

WFWP San Diego, CA USA: Our Children Are Not For Sale

Caroline Betancourt
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The movie "Sound of Freedom" was released on July 4, 2023, and inspired WFWP San Diego to quickly host an event to spread the word about children, some as young as five years old, who were helpless victims of sexual predators. While this is a multi-billion dollar global enterprise, it was a surprise to learn that San Diego is rated by the FBI as among the top 13 locations with most victims under the age of 16.

To address this problem, the keynote speaker, Leah Hebert, founded an organization called GRACE (Girls Rising Above Child Exploitation). Having been exploited in her early teens, she created an organization to help at-risk, exploited or trafficked youth ages 12-21 to become healthy, contributing members of society.

San Diego is a hot spot for sex tourism (an 810 million dollar underground industry in San Diego County alone). Many children are trafficked by family members or groomed by men posing as a boyfriend. Leah shared that her case was the latter; she had an unstable housing situation, lonely, low income, with decisions blurred by drugs and false promises. She was freed when her captor was caught and deported.

GRACE helps at-risk, exploited or trafficked youth by hosting group gatherings, outings, providing meals and transportation, finding mentors, stable housing and being available to give support and care.

Leah then informed the audience of ways to stop the demand for sexual exploitation by educating family members of the harmful effects of pornography on children and users, and get involved to help those who are at risk or trafficked.

The event, held in a Marie Callender's restaurant on August 17, 2023, was attended by 56 participants. Some of the attendees are already working in various ways to stop human trafficking and were able to share their work and find ways to collaborate with each other.

The following attendees shared their contributions to the work to stop exploitation:

- Rohida Kahn from the Department of Homeland Security
- Lura Decker, Coordinator for the Center for Justice and Reconciliation of the Nazarene Church
- Celsey Taylor, Assistant to the Vice Chairwoman of the San Diego Board of Supervisors
- Patrick Erlander, CEO of Father-con
- William Wurch, Director and Paulette Pfeifer, Grant Coordinator, of the Alexander and Eva Nemeth Foundation

WFWP San Diego's goal is to contribute to the network of churches and organizations who will work together in the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation.