We evoke empathy and empower people to eradicate child exploitation
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At a critical moment in the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. raised his voice and said, “There is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

Empathy is an active response to the suffering of others. However, demonstrating empathy is not about becoming the voice for those enduring the realities of exploitation and trafficking. It is about entering into their stories and making sure their voice is heard.

There are many voices of those personally affected by child exploitation that need to be heard; there are many voices of those who work to end it that need to be heard. Here are a few that are especially meaningful to me...

- The Voices of Youth: We partnered with two Denver youth, who survived extreme vulnerability and victimization, to build our prevention media curriculum. They give advice to teens going through what they went through. Now their voices are being heard in school districts and youth outreach programs all over the country.

- The Voices of Survivors: Avery was trafficked in Denver, then Vegas, and eventually the oil boom community of Williston, ND before she was able to escape her trafficker’s control. We partnered with her on our prevention outreach to boom communities and now her voice is being heard by members of congress, attorneys general, law enforcement, the oil and trucking industries, and more.

- The Voices of Advocates: A truck driver, who had been trained to recognize and respond to exploitation through our media, recently observed suspicious activity during one of his stops. He made a phone call and his voice resulted in the rescue of a young woman and the arrest of two alleged traffickers.

- The Voices of World Changers: We partnered with Norma Bastidas, a world-class athlete and survivor of sexual violence, as she broke the record for the World’s Longest Triathlon to fight human trafficking. World leaders, two nations’ capitols, and young survivors are hearing her voice of relentlessness and inspiration!

When exploitation meets a community of empathy, apathy loses, exploitation loses, and justice wins. Even with all of the great progress, as long as victims are being identified and these types of crimes are being perpetuated, we have work to do. We all have to enter in. Use your voice!

Brad Riley
Founder and President
When small towns experience an oil boom, traffickers see the workers moving in for high-paying jobs as a prime target. While there can be great economic benefits for a town experiencing a boom, there are also social effects. Community members living in a boom need resources to know how to prevent and intervene in issues of child exploitation. And members of boom industries – such as oil and gas – need resources to train their employees to know how to engage on behalf of vulnerable and victimized kids.

Our BOOM campaign empowers boom communities and members of industries such as oil and gas to create traffick-free communities by forming clear response protocols and committing to employee and community trainings. BOOM provides the tools this demographic needs to empathize and engage.

After releasing this program in 2014, we led the conversation with Congressmen, school administrators, law enforcement, and community advocates on how to prevent child exploitation in boom communities in Kansas, North Dakota, and New Mexico.

“I have heard so many people thank me for bringing iEmpathize to Carlsbad to educate our community so we can get ahead of this [issue]. We want to keep as many of our kids as safe as possible.”

Jerri McTaggert - Community Member of Oil Boomtown Carlsbad, NM
“If there had been a program such as The Empower Youth Program, adults and peers in my life would have been aware of the indicators of exploitation and would have been able to intervene. Now, there is awareness and prevention available so that no other will have to be exploited in the ways that I was.”

Christine Cesa - Trafficking Survivor

Exploitation comes in many forms, such as bullying, neglect, and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Human trafficking, perhaps the most extreme form of exploitation, is a form that many youth know little about, yet it occurs in virtually every U.S. community.

Many factors can make a youth vulnerable to exploitation. Personal factors, such as poverty or unstable home environments, and cultural factors, such as hyper-sexualized media, can push them into vulnerability. Exploitative people target those who are vulnerable, seeking to pull them down further in order to obtain personal gain.

Youth need to be empowered to safely navigate the factors in their lives that could otherwise make them vulnerable to exploitation. In 2014, we developed an updated version of our Empower Youth Program, which is a tool that enables individuals to facilitate prevention-focused conversations with youth about exploitation and empathy so that they can be empowered with protective strategies. It unveils the system of negative pushes and pulls that entrap youth and empowers them with alternative, positive pulls that can lead to success and safety. It also empowers youth to respond if exploitation is happening among their peers or family.

In the final quarter of the year, we distributed the program to over 40 facilitators in 10 different states! Thousands of kids now possess the tools required to prevent being exploited.
Child Exploitation happens along our nation’s roadways in places like hotels, restaurants, rest areas, travel plazas, ports of entry, etc. Additionally, industries that are primarily comprised of men become targets for traffickers. This means that truckers are often in close proximity to vulnerable and victimized kids and therefore need to be empowered to know how to recognize and respond to signs of exploitation.

In 2014, we collaborated to create the Freedom Drivers Project, a tractor-trailer converted into a mobile exhibit that is now touring the country to educate and empower the trucking community to recognize and respond to child exploitation. Our efforts were vital in creating the overall design, content, and media utilized in the experience. We also updated previous films that we had created for our partner, Truckers Against Trafficking, and created new media pieces for more targeted use.

To date, our tools have been used to train over 150,000 professionals at truck shows and through safety trainings. Since 2007, members of the trucking industry made more than 1000 calls to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. These tips provide law enforcement with vital information that leads to the restoration of victims and arrests of perpetrators. The United Nations has named this campaign one of the “Top 100 best practices fighting human trafficking internationally.”

“

All those girls I thought were just runaways. Then I saw your videos and information and realized I’d been seeing those girls for years and that they weren’t just runaways.”

A Member of the Trucking Industry
“It’s everybody’s issue. . . This is a crime against humanity. As a society we need to protect our children. They are the future.”

Norma Bastidas

Survivors deserve to be front and center in conversations about exploitation, from best practices in prevention to intervention strategies, to recovery and rehabilitation methods, to advocacy efforts. They also deserve a wide spectrum of individual support for personal well-being and financial security. However, the reality is that they do not always receive these things, and that certainly needs to change.

iEmpathize partners with survivors to appropriately share their stories and engage them as activists.

In 2014, we embarked upon our greatest adventure yet. In partnership with the United Nations, iEmpathize collaborated with Norma Bastidas – ultra-athlete, single mom, and survivor of sexual violence – to help her break the world record for the longest triathlon. Along her route, we captured the stories of survivors and their advocates. The result – our first feature length film titled “Be Relentless”, will be a documentary used to advocate for better policies, laws, services, and support for survivors in Mexico and the United States. Profits will be used to fund opportunities and cover emergency costs for survivors of exploitation.
University students don’t always understand that human trafficking is an issue both in their communities and around the world. College students are not immune to the atrocities of exploitation. Yet they can also be the force behind the cultural shift needed to eradicate it.

Empower Universities is about providing students, faculty, and staff with an engaging education about child exploitation, and empowering them to respond. We accomplish this through three different programs. Our internship program provides students with an in-depth look at what it means to be a human rights advocate working to eradicate child exploitation. Our Empathy Week program empowers students at university campuses across the United States through experiences that challenge them to empathize and engage. Finally, our Film and Talk events authenticate the issue in classrooms and at campus events, providing opportunities for students to unpack the issue and assess how they can work to eradicate child exploitation in their own communities. All of these methods prepare our country’s future leaders to be actively engaged in responding to this issue throughout their lives.

In 2014, twelve interns served with iEmpathize, six universities hosted us, and over 3,000 students were introduced to the issue through our Empower Universities program.
In addition to the monetary income shown above, iEmpathize received over $250,000 of in-kind donations in 2014!

Note: 2014 deficit covered by surplus from previous years