

## Sexual Trafficking: Do You Know Lacy?

**By Crispin Ketelhut**, Associate Director of the VIRTUS Programs

We recently presented at a conference in Florida on the topics of pornography and sexual trafficking. Prior to the presentation, one of the participants informed us that the presentation would be much more effective with video excerpts of the subject content—to "spice things up." We certainly are not going to provide those types of photos/videos for you, but we will provide a snapshot of the reality of the sex trafficking of minors in the United States that has been provided to us by experts in the field.

Below are some facts, figures and a video link to illustrate why the subject of sexual trafficking of minors is important for us here within the VIRTUS® Programs, and why we are incorporating the subject into our ongoing training content.

- Did you know that 100,000 American children are exploited for sexual trafficking each year? This conservative number is from the Department of Justice, whereas various non-profit organizations denote there are as many as 300,000. Sexual Trafficking of human persons is a problem right here in America.
- Were you aware that the exploitation of American children is fueled by the purchasing and consumption of pornography? This is because victims of sex trafficking become part of the pool of videos and images circulated online.
- What about the fact that the average age a child is first exploited through "prostitution" or sexual trafficking is 13? The next time you see a female (or male) on the street corner, or hear about one and are tempted to think about the person as a prostitute, I urge you to reflect upon these numbers. And I invite you to ponder where she came from—because data is showing that these girls started out as trafficking victims when they were kids. And many of them are still kids.
- Did you know that traffickers recruit from schools, malls, parks, protective shelters and social media websites? It can be as easy as picking out a child who has her head down in the mall, or sending a "friend" request or message via social media, such as Facebook.
- How about the fact that victims come from all demographics? Lacy was a member of a church youth group when she met her trafficker. I encourage you to take the next 4 minutes and 32 seconds from your day to view this YouTube video ("Do you know Lacy?") by going to the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kkq7PNes7dY> .

You might actually know this girl or someone like her. Lacy is not a stranger—she could be a student in your parish or school. She could be a youth that you could help if you can identify some of the warning signs and were equipped to communicate your concerns. Girls like Lacy need you to step up and be heroes, to protect them from harm and abuse happening right here in our communities.

You can see that this is a grave matter that directly affects us in our roles as protectors of children and youth from sexual abuse. One of the first action items we can do to prevent the sexual trafficking of children is to inform ourselves more about the problem and dispel our own

myths about this horrifying reality. Another goal we can achieve is to make sure that we are not glorifying the problem or exacerbating it. Over time, the VIRTUS Programs will be providing more information about those warning signs and what you can do. Thank you for being a part of the solution.

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