

Human Trafficking: The Super Bowl's Dark Underbelly

The big game in the U.S. is just days away, and everybody is getting into the swing of preparations. For as much festivity as there is, there's a dark underbelly too.

"Many people are ushered into these events for sex work," explains Bill Blacquiere, president and CEO of Bethany Christian Services. "The attorney general said the Super Bowl is known as the single largest human trafficking event in the United States."

According to the 2013 Trafficking in Persons report developed by the U.S. State Department, as many as 27 million men, women and children are trafficking victims at any given time. While there are no firm statistics on how much the forced sex and labor trade expands during the Super Bowl, it has been estimated that more than 10,000 prostitutes were brought to Miami for the 2010 Super Bowl and 133 underage arrests for prostitution were made in Dallas during the 2011 Super Bowl.

Bethany Christian Services, the leading global family preservation and child welfare agency committed to protecting vulnerable children, is calling for greater awareness.

Blacquiere says, "That's the real issue here. People are unaware. I think especially as Christians, we need to stand up and to protest what's going on. We need to urge our lawmakers, our law enforcement, to take action, to not let this type of activity go on."

Blacquiere adds that human trafficking is an issue that many of us think takes place on the other side of the world. However, the Super Bowl has proven otherwise.

"The unfortunate truth is that it's happening right in our

backyard," he says. "Bethany is committed to reducing, if not eliminating, instances of child trafficking in the U.S. and around the globe.

"Bethany's work with child trafficking we see as prevention. We do get involved when children or even adults are rescued."

Specifically, Blacquiere says the organization intervenes before the children become victims.

"Bethany does a lot of foster care work with children who are abused and neglected, through mentors, to get jobs, to get them into college, because they're so vulnerable when they're 17 or 18 and they're on their own," he says.

Blacquiere notes that when foster kids age out of the system, they're often not ready for the challenges of real life.

"For them to find shelter, to be able to get jobs, it's just very difficult. So they're very susceptible then to be taken in by somebody to engage in drugs, in sex work, et cetera," he says.

However, because Bethany intervenes at the right time, the kids are better prepared, which makes them less vulnerable to social predators. Plus, they're prepared spiritually too.

"I think because they interact with staff at Bethany, mentors and Christian foster parents, they see firsthand what it means for somebody to love them and care for them—something that maybe they have never experienced in their life," he says.

It's about a forever hope.

"In addition to demonstrating that," Blacquiere says, "they're also being told what we believe and why it's important for them to explore."

Blacquiere adds that Bethany's efforts to prevent child trafficking and human trafficking don't stop at U.S. borders.

Bethany currently works with governments in developing nations, including China, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, South Africa and Uganda, to implement sustainable social welfare services that will unite orphaned children with loving families. The kids might otherwise become the targets of trafficking rings.

Bethany also considers “re-homing” a form of child trafficking. Re-homing is the practice of unregulated placement of children by their adoptive family into another family without proper oversight. In 2013, Bethany called for greater oversight from federal and state governments to protect those children.

For more information on Bethany Christian Services, or to support its anti-trafficking efforts, visit .

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