And, like we said, our job is to put ourselves out of business. We want to just get people trained on the ground to learn how to do these rescues, to start...you know, right now we have at least two million children to rescue, so there's a lot of work still to be done.

Katie: Yeah, that's so sad to know that. And I've subscribed to you guys' newsletter, and definitely, I'm going to be partnering and helping you guys. But you mentioned there are ways, like, getting people trained in communities and actively involved. So talk about that, like what can we all do on the ground ourselves to make a difference?

Kelli: Yes. So we're really, really excited. This has been a project, it's been in the works for a while, but it was a couple of weeks ago, we released. It's a free online training. And this is the first version that's out right now, and anyone can access the training, and we're hoping that, you know, moms and dads, teachers, people in the community, people in corporations will be doing the training. It's about an hour long but you can do it in segments. And you will see there's just a handful of segments of our team members talking about different

issues from understanding what human trafficking is, how to identify a victim, how to identify a trafficker.

And at the end, which will be, I think, useful for your audience, there are segments on internet safety and how can you, you know, put things in place to protect your own children. And throughout the training, there's also links so you can see other videos and other resources, and really become familiar with this topic and, kind of, feel empowered that you could actually do something about it. So if you go to ourrescue.org, ourrescue.org, it's on just the front page when you go there.

Katie: Awesome, and we'll make sure that's linked in the show notes as well, wellnessmama.fm so that people can find it, and I'll definitely commit to doing that myself to going through it. Does that help people recognize some of the warning signs, kind of, in their own communities?

Kelli: It does. I think if you go through the training that, again, you will feel as empowered as you can and being a normal citizen on what to look for, and in, kind of, warning signs that you'll see. I do believe...I think our whole team feels this, that we are confident that in every community there is trafficking going on. And it's just getting people on the ground to, kind of, be familiar with what they're looking for. And so we're hoping with this training that people will start to just keep their eyes and ears out. Again, that they will be more empowered in their own circles with their children in their own circles, they will understand what they're looking for, and maybe what to talk to their children about. Yeah, so we're excited about this resource. And hopefully, within the next year, we're going to have it out in Spanish also.

Katie: That's awesome. And I think that addresses these two big points, which one is that people either think it doesn't happen where I am, or that if it does, there's nothing I can do about it, that it's a governmental problem, or it's very widespread. So I love that you guys are addressing both of those issues, and it's so sad that it's probably happening in all of our communities, but also, very, like you said, empowering that we can hopefully do something to help change that statistic and to help keep our own kids safe, which I know, like statistically, it ranks right up there with the biggest fears that parents have. But so many parents think it's something they can't really help with. And so I love that you guys are the voice for that, and it is amazing that you guys have rescued, you said, 1200?

Kelli: 1200, yes. Yeah, and we've also arrested, oh, I think it's close to about 500 now. And so we've arrested 500 perpetrators and traffickers. With that, behind each one of those arrests, there's, kind of, rough statistics out there that say you've prevented about 100 to 200 children becoming victims by putting that one person behind bars. So the number is a lot bigger because the arrests we've done, but actual children, actual victims that we've rescued has been 1200.

And one thing I think to keep in mind is...I was just having this conversation with a group yesterday. We were, kind of, talking about, that sometimes trafficking, there's kind of different definitions of what trafficking means. Some people were under the impression of trafficking just means that you're taken from one country to another country or state-to-state. But really, what we feel trafficking, child sex trafficking is, it's any time a child is sexually exploited. So that child could actually live in a home but they're being sexually exploited somewhere, whether by a teacher, or by a neighbor, or by maybe another family member. But what it is, is that child is threatened that if they say anything, that child is given gifts, sometimes teenagers are given really nice phones, or they're given, you know, money or something. So any time there's an exchange of sexual activity for either being threatened or goods, that is trafficking.

Katie: Yeah, that's such an important point.

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Katie: I think it is so easy to just assume that it's something happening in other countries or, like, far away and that it's children being taken across country borders. But that's almost a little bit more sobering to realize it's happening even to children that people may never realize are going through that. So, so horrible. So, okay, I'd love to go a little bit more into...We talked a lot about keeping your own kids safe especially on the internet. A question I love to ask is, what are three things people don't know or understand about your area of expertise, in this case, trafficking, especially of children that you think are important to know?

Kelli: Right. So I think one of the things we already talked about that it's really important is, kind of, breaking those barriers that happens everywhere else, and realizing it is happening in communities, and every community definitely has cases. And like I said, it doesn't necessarily mean they're being taken somewhere, but that there is a child in your community that is being sexually exploited but still lives at home. And again, we see those cases in the news sometimes, like with teachers, or a child that was being...I know here in Utah, there was a child that the uncle was taking the child but he was using a gun, so he's using a physical weapon, right. So she has fear that if she says anything or reports anything that something bad will happen. So I think we just need to start the dialogue that we need to protect children in our communities and keep our eyes and ears open to what this is.

And sometimes, honestly, it's teaching our children and our teenagers and our college students what they're

looking for, and again, the online training, you will kind of see some of these things that maybe they can keep an eye out for because sometimes it's peer to peer that will notice a change in a friend, will notice that a friend maybe has a new phone, or new this, or new that. And so sometimes, it's our children, I think, that are gonna be the best eyes and ears on the ground, and like I said, junior high, high schoolers, college students.

I think, let's see the second thing. The world needs to be a lot more proactive in studies. And unfortunately, like I mentioned, and you read in my bio that I've been at United Nations meetings, kind of been involved in international discussions for about 18 years. And there is such a need for research that this topic needs to be addressed more, we need more research. And thankfully, and especially now that the United States has really engaged to this conversation, I think we're gonna start seeing more and more research coming out.

I think all of us involved in these industries believe that the more research that comes out, we're going to realize the numbers are higher than what is actually being reported because once we get communities involved and regular citizens involved in looking for victims, so many more victims are going to be identified, so many more traffickers are going to be identified. It really has been, kind of, a hidden criminal industry. Really, governments haven't had the resources to put towards it, and that's why there's a lot more non-profits that are stepping up and trying to help with this. So again, I think once we all get more involved and we get more research involved, I think we're gonna see the numbers are gonna be a little different than what they are right now.

And that was my third thing too, was, unfortunately, the lack of resources and the agencies. I think we'd all like to believe that our governments around the world are a lot more empowered and have the resources to combat this criminal industry, like I said, that's becoming the number one criminal industry in the world. But it is a very, very complicated criminal industry, and it's very high tech, and it takes a lot of resources. So it has to be more than the government's helping with this issue, it has to be every single one of us that's engaged in this cause. And hopefully, we're going to start turning some numbers, you know, do some downturn of numbers because they've only been increasing. So we need to, kind of, get a handle on this, but it's going to take all of us, really.

Katie: Yeah, and I think the other thing you guys do that's so important, from what I read on your website, is that you really are active in the recovery as well because it seems logical, like a child can't just go through something like that and then just re-enter normal society and be totally fine. There's got to be lasting, I'm sure, effects from that. So I love that you guys are addressing that as well as working with children. Are you seeing good results, like children are able to recover and eventually go onto, like, more "normal lives" and actually get past it?

Kelli: Yeah. And thankfully, you know, again we're only four years old, so I don't know, you know, we don't have long-term studies, but I have studied some studies out there. Unfortunately, these children or adults who are in this industry becoming sex slaves, it is the most traumatizing event you can ever experience because you experience your identity being taken away, you're emotionally, physically, sexually abused, right? They lock them up. They just break them down in all areas. So it does take a lot of intervention. The good news is, yes, there are success stories. And the intervention has to happen because if not, the children will go back into the trafficking because that's all that they know, right? They don't know how to survive outside of that industry, and they have been taught that that's who they are.

A lot of times, you know, their names are even taken away from them, they're only given a number, they're

number, they become a commodity that's sold by a certain number and sometimes, that number is tattooed on their body. So thankfully, with the intervention, which includes, like, you know, medical intervention, you know, therapeutic intervention, but also education, providing education and vocational training. And we have, I think, you know, the best, kind of, stories are the ones who've gone on to become professionals, and they have become mentors for other children in the system. So, yes, there is definitely a success rate out there.

Sometimes, you find stories where they will maybe go back into the industry, like two or three more times, but then they eventually get out. It's them knowing how to get out and that they can get out, and that there are resources available to be out, you know. So, but yeah, that's the best part of the stories, right, is seeing the traffickers arrested and put behind bars and seeing children who become successful.

Katie: Yeah, and that's wonderful to hear those kind of stories. I'm curious, I know this is probably addressed in the training, but what would you have someone do, or what advice would you give if they think they are encountering something in their own community or if they see a child who they think might be going through that?

Kelli: Yeah, and thank you for asking that because I think one of the things society needs to be comfortable is making the phone calls. And I think, you know, you look historically, like, society getting comfortable with calling 911, or are getting comfortable calling suicide hotline number when they had concerns, or comfortable calling child protective services when they see a child, and that's when they see a child that they think was abused.

And it's, again, breaking those barriers that we all are responsible to pick up the phone and make a phone call when we just don't feel like something's right. And you don't have to have facts, like you don't have to know for sure like, "Yeah, I absolutely know this is human trafficking." If your, kind of, sensory goes on where I just feel like something's off, you can make a couple different phone calls. One is, if it's a child, you always can make a phone call to your child protective services. And again, all these phone calls can be done anonymously, I know sometimes, people don't want to give their own name out, but you can call anonymously and just kind of tell the scenario, why you're feeling uncomfortable, but you can also call your local law enforcement.

The thing that we would really like to encourage everyone to do though is to write down or put in your phone actually, we're really encouraging people to put in their phone, it's a hotline number, it's human trafficking hotline number. And the reason why is even if you call child protective services, or even if you call the local police department, sometimes they've never dealt with human trafficking. And so you kind of have this extra resource. It's called the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, and that phone number is 888-373-7888.

And our team has it on our phones, and every time we present, we ask people to put in their phones because it's one of those phone numbers where you think maybe you'll never use it but that one time that you feel like you need it and not on your phone, you'll definitely regret not having it, you know, and you definitely wanted to have that resources. And also, if you have a case where you think, like, gosh, I think there may be some trafficking going on but you're not sure, you can always call this hotline number also and they can walk you through the questions and help you identify resources in your own community. So it's a great number to have.

Katie: That is so great to know. I just wrote it down and it will be in the show notes, and I'm gonna put it in my phone as well. I'm curious also, some questions I love to ask are advice you would give to someone who, like, think that they've encountered this or who is new to this and wants to do something, and also, if there are any

books or resources you'd recommend?

Kellie: So, well, I would say for someone who's just kind of entering into this, is what you're, kind of, referencing?

Katie: Yeah, because I feel like, for me, it was a new idea that we could actually do something to affect change here. I thought, like many people, I thought it was, kind of, in other countries, or not in my area, or only the government could fix it. So, I'd love any advice you have there.

Kelli: Sure. You know what? I think one of the most exciting parts of the job for our team has been watching the communities become involved in this issue. And I've loved the creativity that's happened. So, you can see certain communities that have done, like, 5k races to help raise money. One of the most important things, if you're talking about actually rescuing children is, it does cost money. Like, for every rescue that we go in and do, and you can rescue, you know, say, 5 kids all the way up to 20 kids, is about \$45,000. I mean, it's an industry that...you know, and sometimes you need a high-tech equipment.

And so we have been just, gosh, just blown away with the amount of people and communities that are getting involved. And it could be someone just raising money by selling bread, or there was a school that sold pencils, or communities that are holding music events, or whatever it's been. But the advantage of doing something like that is creating awareness, right? So any time, if someone wanted to do a fundraiser, what you're doing is creating awareness, and you're creating the dialogue that needs to happen. And just, kind of, breaking barriers.

I feel like we're kind of pioneers, all of us who are talking about this are pioneers in breaking the barriers of a social topic that needs to be discussed, and it's not one...a lot of people we talk to is the first time they've ever even talked about it, right? So a lot of times, people you're talking to in your own circles, and that's one thing we encourage people to do, is to talk to people in your own circles, to now go and talk to your family about it, or if you belong to a church group, or if there are opportunities at local schools to be able to talk about these issues, to keep the conversation going is really, really important.

In regards to information, like, on how to find out more information about it, I would say our website is a great place to start. Again, that's ourrescue.org. The online training will have resources available. And again, of other videos, other, you know, even videos from other organizations that are out there doing the work, it will have more information that you can read about it. And then start paying attention to mainstream media, and newspapers, and your local community, and start just kind of paying attention to articles that are out in your own community. It's definitely being talked about a lot more on the mainstream media, and in newspapers, we're seeing it a lot more now.

In regards to a specific book, I have a specific book that I love but it's textbook. So I don't know if anyone wants to read that, but it's talking about sex trafficking is becoming a public health issue in the United States. And I don't have the name of it specifically right in front of me, but I could e-mail it to you. But it's a textbook, so it's the price of a textbook, which is, you know, pretty pricey.

Katie: Yeah, I'll definitely put it in the show notes for anyone who wants to read it. And, yeah, I think you hit the nail on the head as far as this is, like, a devastating...it's a public health crisis but it's also, like you said, one of the most horrible things that can happen to a person. And something that many of us didn't realize we

could help change, and I very rarely make any direct ask of anyone listening, but I'm gonna do that today, which is I hope that all of you listening will take an hour of your time to go through the training, it's free, it's probably gonna give you a lot of great information to practice in your own family to keep your own kids safe but also with enough of us doing this and having eyes and just being more aware, hopefully, we can bring a lot more children safely out.

So I don't do that often, but really, I would encourage all of you, the link will be in the show notes or it's, as you mentioned, at ourrescue.org. So definitely make sure to check that out. Any parting words, Kelli, for everyone listening?

Kelli: Yeah, I think, you know, one thing we talk about is that there are more slaves today than there have existed in the world. And it's one of those social issues right now, again, that I think we talk about, you know, if we all were back when there were slaves we would have all, you know, risen up and said, "No, we're not going to have this," right? And that's what's happening now, we have more slaves in the world today than ever before, and it really is going to take a groundswell, like it did back when we freed slaves before.

That every single one of us is going to have to be involved in this, and whether it's talking about it, it's protecting children in our own communities, it's, you know, supporting organizations who are engaged in it, but it's people on the ground, it's the groundswell of the communities who are gonna call for legislation. So it's not governments and non-profits who are really gonna make the biggest difference, it's individuals in communities that are going to make the biggest difference.

Katie: I 100% agree, and I believe the quote is something along the lines of, "Never doubt that a small group of committed individuals can change the world, because indeed, that's all that ever has."

Kelli: Right. That's one of my favorites. Yes, I love that quote.

Katie: That's awesome. Well, I cannot thank you enough for the work that you're doing. I know, like I said at the beginning, this is a tough issue to hear about. It's a tough issue to think about, but such an important one because even if, hopefully, it's not something that any of us ever encounter with our own children, the fact that there are children in our communities that are going through this is heartbreaking and horrible, and hopefully, we can all together start making changes.

Definitely something I'm gonna be referencing in blog posts in the future. And there are links in the show notes today for people to find you guys. But really, I do hope everyone will get involved in whatever way that works for you in your own life, your own family, but just so together that we can start to make changes because it's truly staggering what's going on in our country. And I really appreciate you bringing awareness to this, and for all the work that you guys all do at your whole organization on a daily basis.

Kelli: Well, thank you, Katie, we really appreciate it. And if anyone ever has any questions, you can feel free to e-mail us on our website or e-mail me if you have any thoughts, questions, anything, even any feedback about the online training.

Katie: Awesome. I'll make sure that the context for your website is on the show notes as well. And, like I said, I hope you will all consider getting involved and the links will be there so that you guys can do that. But Kelli, thank you so much for your time and for your work.

Kelli: Thank you, Katie.

Katie: And to all of you for listening, and I hope to see you next time on the "Healthy Moms" podcast.

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.