Welcome back. This is Jen Lee, the creator and host of I Need Blue. Survivors Talk Surviving. Visit www.ineedblue.net for additional stories. As you listen, if the message moves you, rate and review it on Apple podcasts and Spotify so more people can find it. Share it with friends and family. The more we share, the more we learn, and the more we can help. Please note, I Need Blue does contain stories which feature graphic content and could be triggering. Please seek help if needed. Remember, you always come first.

My guests today are accomplished and deeply passionate about creating awareness to help victims of abuse and trafficking, ultimately leading to the eradication of this epidemic. Today's episode focuses on human trafficking which continually occurs at the US and Mexico border. On both sides of our border, girls, boys, and youths are being exploited. Alma Tucker is the President and Founder of International Network of Hearts Foundation, INH, based in San Diego, California. **Visit www.inhearts.org to learn more about INH**. On the website there is a red “Donate” button for any level of generosity. Alma has over 20 years of experience assisting victims of human trafficking and advocating for their rights within the border region of Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, California.

In 2019, Alma was invited to the White House in Washington DC to discuss human trafficking issues at the US/ Mexican border with the Trump administration. Alma was also invited to speak in the Rayburn Building at the Capitol on Women's Day in Washington, and at the Global Sustainability Network, GSN, at the Vatican in Rome, Italy. Alma received her degree in clinical psychology.

Andi Berger, JD, is Founder of Chair Of Voices Against Trafficking, VAT, an International organization which networks with independent businesses, nonprofits, individuals and human rights leaders, and legislators dedicated to the eradication of human trafficking and human rights abuse. VAT hosts quarterly international forums providing awareness, education, and solutions. The website is [www.VoicesAgainstTrafficking.com](http://www.VoicesAgainstTrafficking.com)

Her journey of surviving abuse and trafficking, her road to escape and emergence as a powerful and fearless rescuer, is documented in her book, A Fragile Thread Of Hope - One survivors quest to rescue. There is some collaboration in the book between Alma and Andy. The book can be found on amazon.com.

As we learn about the behaviors associated with this crime, we will have a greater appreciation for what you ladies do and the importance of it. Alma feel free to add information as needed; you are a great resource. Ultimately, this is a joint conversation.

Alma

Thank you so much for having us. This is our Alma Tucker, President and Founder of International Network of Hearts. We are in San Diego, California, and on the other side of the border with Mexico, Baja California. I am a board member of Voices Against Trafficking.

Andi

I'm Andi Buerger, Founder of Voices Against Trafficking. I'm also a survivor of child sex trafficking. My story began years ago, from the time I was six months old, to 17 years. My birth family and extended family members trafficked me. As a child, the term "human trafficking," didn’t exist. People barely talking about child abuse. In the 60s and early 70s, there wasn't a place to go, there wasn't a way to reach out for help.

If it was family members trafficking you, sexually abusing you, physically abusing you, you were stuck because familial trafficking, the predators’ actions get covered up by the bloodline. When I went to get help, which I tried a couple of times, I was sent back, and I paid a greater price. By the time I was five years old, my birth mother made it clear that she could take my life anytime she wanted. I thought, you know what, I'm just going to beat her to the punch because the abuse, and the sexual torture was so great. I thought I'd be better off dead because at least I'll be at peace. I was just five years old.

I went out to the curb of my house and waited for a car to come by fast enough, so I could jump in front of it. I thought, you know, if I just get smashed by a car, then they can never touch me, and I'll never have to be in that house again. On that day, while I was waiting, no cars showed up and all I needed was one. As I waited, I looked up into the big blue sky and wondered, who made this sky? How far does it go? I was a little kid and curious about, was there someone or something bigger than me? Bigger than the people that hurt me and maybe they could help me?

I realized for me in my life, it was God. I heard this voice within my heart say, "this is not the plan I have for you. Suicide is not the answer." For some reason, I trusted the voice.

I went back to the garage and leaned against the door. I really felt like I had to trust the voice and I'd never trusted anyone. It was a big leap, but I felt peaceful as I stood against the garage door, and simply said, "If you keep me alive, I will do whatever you call me to do in my life."

Of course, at five, I didn't understand how long it would be to turn 18 and be free, and as most victims know, you're not free. The years went on, and the abuse went on; the physical, sexual, and mental abuse lasted for a long time. I did try to take my life a couple more times. By the time I was 16, I decided I had already suffered so much that I either had to choose to live forward, or really finish the job once and for all. In my heart, I knew there had to be somebody out there that loved me or some way I could find my purpose and find a hope. My birth mother made one last try at taking my life by trying to choke me to death when I was 17. After that, I graduated high school and went to college. It was then I had some physical distance from these abusers. College was the first time I started to learn basic skills, how to take care of myself, how to see how other people lived, and have space from the people who were still in my life, but they couldn't touch me as easily.

Jen

When people think of trafficking, they certainly don't think of a six-month-old. How does a six-month-old get trafficked?

Andi

Well, I think it starts with the the physical and sexual, the sexual abuse and, and babies are often taken, whether it's to sell them or to use them. And I can't say enough about depraved nature, how far someone will go. And my birth mother was the primary sexual predator, and orchestrator of pretty much everything evil in my family, a mother who plays doctor too much with her baby or a male person in the household that that will fondle or do things. So in therapy, there are ways where they can go back, and you can't lie, you can only tell the truth when you when you're under a certain IV sedation. So during extensive therapy, this is how they were able to determine how far back it went. And then years, years after that, and that was in my 30s, I found out that my birth brother basically said in the last conversation we had, that he had never seen me the first year I was born, that my birth mother kept me in a room with a female cousin, and had people in and out of there. It's unfortunate, at toddlers, little children and Alma noses, you know, if a predator wants a product, and can get their hands on a child, or someone innocent teenager, young adult, they will do that in any cost. And unfortunately, families will cover up those secrets for generations.

Jen

Did you have siblings? Were they victims too?

Andi

Yes, I have birth brother. He is alive, but I don’t know where he is living. He was four years older, and probably endured more abuse than I did simply because he was older. My birth mother had an unusual attraction to him as the male child in the family.

Jen

What was your mother trying to get? Drugs?

Andi

No. She went to church and was a religious person. She wanted the status of living a life that she couldn't have. My birth father was a salesman and didn't keep a job very often. He liked his secretaries, and things like that. I think she had something inside of her which was just evil. Honestly, I think people choose to be good, or they choose to be evil, or they choose to do nothing. In my opinion, doing nothing, is just as bad as being evil. If you can stop somebody from being hurt or help them, I really believe whatever moral code somebody has, that’s the least you should do.

Jen

Was your mom a victim of trafficking or abuse?

Andi

I’m guessing that she and her siblings were abused. When I started talking about this, people would say, “Oh, well, that explains it.” As if it was okay. I would always say, when it’s between an adult and a child, it is never okay to hurt them mercilessly or to violate them. But I am certain there was abuse in her life. Much later, we determined through my own therapy, she probably had multiple personalities. Again, that doesn't excuse the actions, and it’s important someone listening understands that. It's never okay to be hurt that way.

Jen

When did you realize this was not your fault?

Andi

I worked on it the first 30 years of my life. I married someone whom I thought would help me along the process, however he ended up turning out to not be a good person. He had his own sexual eccentricities and the marriage lasted about 8 years, not too long. In that time, during therapy, I started realizing it wasn't my fault. I needed to learn how to communicate my needs better, and how to take care of myself, and how to change what I expected.

I was successful in business, but not successful in terms of emotional or relational maturity. I was naïve and I didn’t know how to speak up for myself and say: this is wrong, you can't treat me this way. I learned that after the divorce.

Before I married my husband, who I have been married to for 21 years, I had to learn how to communicate differently. I had to change my expectations beyond thinking, “it's a great day because nobody raped or beat me today.”

Jen

When did you get to the point where you could talk about it publicly, like you and I are today?

Andi

I started speaking, in my early 30s. I wanted desperately to help other people who had been hurt like I had, even though I didn't necessarily have everything handled at that point. My faith, my support systems, working and realizing not everybody treated me the way that the people who were supposed to love me treated me, I realized there were people who valued me. I have self-worth. I began rebuilding my self-esteem, through self-talk and counseling. It was a choice I made every day.

Healing is a moment-by-moment process. I think it's a choice every moment and when you do that enough times, year after year, it suddenly becomes your new normal and your new habit to realize what is healthy and what is not. “I don't think this is a safe person or a good situation for me, or wow! that really bothered me, or I've been betrayed, and hurt.”

How do I self-nurture and self-care? It’s an ongoing lifetime process. I still deal with PTSD even at 60. I'm just starting to talk about that publicly because people need to know more about. My growth really happened, my healing accelerated, in my mid 30s, after much counseling. When I met my husband, I realized what I had always wanted, was available to me. I wasn't the one that was broken in all my relationships. He was the most amazing human in my life. “I don't understand everything which happened to you, but I can promise you two things. I will always listen, and I will always be here.” He said to me. That's what victims need is someone to listen, and not always to fix or explain it.

Jen

Healing is moment by moment. Can you tell us about some triggers which caught you off guard?

Andi

I was probably 19 and working for a sales company which my birth father owned. A nice gentleman who visited frequently, stopped by one day. I would always hear him arrive, except this one day I didn’t hear him come into the office. He came up behind me and put his hands on the back of my shoulders. I jumped, I just freaked out, I turned around and I'll never forget what he said, “Whoa, who hurt you?” I wish I could have told him it was the man he was doing business with. I didn't have that presence to be able to do that.

I don't watch certain things on TV. If I get triggered by something visual, I’m very visual, it impacts me more than something I hear. If I hear something like a person being called stupid or somebody's angry and bullying another person, I feel that. I feel all the body memories.

I have to do something to process that, so it doesn't stay with me.

Jen

What is the greatest misconception of human trafficking?

Andi

“It doesn't happen here. Not in our neighborhood, not in our family, not in our community.”

 That is wrong. In the US alone, every 40 seconds, a child aged 18 and under is abducted. They’re gone. They're either taken, or they're lured into a situation where they are taken. It is assumed they are missing children. A lot of people write it off as runaways, troubled, or their rebellious. But that's not true.

You hear, “well, I've known Jane or Joe my whole life, and they couldn't possibly be involved in something like that.” We must get better at vetting where are kids are, where they are hanging out and who they are with. It’s important to make sure they are safe and in safe situations.

People don't want to believe the monster exists. That people are so depraved, they would use a child for sex or sell a young girl to be used for sex 20-25 times a day. The same violation happens to boys. It’s hard. We've had national headlines with the Epstein and Maxwell cases, which show males and females can both be predators. It's hard for people to receive that.

Jen

Would you agree that part of the reason survivors don't come forward is because they don't think they will be believed?

Andi

I did not think people would believe me, especially in that culture. I am a little older than some of your listeners. We saw in national headlines that a 14-year-old who testified in the Epstein case was not believed. It takes courage, it's takes guts for a young person to speak up. I try to encourage anyone who is in contact with children, whether it's a guardian, a grandparent, a natural parent, or a stepparent, have a conversation about stranger danger and implement a safe word for the family. Your child can text you that word to alert you of their situation and to come pick you up. If your child is in danger, or they feel uncomfortable, allow them the safe space they need to talk to you about it.

Jen

What words of encouragement would you give to someone contemplating getting help?

Andi

Number one: it is not your fault. What happened should never have happened, but it did. You are a valuable and worthwhile human being, and you deserve to have a future full of hope. You deserve a life designed for you. Please don’t let the situation or events take the rest of your life.

The most important thing you can do for yourself is to go through a healing process, whatever that looks like to you. A qualified counselor, somebody at your church, somebody at school, somebody that you trust, but include qualified counseling to work through it. Healing is painful but the great thing about healing, and need to be faithful with it, if you do the work you will win. You can be successful. You can have beautiful relationships and friendships and all those wonderful things. If we don't deal with the garbage in us, we can't get that out.

Jen

Did people fail you when you asked for help?

Andi

I found out later some people suspected and knew, but they didn't want to get involved, because they thought it would be worse for me and my birth brother. When I did try to get help, I was told, every family has problems, and your parents are under a lot of stress, etc. No one wanted to accept what I had to say. I wrote a letter about killing myself, and gave it to the person I most trusted, and who I thought would support and understand me. They gave the letter to my birth mother which made things worse. I stopped trying to reach out and I thought, if I can just live and survive, then I will win. If I die, they win. It became a very primal thing. Not being believed makes the shame feel more validated.

Jen

At five years old, you have this natural attachment to your parents. Right? Kids love their mom, they love their dad, etc. What is the psychological challenge between realizing it's okay to not love your mom, and maybe even hate her because of what she did to you, versus the internal struggle of, wait a second that's my mom, I'm supposed to love her?

Andi

Familial trafficking, child abuse, sexual exploitation of any kind, whether it's pornography, etc fit in the same bucket. Child abuse is the big umbrella and under that you have pedophilia, trafficking, etc. For familial abuse, the mother/daughter, mother/son, or father/daughter, father/son relationships, there is a sacred trust. There should be a sacred bond at all costs, where the parent protects the child and tries their best to keep them safe from harm which can be prevented.

What I saw with the kids we rescued is the parent or person responsible for the child, would just sweep it under the rug, divorce or they would get rid of the family member that was causing the problem. They never dealt with the child's pain or the child's experiences of those hideous acts which were committed against them. Without dealing with that part, the child does not get what they really need. There’s always that self-deprivation, shame, and guilt.

It is very hard to rebuild that relationship when trust is broken. And yes, it is ok to not have holidays and not want to be around that person. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. What is dangerous to the victim is to harbor the hatred and bitterness. I believe in forgiveness. How you get there is an individual journey. In my case, I had to pray all the time. I basically told God, “I'm not doing it. Nope. You want me to forgive them, then you're going to do it through me.”

I didn't understand the benefit of releasing all the shame, all the guilt, all the ugliness, all the hurt, and grief. There's a lot of unresolved grief for victims. When I released the people that hurt me, and it wasn't for their benefit but mine, I could receive joy, love, laughter, and goodness from other people in my life. It allowed me to fill myself up in those areas.

I have seen victims who haven’t been able to do that part or did not get the help they needed to release. They hurt and they're very ill. Some have had cancer; some are chronically ill. It affects the body. Sometimes they have a mental illness. I encourage people, please think about it, consider it, and get help if you want to release that out of your life, because it is not healthy for you.

Jen

Did you lose relationships with family and friends that you wanted to keep after you came forward?

Andi

I had a couple of very close friends who sided with my birth parents. They only knew the Chicago Joe, take them to dinner have fun guy. Of course, my birth mother was The Stepford wife perfection. She looks good. The house is perfect. The kids are in line. There was an image which was projected publicly and didn’t reflect the truth inside the walls of our homes. I did lose friends. I lost family, the only safe family I ever knew. I still have great memories of them, but because they were related to my birth mother, there was no way that I could tell them. I got close to telling them because I thought if they knew they would take me into their home. I never got that chance because my birth mother was always on the prowl, always trying to get me in trouble so she basically could beat the life out of me, hurt me, touch me, etc. She was very ritualistic that way. My birth father was more impulsive; I never knew when he would go off. It was hard.

I had shadows behind me my whole life. I didn’t know if this was the day I was going to really get hurt, or somebody would really brutalize me. I lost the only decent safe relationships I had, because of that. When I did start speaking, my one aunt listened and accepted it. I called her from a payphone by my college when I received a five-page typewritten letter from my birth mother. She heard I was starting to speak about these things, and basically threatened me with lawsuits. She was going to ruin me and take everything I had. I was a college kid so I didn’t have much she could take. She went on a legal rampage against me and threatened my life. S

I called my aunt I said, “I just want someone to know the truth. I know this is going to be hard for you to hear. I'm just going to let you know if anything happens to me, or I die prematurely, your sister, my birth mother, is first on the list of who done it and I have already given the police her name.” That’s how intense it was. I didn’t speak with my aunt again until I wrote my first book. One of my cousins read the book, called her mom, my aunt and after 40 plus years, we reunited just in terms of a relationship over the phone. She felt enormously guilty that she didn't know, and she didn't help.

The only person responsible for what happened is the person who committed the act. You can't fix what you don't know. So we've been able to have a telephone and virtual relationship. I've been able to talk to her and a couple of my cousins who I would have loved to have relationships with through the years. Yes, I lost a lot.

Jen

Yes, but you've gained a lot too. What is the biggest thing you gained?

Andi

The biggest thing I have gained, besides learning to trust again, having a successful marriage, having friends like Alma and other people in my life, I found my own voice. This past year, through Voices Against Trafficking and the book we compiled, I found my own voice. I found the authentic Andi inside. I used to write, paint, dance, write music and do a lot of creative things. Between the abuse, a narcissistic abusive ex-husband, and all these different things, I lost myself for a while. I had nine traumatic brain injuries in the last 20 years. So the first book, I needed help writing to organize it. I had my story, the content, and the kids that we rescued, but I couldn't put it together, so I had a great writer who helped me. This last year was the first year I felt like I am really who I'm meant to be, I'm truly authentic. I've always been transparent, but now I'm genuinely authentic and after all this work, after all this stuff, I finally get to have my voice. And for a kid who had no voice, who had a huge speech impediment, was laughed at all the time up through college years, that's a big deal. And anyone who's been a victim and has not been heard, and has not been valued, they understand that.

Jen

Alma, can you tell me about your experiences from your perspective?

Alma

Yes. We hear all the challenges the survivor goes through. The biggest challenge is escaping especially when it is familial abuse. When it's a family member who is taking advantage and exploiting someone, the criminals know everything about you. They know where you live, family members. Who do you trust more than your mom, or your father? To think they could give you birth, take advantage of you and do something unbelievable like trafficking you. It is more common than we think. I see it in almost every case.

I'm so blessed to come from a home where my parents protected and loved me. I'm inspired to help others because I know what it is like to have good parents. I should do something to help. How could I not do something for others that are in need? I've been hearing stories from girls who say, “Alma, I don't remember the pain. I don’t remember all the rapes I received at night. I was a victim of things I don’t remember. What really hurts me to this day, is all the people that were around me who saw it and didn’t do anything. That hurts.

A particular girl described how her mother and her father took her and her 4 siblings to hotels and other places where they allow men and adults to rape them. The managers of hotels or the taxi drivers can see what is going on and no body reports it. Part of the problem is the people who see this and do nothing. If you see something, you say something otherwise you are part of the problem. Victims don’t have a voice. They're being told they are the problem.

Some victims don't even know what human trafficking is. Some workers say, “Alma I thought this was my normal life.” Imagine 5,6,10 years old’s saying, “I thought life was like that. That I didn’t have rights. I thought oh, that's life.” Until I grew up and started understanding or I came to this program. I realized then this life was not normal, and I deserved a better life and I have rights now.

 It takes a long time to heal and trust again. I remember seeing the face of girls and boys who were coming to our shelters, their eyes were down and there was a lot of shame and feelings of guilt among them. In our programs we offer psychology therapy, and some kids needs psychiatric treatment, because they experience thoughts of suicide. They have bulimia or depression. Some of the cases require a specialist for proper treatment. We also offer social worker services. Each child is a case for us. We want to find who did that to them. Why? Because while this child is in a safe place, there are several more who are not.
We need to follow the cases; get to the root of the problem.

Jen

How often are predators caught?

Alma

Not common at all. I work closely with the Mexican authorities. To them they see it as the child is safe now so that is ok. But no! They have their hands full and not too often do they follow the cases. We push; we have an attorney in our in our team too. We push and they don't like it. They don't like we are asking for justice for these kids.

The predators take the most beautiful part of these children. Instead of them playing with toys and going to school, they're doing things that they're not supposed to do at their age. They lose a lot and we need to help with that. Some kids come in very sexualized because that's what they been forced to do. It’s hard for children and youths to come into our place and trust us right away. It takes time. I remember I asked one of our girls who was 15 at the time, “how long did it took you for really trust us?” She said, “Alma almost two years to know that you guys are for real. I was always waiting to see what you were expecting from me. When are you going to start asking me to do things?”

It is a long process to heal and that's why it's important to have programs like we have and others, which provide the right services. Once a victim doesn't receive the right treatment, they can come to be a victimizer. They repeat what they learn.

Jen

If they don't escape or end up with somebody great like you or Andi, what happens to them? Do they age out? What happens if they don’t get help?

Alma

It's been proven in studies that people who age out, die at an early age due to illness and infections and trauma. Or, they become part of the criminal world, recruiting all the girls and boys. When their age is not so attractive for the clients, they may choose to be part of the organized crime.

Andi

Self-medication is common among a lot of the kids that we rescue, either drugs or alcohol etc., They are trying to anesthetize their pain. As they mature, they will have trouble with getting into a genuine relationship because of the hurt and pain. So, they'll end up in the criminal system, and sometimes they just end their life. We have many teens which we have helped whom have tried to commit suicide several times because it is too much for them. Teen suicide is super high for victims who just can't take it anymore. They find it is the best deal for themselves.

Alma

I'd like to insist how important is to have a program for survivors. Right now, we are going through a difficult time finding housing for mothers and daughters who have been rescued, mama’s and little babies. We need more shelters. We need more organizations, focused on minors. It is not common to have homes for minors it is more so for adults. The minors go to foster homes and don’t receive the right care. It’s about being more aware on how we can help organizations which are already doing the work?

How can we prevent this from happening in our own homes? How do we communicate with our children when social media is taking over communication? We need to be aware of what our children our doing; what photos they pose for, the friends they keep, and what they're doing when we're not watching them.

We must be aware of these situations to stop human trafficking. Once you know this is happening, how can you look at the other side when we see it happening? I can be difficult to spot because a lot is being done underground, and they are using the internet. When a boy or girl has been abused or exploited it is not just the problem with their parents, the community needs to respond for these children. Call 911 and report it. Call organizations in your area. Call the national line to reach people who know how to care for children in this situation. It’s important to call an organization and not just the police because sometimes the police or authorities are not familiar the subject. I work a lot with Amber Alert.

**A predator is going to act in the first 4 hours when they take a child.** It’s important to not wait when you are suspicious a child is in danger.

Jen

Can you define indirect victims?

Alma

Some of these girls or ladies are being sexually assaulted, and raped. From those situations comes a pregnancy. The don't know who the father of this child is but here comes a baby. The baby is called the indirect victim and the mother is called the direct victim.

Andi

As you try to get justice for the child, the rest of the family also suffers when there is an incident against a child. Even 1 sexual assault can taint the entire life of the victim. There is a lot of residual effect from every single incident of sexual trafficking, pedophilia, and pornography.

Jen

Healing is one moment as a time. Triggers can happen at any time. Therapy is there to help you cope. You learn to be first and to take care of yourself. For some, that's really hard to understand and accept.

Andi

Yes, it is. It's tough to put yourself first when you were nothing most of your life or treated like nothing. These girls have been raped, leading to pregnancy and suddenly, not only do they have their own life to deal with, but they must think about another. Think about how much emotional weight they carry. We need more shelters, no doubt about it. We need communities to be more open to housing. These victims want a chance at a new normal because it'll never be normal the way it was before things happen.

We do not have adequate mental health services. Physical, mental, and emotional abuse is horrific. The impact lasts a lifetime. In my opinion, when somebody is sexually abused, assaulted, trafficked, it is the most intimate violation of a human person. It's the soul, the mind, the body, the spirit of that human being; it is the life source. We do not have a lot of counseling or mental health resources dedicated to that kind of healing, situation, and hurt.

I have watched several young victims be taken into an exam room and treated like a piece of meat. All in the name of, “we have to get the rape kit, we have to do this, we have to do that.” They forget this is a human being. Okay. Then you have counselors that try their best, but maybe they're not qualified to go that deep into the psychosexual issues that occur, especially with a victim that has had years of abuse or years of trafficking. **The average life expectancy of a trafficking victim, if they're healthy enough to withstand it, is 7 years. The likelihood of** **escape 1 in 100.** And that's only off the statistics that we know. Those victims deserve the best care we can offer which was one of the points of creating Voices Against Trafficking. If all individuals, all groups, all people, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds can come together we can make a difference. We're not religious, we're not political, we are just trying to leverage organizations and front liners who can go to legislatures, and leaders in countries and say, “This is what we need to do.”

Jen

Alma works in areas at the border Tajuana, Mexico, and in San Diego. There’s enough TV broadcasting, and social media broadcasting on what is going on at our southern border and the amount of people coming in. Can you explain how it’s not just people illegally coming into the country, but the horrific activity which is taking place on the journey here.

Alma

People are coming from their countries, 3rd world countries, who are going through social, and economic challenges, insecurity, etc. They hear what kind of is an open invitation that the border is open, and no child will stay behind. We are seeing 1,000s and 1,000s of people come through the border. The question is who moved them? Who brought them to the border? Organized crime is big business bringing people from the south. They’re selling drugs, but also bringing undocumented people in who pay them. They are telling them come, come, the border is open and if you bring your child, it’s even better. They are renting kids to one or another. Oh, this couple don’t have kids so let's give them some kids, so they are allowed into the country. They lie to them.

This organized crime charges a lot of money to bring them to this border. They call themselves Coyote, smugglers, and say to people: if you want to cross the border, by the mountains, $10,000. If you want to cross by car $15,000. Imagine these people don't have that amount of money and when they don’t pay, the smugglers kidnap them and tell them “You’re not leaving here until your family send you the money.”

 Or they use them to smuggle drugs. They say, as example, “you need to have drugs in your backpacks” and they use them to bring drugs, including a lot of amphetamine into this country. We’ve been in conference with the authorities in Texas, with the authorities in both sides of the border. The smugglers put a bracelet around their wrist with different colors representing the price they pay. They have different bracelets for minors. If the undocumented person has drugs with them to bring to the United States that is a different bracelet. This is a big industry right now.

They're making a lot of money by using humans who want to come to this country; they are taking advantage of their need. I see this affecting both sides of the border, in Mexico and here. They are camping in the streets where they don't have the basics like toilets, a kitchen, and bedrooms. There is a lot of issues with Covid and it’s our health problem. The organized crime creates a lot of insecurity issues too. Assaults are affecting the community in Tijuana.

The president of Mexico say that migrants are welcome here, but they don’t offer the number of services those migrants need. It is a big thing going on here and we extend our services for migrants too. We visit them, we bring them food, and my goal is to identify victims of human trafficking and children who are victims of human trafficking.

We already helped one boy from Honduras and another one from Guatemala. The trauma they have is horrible. One boy witnessed his mom being forced to have sex with men and she was forced to use drugs. The little boy says that with his own eyes how they were taking advantage of their mom. We open our services for migrants to. There is a lot of things going on at the border.

Jen

How many children are coming over unaccompanied?

Alma

I don’t have exact number, but I know it is 1000’s and 1000’s of kids coming over. Adults too. They make it to United States one way or another. Some areas have no wall. The project was stopped from this new administration, and they walk in like they are walking into a different neighborhood. There is a lot to do and I’m looking forward for this new administration, which is not so new anymore, to take the subject more serious. I know President Biden invite everybody to create awareness this month, because this month is awareness against human trafficking.

We used to have meetings in the White House, and nothing is happening right now. It's not in the agenda as a priority, but we must keep working on the work which was done before.

Jen

That's unfortunate, because it doesn't matter what administration is in the White House, the sex trafficking doesn't stop. It's not Republican or Democrat this is about people. When you did work with the Trump administration, can you share with us some of the things that you were able to get accomplished? If the government is going to help, what are things they either did in the past to help out, or that you need today?

Alma

The Trump administration was only 4 years, and a lot of the work they started was in the process of getting to the next level. Money was released to fight against human trafficking to support shelters that already opened in United States. We were part of that network because with our location in San Diego and in Mexico, we were supposed to open a shelter here in San Diego, but everything is stopped, and that didn’t happen. We are not able to receive that support. We were in conversations and then the communication stopped but hopefully is going to happen soon.

Jen

What if someone wants to donate?

Alma

<https://inhearts.org/>

Red button. They are a 501 C3. I really encourage you to keep supporting us for we can rescue more people support more people and look for shelters for people in need.

Jen

Alma and Andi, do you have any last words of encouragement, information that you want to share about you and your organization's?

Andi

<https://www.voicesagainsttrafficking.com/>

501 C3 organization and donations are tax deductible. What we do with the dollars is provide an international forum for free on Facebook and Youtube every quarter. Our next one will be March 30 and we bring people and voices from all over the world, US, Mexico, Australia, everywhere, to share what's working in the fight against human trafficking. We share stories, share policies, and share ideas. It's a great way to educate the public, in 5-to-6-minute presentations by speakers for an hour and a half. We've been doing that for a couple of years now. We have a new book that's been released, Voices Against Trafficking The Strength Of Many Voices Speaking As One. There are 18 authors and 20 chapters, all from different perspectives. Alma has a wonderful chapter in there and if you really want to know what's going on with the border, Mexico, and what's happening with these children, that's a great chapter to read.

https://www.amazon.com/Voices-Against-Trafficking-Strength-Speaking/dp/1733360522/ref=sr\_1\_1?crid=ICEKJD0GROQA&keywords=voices+against+trafficking+book&qid=1642699609&sprefix=voices+against%2Caps%2C93&sr=8-1

We have media members who have contributed. We have a woman who is just amazingly active and astute and almost 80. She walked with Martin Luther King and wrote an amazing chapter on the evolution of slavery, which, by the way, involved human trafficking hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years ago. It's not a new thing here. We also have information on what you can do when you travel, and how to keep your kids safe on the internet. The book is another tool, and we're going to bring it out every year. Our goal is to get a book into the hands of every Senator, every US Congress person, every Attorney General, and every Governor in the US, every single year. So the influences from the top down, in your state and across the board, can't say they don't know, or they didn't understand. We are making it very clear.

Our book has helplines, hotlines, and tips. It's another tool and we're trying to get as many tools as possible in our belt so that the everyday person can say, “hey, you know what, I could do this much.” Or if I don't have time, or I don't have money, maybe I can just add my voice to the roster. Voices Against Trafficking wants to have 1 million voices by the end of summer 2023 on our roster. To find the roster, go to our website: there's a tab that says Add Your Voice.

https://www.voicesagainsttrafficking.com/add-your-voice

We want to be able to take those million names to legislatures, and to other places where we can say, “You know what, we have a million people, and they want you to protect their children. They want the future of our country and other countries to be protected.” We can leverage that to get things done.

Look up the help lines and put them in your phone. If you see something, say something so you know who to call when you need it. If your children are old enough to understand, have the numbers in their phones as well. Kids see other kids being hurt or being taken or in trouble probably more often than we do as adults because kids are in the same social circle.

Lastly, if you vote for anyone, a mayor, a city council person, State, Governor, make sure you're getting your votes worth in terms of protecting the children in your community. If they cannot tell you what they're doing, what laws they're supporting, what their activities are regarding anti-trafficking measures and education, then they probably shouldn't have your vote or your support the next time around. Those are simple things which can be done.

Again, if you're a victim, please reach out for help. We want to be there for you, even if we're not in your town or your area, there are people that want to help you. We are looking for you and if you've been found and you need help rehabilitating, reach out to one of our websites and Alma or myself would be happy to direct you to help. We want to make sure that you have a chance at the life you deserve to have.

Alma

1-888-373-7888 is the hotline. Please, if you see something, if you're going through something, call this number and they will help you in specific cases of human trafficking.

<https://inhearts.org/>

You can find us also on Facebook and Instagram.

# Amazon.com: Voices Against Trafficking: The Strength Of Many Voices Speaking As ONE

We can give a voice to victims by getting the book and learning more. Learning more is the best way to prevent something from happening to you or the people that you most love. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure to talk to you guys.

Jen

Thank you for being here today.

<https://ineedblue.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/I-NEED-BLUE-110173334559864>