



CNN NEWSROOM Transcript

**Congress Investigates Skyrocketing Oil Prices; California Officials Search For 11 Hikers;  
First-Hand Account From Survivor of Child Prostitution**

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ROBERT MUELLER, FBI DIRECTOR: Our efforts have led to the recovery of 433 child victims. Just this past week, the FBI joined our law enforcement partners in a five day national enforcement action. This operation, known as Operation Cross Country, included takedown operations in 16 cities across the country and led to the removal of 21 children from the cycle of victimization.

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LEMON: Well, authorities say the children most vulnerable to sexual predators are runaways.

KYRA PHILLIPS, CNN ANCHOR: Well, Carissa Phelps knows firsthand what it's like to be sexually exploited. Years ago, when Carissa Phelps was just 12 years old, her mother dropped her off at juvenile hall. She ended up on the streets of Fresno, California. Well, a pimp found her and her life as a child prostitute began.

She tells her disturbing story in the documentary, "Carissa."

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CARISSA PHELPS, SURVIVOR OF CHILD PROSTITUTION: There's a trucker that drove me behind that motel in an empty lot. There's (INAUDIBLE) in crack cocaine and forcing me to smoke it in Palm Court Motel. I really didn't want to smoke. I really didn't want to smoke it. And he forced me to smoke it. And he said I would like it. And I -- I started faking a seizure. I didn't know what else to do.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

PHILLIPS: Well, since then, she's gotten off the streets and earned an MBA and a law degree from UCLA.

Carissa Phelps joins me now live from Fresno.

You are one amazing woman, Carissa. I'm just going to start right out with that.

PHELPS: Thank you, Kyra.

PHILLIPS: Tell me...

PHELPS: Thank you, Kyra.

PHILLIPS: We set up what had happened.

But how did you get out? PHELPS: It was luck, pure luck, I think. At the time, children like me, runaways, were just seen as a nuisance -- a public nuisance and shifted around from group homes in and out of juvenile hall and were never really asked the right questions about what was going on with them on the streets. And kids -- kids that have been molested, kids that have been raped, even adults, don't talk about these abuses readily.

So people were just shifting me in and out of juvenile hall, in and out of group homes. And I was continuing to be exploited on the streets every time I went out and thinking that that was the life that I was destined for maybe forever, until -- until some really great luck.

PHILLIPS: Well, what's the memory that haunts you the most?

And when did that luck change?

PHELPS: It's being held by a pimp and told that I was nothing, being degraded and forced, like I said in the video, at 12 years old, to smoke crack. I was terrified. And I think I thought my life was over at that time. I didn't think anybody was looking for me and I didn't think that anybody cared, until I met Ron Jenkins, actually.

He was a counselor in juvenile hall who had his own rough childhood and decided to work with kids. And he still works with kids today. And he was amazing. He just reached out to me and he asked me for the first time in two years what had happened to me on the streets. And once that information was out, then I was able to get the counseling that I needed -- the counseling that I needed, the support network that I needed. And Ron was a central figure in all of that.

PHILLIPS: It always takes a mentor or a role model.

Well, the FBI announced this arrest of 300 plus people, Carissa, that were involved in this child prostitution ring.

Is that moving in the right direction, is that enough?

Or do you look at that and think that's not even the beginning?

PHELPS: I think we're moving in the right direction. I'm really going to be interested to see how these cases play out when they're prosecuted, because we have the Traffic Victim Protection Act that will protect U.S. citizen victims -- child victims of sex trafficking. And we'll see if this gets enforced, if the U.S. attorney does the job that it should do, we will see what happens.

And I think that what comes out of those cases will need to be publicized so that people understand that they will be held accountable if they engage in sexual activities with minors. These aren't -- just because they're runaway kids, just because nobody is looking out for them or has taught them maybe right from wrong, they are not going to be ignored by our communities and our society anymore.

PHILLIPS: Well, I know that you meet with a lot of these kids.

And when you look them in the eye, especially the 12-year-olds, you probably see yourself.

What do you say to them?

PHELPS: I just let them know life is going to be OK. It's going to be great. And that they're going to be able to get through it. They need to ask for the help that they need and deserve and really get involved in therapy, get the help that they need and find a safe place to be. A lot of us, when I was on the streets, we didn't want to be at home. And we didn't know how to ask the right people how to place us in group homes or foster care. And I think that's another big, big fault with the system is that kids aren't given a voice. And they really need to be able to ask for what they need.

PHILLIPS: Well, you're a courageous woman, Carissa Phelps.

I encourage everyone to see your documentary, Carissa.

And thanks for sharing your time with us today.

PHELPS: Thank you so much.