Guest Speaker: France Young:

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Transcription between 01:42 and 34:44

Jenn Rae:

Thank you, President Dean. France Young is a youth outreach counselor and case manager at Youth Haven. She is currently involved in many community groups, including the Nautilus Aga, South Simcoe Opioid Advisory Committee, the South Simcoe chapter of Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, SHIFT Collaborate, Nautilus Aga OPP, Simcoe County Suicide Awareness Council, New Tecumseh Young Advisory Council, Palliative Care Support at Hospice South Simcoe, Small Church Connection Canada, Fight for Freedom, a human trafficking organization,

Peel Region Human Trafficking Committee, and Barrie Human Trafficking Committee. Before that, she worked with Youth Unlimited Toronto and Big Brothers and Big Sisters South Simcoe. France has joined us here today to speak about the issue of human trafficking in Simcoe County. Please welcome France.(...)

France Young:

Thank you, and thank you, Jen, for inviting me out today. This is a topic that unfortunately is near and dear to my heart. I have increasingly been doing work around human trafficking, recruiting,(...) and the exploitation of children for the past four to five years.(...) So as I am currently working with Youth Haven as a counselor to youth, the human trafficking work that I do actually is under another organization called Imani's Place. I helped get a house up and going in the New Tecumseh, just on the Cookstown border, three years ago for human trafficking victims, for women that are exiting human trafficking.(...) And we just managed to get it fully opened about three weeks ago, and have two crisis beds in the basement that are offered to the police services to bring women that are helping if they want to exit. So human trafficking, not a comfortable topic. I've been asked to speak a lot on this actually over the past couple of years. During COVID, I've spoken to about 14 Lions Club organizations.(...) So Rotary, thank you so much for bringing me out. I think this is a topic that is as uncomfortable as it is to discuss. We do need to address it in our society, and I hope that you'll see coming out of today that even though it's a dark and challenging topic, that there is a lot of positive that we can do.(...) So just a quick, I know I have 15 minutes, and this is normally about a half an hour to 45 minute presentation, so I'm going to try to pack as much in quickly as possible. Thank you for your patience.(...) So we do have, people ask, is it really an issue? It's an issue because we have a Canadian hotline, and the hotline is 24 hours a day, and it's in 200 languages.

So the fact that we need a hotline in 200 languages open 24 hours a day, I think is the answer to the question. It is a concern.

The first year they were open, they had 2,390 calls, and then in 2020, they saw a 44% increase in that.(...) The numbers are astounding to me, to be honest, even though I do this work. One in three calls do come from victims,(...) 44% while they were being trafficked, 39% after they were trafficked, and 26% family and friends, and then there's more statistics. But again, I'm going to shorten some of these for the presentation purpose today.(...) 80% are female victims, and the majority are under 25 years old, and that's what's so concerning for me, is the fact how young they are. And I do work with young girls who have been exploited,(...) and prior to COVID, actually, with a human trafficking organization in Toronto, we went into strip bars on Saturday nights to work with girls, and they were all domestic girls that were working in the bars that were trafficked.(...) 50% of all victims are definitely underage, and the average age of recruitment now is 12 to 14.(...) 2,000 girls were brought into the US through Canada legally. This is all coming from the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking Statistics.(...) And interestingly, which people may not know, is that 42% of the recruiters were women.(...) This is not what people think that it's just a male issue, it's both. It's a male and a female issue.(...) However, the majority of people who have been charged are men between the ages of 18 to 34, which is also a concern as a youth worker. I don't believe any of us want our, you know, young men of today, our children, our grandchildren, to be involved in this industry. So the fact that there are so many men between 18 and 34 involved is also a concern.(...) It was interesting in October 2021,(...) Sylvia Jones, who's the Ontario Solicitor General, said that the average age of recruitment is now 13 years old in the province of Ontario.(...) So now bringing it down nationally to provincially, Simcoe County, where we are, is actually the number two county in all of Ontario for human trafficking. And Barry is cited as having 2.2 times the national average of girls that are exploited.

You know, this crosses over into other areas that I work with. Just a few more stats. Suicide's actually the second leading cause of deaths for 15 to 24 year olds in Canada. And that is tied to mental health and to trauma, obviously. And so I do believe that anything that affects you physically, mentally and emotionally can lead to obvious signs of suicidality and human trafficking would be one of those. So there's a lot of intermingling for our youth.(...) We've seen more even locally in the newspaper. Again, I don't know what you're seeing pop up, but we know there's been some stuff through Simcoe County recently of 19 year olds that are recruiting young people.(...) There was an article written by CBC News around this saying that the luring, the title is the luring of girls into the sex trade is reaching an epidemic level. The police say in the past five years, they've seen 1100 cases and assisted nearly 300 victims in Toronto alone. So sadly to tell you that is actually the true stats and it is an issue everywhere and people think it's just an issue in the cities. But now I'm going to switch over to what my main concern is. And this is where I think it's so important to discuss this topic. It's actually the work, not the human trafficking, but what happens before someone is trafficked. And that's called the grooming or the luring. I mean, I can come and give another human trafficking presentation and break down a lot of the details in depth, but the luring and grooming stage now happens online. Sadly to say, I do a lot of training and take a lot of

courses out of the states because they are ahead of us on this.(...) And Child Advocacy Centre in the States keeps great statistics and they went from about 7.8 million calls a year up to 29 million calls a year. They tripled the number of calls for child protection. And they said that two thirds of the calls they got were involved with online activity. So to me, that's the big thing. That's the issue. How do we protect children, young girls, young boys from being involved in any of this? It all comes back to unfortunately the internet, social media and online use.(...) And the truth is this isn't going to go anywhere.(...) You know, the computer, the internet, thank you that today we could use it for this, for example.(...) It's a great tool and it has great resources, but unfortunately organized crime and other groups and individuals have found ways to use this negatively to affect young people.(...) So the future for this issue is really an online issue.(...) And that's the challenge as we see that increasingly the grooming, the recruiting happens online.(...) And people wonder how that happens with youth and parents, you know, again, no shame, no blame. We're all trying our best to navigate this new world, but we're seeing it. I see it all the time as a youth worker, how this is pouring out into the schools, how it's pouring out into families.(...) I'm sure any of the officers online here are fully aware of what's been happening in the schools and everything from cyberbullying to sexting where there's pictures, where there's challenges, where there's so much inappropriate content.(...) And this isn't to blame the young people today. They're being raised in a culture that is not the way most of you in the room were raised. I myself am definitely much older. My daughters are both in their 20s and settled down in life now. And even they can't believe the change that they've seen in their lifetime online.(...) And so, you know, people always say, well, how do kids get groomed? How did they get manipulated? Well,(...) a wonderful app came out from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and we're actually using it, introducing it to youth. We're doing it through school presentations now.(...) And I'm going to read you something from the app. So what happens?(...) So this tool is to show children or adults how easy it is to be manipulated online. So what they do is they open up the app on their phone, and immediately it says, there are 15 things below. Tell me three things that are like important to you or something you might be looking for.(...) And I'm going to read them to you, because I'm sure everybody in the room can relate to three of these 15 things.

So it starts with someone to listen to me. I think that's pretty normal in society. Everybody wants to be heard.(...) Someone that makes me feel attractive.

Romantic love, a safe place to stay,(...) some physical affection.(...) People who understand me, friends who get me. A good time in a party, social life, an adult to take care of me.(...) Regular meals. Sadly, this is an issue for youth today still.

Expensive things, nice clothing,(...) a best friend, popularity,(...) attention from cool people, a date or money.(...) Now, if you think of those 15,(...) they really know, the reason they put them on there is that pimps and groomers really know how to find the vulnerability. And that's what they're going to look for. So if when the kids go into this app, if somebody picked someone to listen to me, people who understand me, and a best friend, well, to me, that's absolutely normal. Every child in our public school system, every child in high school is going to want that. So if you pick those three,

what happens is then it immediately opens up and through artificial intelligence, the app starts a conversation with you. So it might start and say, hey, I saw you at the calf today. I like your outfit.(...) You know, something simple like that. And then the conversation goes on. And as they communicate over text with the with the computer, it leads them through a manipulation into a grooming. But every now and then pop ups come and say, this is what somebody might say to manipulate you. This is where you should talk to a trusted adult. This is where and so it guides them, but it allows them to understand how easy someone can prey on their vulnerability. It's a fabulous tool. And I think anybody that does it understands how vulnerable everyone is. A lot of time we do think of human trafficking as kind of the grab, right? Like I know a lot of presentations people think it's, you know, what we see in movies or people brought here from overseas, which they definitely are. I can attest to that.(...) However, when we look at this, this is a money making business.(...) And it is truly about that. And it is now leading past drugs and guns. I'm not going to give all the stats. The police will probably correct me after on it. But I know that the money that is made in this industry industry is now surpassing some of the other illicit industries that are out there. And why? Because they can make a lot of money off a girl. So as an example, I work with three human trafficking survivor organizations, and the girls share with us that they have to make anywhere from 500 to a thousand dollars a day. That's normal.(...) It's crazy how much money there are some men that as their Lord into this to be part of this and to bring girls into this are told you can make $50,000 a year off one girl. If you get two girls, you'll get 100,000. If you get three girls, you're at 150,000 for a teenage boy, and especially if he grows up without any sense of who he is, if he's already been involved in trauma or in challenging situations, whether it's due to poverty, or whatever his situation is, for a young boy at 18 to think he can make $100,000 a year, and all he has to do is attract a couple of girls and then get them to work for him. There are some young boys out there working really hard at this, unfortunately.(...) So going back to the social media, if we look at social media today,(...) the stats coming out are absolutely crazy. But I, you know, I could spend a lot of time, but I know I don't have much more in the presentation. So I don't want to spend on the stats. But we just have to be honest.(...) We're living in a world that there is not the boundaries that we had growing up, the whole world can come into our homes, into our children's lives through a phone, through an iPad, through the television, through Netflix, and affect how they're thinking. So it really comes back to teaching young people critical thinking. How do they understand the internet? How do they understand social media? How do they understand the basic things of consent? How do they understand what luring or grooming or manipulation is? And unfortunately, if we don't talk about it, we're not protecting them anymore. This is the reality of it. I talked to a couple of high school classes, and it was interesting. One of them was a grade 12 class about to graduate.(...) And I was talking to them and I said, you know, you guys don't have any boundaries.(...) The whole world can come into your bedroom and access you through your computer, etc. It is a different world. And we just need to acknowledge that. And there was a boy in the front row. And he was sitting there. And he had an Apple computer on his lap. And he said put his hand up. And he said, Oh, not me. And I said, What do you mean not you? And he said, I don't have a social media account. And I said, Oh, okay. And I said, What's on your lap? And he said, My computer and I said, Do you use your computer in your bedroom? And he said, Yeah. I said, Have you ever been on YouTube? And he said, Well, yeah, of course. And I said, Was the YouTube video made by your mother, your brother, your aunt or a friend? And he laughed and said, No. I said, Have you seen a video come out of Russia, or the Ukraine, or a TikTok video come from anywhere else in

the world other than your community? And he just looked at me and went good point, because he got it very quickly. And this is what we're talking about. We just need to be aware. And even if we put on, there's so many great tools for parents out there. There's so many ways to talk about this. But again, the information isn't out there, because we're not talking about it enough. But when you realize the amount of information for parents, and for youth to talk through this and to critically think through it, what we realize is that by doing this, we're protecting them not just in our own home, but out in society, because I also had parents go, Well, we have filters on our house, we monitor our kids content, we turn off our Wi Fi at 10 o'clock, they're doing a lot of the things to try and protect their kids. And I said, Do your kids go to a public school? And they said, Yes. And I said, Well, all it takes is another student to walk up to them with a cell phone and say, Hey, look at this. Hey, check this out. And all of a sudden, they're engaged, right? And they're intrigued.(...) And the engaging, unfortunately, what we're seeing in the high schools is through the bullying and the sexting and kids today just, they don't grow up anymore the way we did, they always have somebody with a phone around them. And again, I'm sure, you know, any of the officers can attest to this, that they're getting a lot of I know, I work a lot with the Nautica saga OPP.

And, and South Simcoe police would be the other police service in my catchment area. And I know when they're bringing youth to me to counsel, sometimes they're showing me on the phone, oh, here's the video of the fight. And I had to put in a salt charge. Here's the video of whatever it is that they're putting a charge, or they want me to work with the youth to try and defer the charges as long as the youth is willing to do the work.(...) And you know, it's interesting, I, I try not to look at a lot of that content, but I do see an incredible amount of content. And it truly is because kids have phones all the time, and they're taking videos. They're taking videos out in the parking lots, or taking videos in the schools. And so again, we talk about human trafficking, and that's what we're trying to avoid.(...) We're trying to get to the point that a human being is not exploited in any possible way for money, whether that's labor trafficking or sex trafficking, but it is exploited. And so again, if we're looking at it, from a community perspective, and from a family and a school perspective, it truly is around the education and speaking their language. There are so many forms now of social media, we will never stay on top of them all, unless you're constantly researching and catching up. For example, I pulled something, let me just see where it is. I know the ones we talk about with the kids, but I pulled something here recently, and it was a guide for parents.(...) And I'm just going to read a few of the platforms, just to see if you're familiar, because some of them, and I do this all the time, I've never heard of amino,(...) ask FM, calculator percent,(...) chat chat roulette, discord, obviously, Facebook live, Facebook messenger, post party, Instagram, kick, line live me meet me Omegle, Reddit, roblox, Sarah, hop, Snapchat, telegram, tik tok, tumblr, twitch, Twitter, VSCO, we chat, WhatsApp, whisper, you bow, only fans, which is a horrendous one that's out right now. But I know even just reading that, there were some on there that I haven't even seen. So there will always be content ahead of us. It's never about staying up to what's being created. It's about challenging what's forming the brains of our young people today, and how we can speak into this because the truth is, I don't know how much everyone in the room knows about the brain chemistry for young people, but their brains definitely are not formed until 25.(...) And so right now, their critical thinking at 678-910-1112, when they're starting to get introduced to social media, and the internet, they don't have the capacity to look at it through our lenses. As adults, we've had relationships, we've

had challenges in life, we've grown and had experience. So we know when we see something, if it's inappropriate, or if it makes us uncomfortable, or if it is something that should be challenged, what to do with that, hopefully, but kids don't know that they really don't have the front part of their brain, their critical thinking fully formed. And so they are calling out for help without asking, they're calling out in their behaviors, with the assaults, with the inappropriate behaviors, with the challenges that they're having with the anxiety and depression and all the other issues that are presenting them.

So I just want to wrap up by saying it is a big thing to tackle, you know, human trafficking on one hand, the other hand is the social media and the work that needs to be done. And I just want to close on saying thank you so much on having me here to kind of put a little bit of light onto this, because the only way it's going to be done is collaboratively. If we're not working in silos, it's this type of work, it's police services, it's social agencies, it's hospitals, it is law enforcement, it's the courts, it's parent groups, it's community groups like yourselves, all working together to try to find solutions so that our young people can have a better future and avoid being exploited in any way possible. So thank you so much. I have lots of tools and resources for parents and for youth and I'm more than happy to share anything to do follow up with you because I know this has been a short time. Thank you. Michael, you got a question?

Michael Tough:

Yeah, I'm just curious, as the father of daughters, I was shocked when one of our daughters about seven or eight years ago brought this to our attention and how shocking it was and we were fortunate to be introduced to an organization called Bridge North and Cassandra.

France Young:

I know Cassandra, I work with her. She's one of the organizations I was talking about. She's lovely. Yeah, so that was my question is how connected are the youth, like the youth haven is to the actual to other support services and how connected are you in terms of working together and all working towards the same solution?(...) You know, Michael, are you in Simcoe County?

Michael Tough:

I am now, yeah.(...)

France Young:

Okay, I just wonder because actually I,(...) prior to COVID a few times, had reached out to Cassandra and asked her to come to our county to help some families because there are very few survivor-led supports.(...) There's Rising Angels in the Peel area, but she comes and works with

us.(...) Her name is Katerina McLeod. She also has done some teaching at the police college.(...) There's Cassandra Diamond also, and then there's two other organizations, but they are limited. You're absolutely right. We need to work not in silos. That's who I am. As I said, this is really near and dear to me. I do work with Youth Haven, but under another organization where we got the house up and going, it's called Imani's, we're actually creating an advocacy center around this, education and advocacy to do more work. These other organizations are working collaboratively with us to try and provide a real hub for supports and advocacy in Simcoe County. We're at the ground boots level, pioneer work, bringing that in, but we're calling on our lovely friends like Cassandra and others in other areas who have been doing this work, who have been involved themselves and been in the human trafficking world, unfortunately, for 10 to 15 years. These women are just absolutely wonderful. They do stellar work, but there's only three to four organizations active in Ontario that are doing that work. They are spread quite thin, and that's where people like myself who haven't actually been trafficked have learned from them, work with girls who are trafficked to try and increase our knowledge and understanding so we can provide more services.(...) Imani, can you spell that?(...) Oh, it's I-M-A-N-I.(...) Awesome. Thank you. Imani, and you do apostrophe S, Imani's place.(...) The woman who donated the house is a Nigerian woman. She speaks Swahili, and Imani means faith in Swahili, so it's faith's place if it was in the way I speak, and it's just to have faith that we can actually really bring much more to this topic.(...)

President Dean:

Thank you, Michael.  Tim, you have a question?(...)

Tim Norton:

Well, good morning, France. Good morning. Thank you. Thank you for everything you do.(...) I haven't had a chance to speak to you myself, but you've spoken to my wife, Melanie,(...) and you've actually been helping some of my kids with some other reasons, and it's amazing. And the fact that you were able to do this without being crushed under the weight of the subject matter because it's painful to hear it, and it causes rage, and I wish more people felt that way and did something about it. That app you spoke about, could you share that? Because I think that would be a powerful thing for us, a tool for us to tell kids about.(...)

France Young:

Absolutely. Yeah, it's under the Ministry of Community and Social Services, so mcss.on.ca. I mean, I can send something out via email if you'd like to gen with links to all the information that I have for parents and for youth, if you'd like, if that would be easier.(...)

President Dean:

Absolutely.

Tim Norton:

That'd be wonderful. Thank you. Okay. And I'm hoping to get you back one day. I mean, just subjects, critical thinking and things like that. I think those are, there's never too many times of explaining to the kids critical thinking is important. And so your message is really, really powerful in many ways. So thank you so much.(...)

France Young:

Thank you, Tim. And I just want to say it is painful. I mean, obviously, I've given you an overview, we're not getting into specifics. But I have seen some terrible things that have happened to young people. And I've heard some horrible stories.(...) And it is it is very painful. And even I think what they're doing with each other in the schools and not really fully understanding it. And again, we have to come from a place where it's not blame and shame on our youth.(...) They they truly don't understand 12 and 13 don't understand what a healthy relationship is like.(...) So they act out what they've learned on TV and social media through whatever form. So absolutely, it is painful. But there are solutions. And I'm so thankful that there are enough people wanting to learn and get supports for people out there.(...)

President Dean:

Anyone else have any questions?(...) Oh, Chief, go ahead.(...)

Chief Andrew Fletcher:

Yeah, thanks, Dean. And thanks, France, for your great work in this field is you've noted a couple times your presentation, we work closely with groups like yourself. And, you know, I just want to reiterate for the group again, some of the work that's going on, because, you know, I think sometimes we we have a tendency to look at this through the lens of, you know, this is doom and gloom,(...) and there's a lot of really bad stuff going on in the world. But you know, there's people like yourself doing a lot of really good work. And, you know, a couple of things I just want to reinforce, again, we often look at this as a them problem. You know, this is not about problem children, girls getting into a life of bad things. You know, there's lots of cases, and I've dealt with two or three cases here in our own jurisdiction, where the kids, the young ladies come from good families with good upbringing, but they become in conflict with parents, and they decide they're going to go couchsurfing for a couple of days and before they get there, they're going to be couchsurfing for a couple of days and before they know what they're engaged in the wrong people and making the wrong decisions. And again, without those supports and without those, those family influences or outside influences there to help them along the way, they make some some poor choices. But I really want to emphasize, you know, this this notion that you've talked about about education, because we look at it as really we call the three E's. And the education is not just

to educate the youth, it's to educate the parents, but also to educate our community and what to look for. You know, when you see a car at a gas station with a young lady in it, who's obviously a bit awkward and uncomfortable,(...) you know, just pay attention to what's going on and educating our police officers, because again, it's a pretty new field even for policing and for our young officers and what to look for. And, you know, we had the case on the 400 this past year where the officers, again, just saw something that looked a bit odd, somebody within the restaurant brought it to our attention, and before we knew it, we'd rescued two girls that were in a car with these two young men. But it's just trying to look for those signs and symptoms. The big part, the second year is really run engagement. And we need to engage with the community to watch for these things, to engage with our youth. You know, again, you've talked about those with lived experience. And, you know, the more we talk to the young girls that have been involved, I was actively involved in human trafficking came down in Halton region when I was there for 30 years. And, you know, very proud of some of the work we did there. But it's, you know, engaging with hotel owners, for example, when they start seeing these girls being brought into hotels and run through rooms night after night is building that proactive work with them to say, Hey, bring that to our attention, then we'll do something about it. And then of course, the last is the enforcement piece that our guys are trying to catch up on. And proud to say that here in Simcoe County was so simple, we do have a dedicated human trafficking investigator now. We received some grant funding just last year through the ministry because they are making this a priority. And it's something we're, we're really focused on. And, you know, you talk about the young people, it's there are there's so much vulnerability out there. And some of this is organized crime. Some of this crime of opportunity, but it's the more reach out we can do and educating people, it's, it's just making those life choices and helping people make the right choices.(...) So thanks for your time.(...) Thank you, Andrew. And you hit on so many key points. And again, we can't go out all morning about this, but thank you for a lot of the things. And that is one thing, just as a side note that we did our first one, and we plan to do more. And actually, it's funny, I'm going to be talking to some simple things about this. We just held a human trafficking conference at the Nado saga in here through the Nado saga, because they also got one of the human trafficking grants. And it was bringing in a lot of the frontline responders initially, and some people from the school board to educate. But the next step that we want to talk about is exactly that hotels, cab drivers, gas stations, like anywhere people will come in contact, how do we get the education piece into communities, right? So there's a lot of work to do, but thank you, we'll just keep doing more. Thanks. And it's not just about educating the girls, but educating the young men as well, and making their choices. And sadly, like anything else,(...) and all, you know, it's about supply and demand. As long as people keep going and looking at these things on the internet, as long as men keep availing themselves to these young girls, there's going to be a supply and demand. So the problem starts with all of us.

France Young:

Absolutely. Yeah. And I know Jackie Beaulieu in your area, I've done a couple of presentations with her. And hopefully the presentation that we're finishing now, if it can be brought into schools, we're looking at doing all the grade nine males,(...) gym classes and presenting it to males. So absolutely, it is a male discussion too. Awesome. Break in the cycle. France, thank you very much for joining us today.(...) Very informative in the short time you had, but like Tim said, I'd probably love to set

something up in the future to learn more. It's probably going to be an ongoing problem. And the more we know, the more educated, the better we are.(...) So thank you very much. We are going to go on to our normal business today. You're more than welcome to stay, but understand if you do have to leave.(...) I have some normal business to take care of myself.(...) Anyway, thank you all so much. And truly, I am more than happy to come and speak on any topic having to do. I've been doing youth work for almost 30 years now, starting the streets of Toronto with youth who were homeless and in the sex trade back in the early 90s, believe it or not. So this is a passion for me. And honestly, I am more than happy anytime to come back. Thank you for your time though, and listening. And just doing this is huge. As Andrew said, this is huge. Just being willing to talk about it, being willing to hear about it and being willing to share with people and to have your eyes open to it is huge as far as conquering this issue. So thank you today. Have a wonderful day, everybody.