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# In Your Neighborhood

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# In Your Neighborhood

**Abstract**

"It's easy to hear about trafficking and think of dusty paths and sordid rooms in countries far from here whose economic system we don't quite grasp. It is much harder to imagine trafficking happening amongst the quaint scenery in places like Northwest Iowa."

Posting about the problem of human trafficking from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/in-your-neighborhood/>

**Keywords**

In All Things, human trafficking, prostitution, slavery, Sioux County, pornography

**Disciplines**

Christianity | Sociology

**Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# In Your Neighborhood

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 [inallthings.org/in-your-neighborhood/](https://inallthings.org/in-your-neighborhood/)

Jen Sandbulte

*I'm not quite sure where I am, or where I'm heading. This place is new to me. We were in Wal-Mart today. This kind lady at the check-out just kept going on and on about what we have planned for the weekend. I wondered if she couldn't see me. Didn't she see the bruises on my cheek from him hitting me? Didn't she know that he wasn't my big brother? Didn't she wonder why I didn't say a word and he did all the talking? Didn't she see the tattoo he put on my arm, marking me as his property? I know better than to say anything, I tried that once.*

*I remember when I first met him. I was online and he just wanted to talk. He was such a great guy. I was having problems at home, and problems with my friends, and to be honest, he was such a good listener. He fell in love with me, and we began to talk about me running away to meet him. At first, I didn't know, but the more we talked, the more I knew that he would love me forever and take care of me. When I first laid eyes on him, I knew that he was everything I had dreamed he would be.*

*Shortly after I got to him, things changed. He left me with a couple of his friends and said we needed the money. I begged and pleaded with him, but he told me it was the only way. At one point he told me how beautiful I was and asked to take photos of me. I guess now they are how he finds appointments for me.*

*Last I heard we were heading up north to some oil field. It doesn't seem to matter where we are, each day is the same. I'm always amazed at how busy I stay in these small towns. I've learned the rules now. If the cops catch me, I'm arrested for prostitution, so I need to be careful. He doesn't like to have to get me from jail.*

*I still know he loves me. I know that my family would never welcome me back, after all I have done. Yet, I can't help but wonder. What if someone would ask me, are you ok? How did you get that bruise? Why don't you know where you are? Or even what is your name? Instead, most give me a look of disgust. It's not like I'm hidden. I often meet my next appointment in places like parks, or truck stops. Why wouldn't people wonder why I'm getting into a car with some of these men? Maybe he's right, nobody sees me, I don't matter to them.*

It's easy to hear about trafficking and think of dusty paths and sordid rooms in countries far from here whose economic system we don't quite grasp. It is much harder to imagine trafficking happening amongst the quaint scenery in places like [Northwest Iowa](#).

While posters and billboards display images of chains and handcuffs, the reality of what trafficking looks like in North America is much different. Even right here in my cozy conservative Christian hometown, trafficking happens.

In research of minors being trafficked (there is no such thing as a minor being prostituted because they aren't 18!)....

- 3% of kids were kidnapped
- 35% trafficked because they are sold by a family member
- 62% because they were tricked by an older boy who told them everything they wanted to hear

On a very regular basis in [Sioux County, Iowa](#) young girls are being lured. The internet and social media has opened doors for traffickers to recruit our kids while we are sitting in the same room with them. Several girls in this area have been inches away from “running” off with someone they met on-line. Nearly every time I talk with one of these girls we discover tactics that are key signs of trafficking. They were made to feel beautiful, or loved, or special. Prince Charming lures them, but the emotional abuse and control is incredible. Often they have texted or snap chatted inappropriate photos of themselves, which come back to haunt them. Most of these girls are free in a physical sense, but in bondage because of lies and manipulation, because of fear for their families, etc.

The following statistics from [trafficking.org](#) help us understand the magnitude of the problem in the United States.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the United States:

- *There are 100,000 to 300,000 underage girls being sold for sex in America.*
- *The average age of entry into prostitution is 12-14 years old.*
- *50,000 women and children are trafficked into the United States each year.*
- *1 out of every 3 teens on the street will be lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of running away from home.*
- *Minor victims were sold an average of 10-15 times a day, 6 days a week.*
- *1 out of 5 pornographic images is of a child.*
- *The sale of child pornography has become a \$3 billion dollar industry.*
- *Over 100,000 websites offer child pornography.*
- *55 percent of internet child pornography comes from the United States.*

Often the prime targets of women and children are those who lack self-confidence. A large percentage of victims have a prior history of sexual abuse. These national statistics and prefaces hold true in my little corner of Iowa as well.

Who in places like Northwest Iowa would purchase sex? In honest reality, we are not immune to pornography, it's everywhere. What starts as a simple glance can quickly rewire your mind and leave you with an incredibly unhealthy views of sexuality. Pornography is definitely a precursor to trafficking demand. And we all know that without demand, we have no need for supply. Modern technology has enabled us to hold pornographic images in the palm of our hand.

Often people ask where to look or how to spot a victim of trafficking. First and foremost, I say become a person who prays for human trafficking. I truly believe that each individual that I have been able to walk next to was a result of prayer and trusting God's leading. That being said, we do see some common threads in trafficking;

1. Major roadways. Hwy 75, Hwy 60 and Interstates 29 and 90 are all great examples of places that you are more likely to encounter someone in need of help.
2. Any place where large numbers of people gather. Think Iowa State Fair, pheasant hunting in South Dakota, the Sturgis bike rally, oil fields in North Dakota, chicken workers in nearby farms.... The list goes on and on. Large numbers of people, especially if predominately men, increase the demand for the sex industry.
3. In a truck stop parking lot or rest areas. Known as “Lot Lizards”, it is fairly common knowledge that women crawl from sleeper cab to sleeper cab at night.

4. Bus stops – often women are left with no photo id. Therefore, they are forced to travel via bus. Spend any time at all at a bus stop, and the odds of you seeing someone who is stuck in trafficking are pretty high.
5. Parks – believe it or not, I've encountered a minor girl right in my town's central park that appeared to having been trafficked.

How would you know if someone is being trafficked?

1. Their non-verbals say a lot. Do they make eye contact? Are they allowed to speak? Often Emergency Room nurses, hair stylists, etc. have a prime opportunity to interact and potentially help these individuals. Make sure the front line individuals have had appropriate training.
2. Look for bruises, tattoos or markings (a guy's name, etc.)
3. Are they looking for someone at all times? Do they seem nervous?
4. Do they have a fake id?

So many people in places like Sioux County don't even know that Human Sex Trafficking exists. They could hardly grasp that it is happening right in their neighborhoods. If we are alert and praying, and asking God for eyes to see, then we can trust that God will work all things out for good.

Please, take out your cell phone and enter the National Human Trafficking Hotline Number 888-3737-888 – you never know when you will need it!