

How to change someone's life on a flight

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Julian Walker: Good morning, Good afternoon. Good evening and wherever in the world you are joining us today, you're most welcome to this latest edition of business travel on the fly. As organizations returned to post pandemic travel, we like to raise awareness amongst clients and travelers about how to spot and therefore help to combat human trafficking. We believe that the travel industry has a particularly crucial role to play in protecting those most vulnerable from trafficking. And through education, advocacy, philanthropy, employee engagement, we can all play a part in helping to prevent human trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of women and children. And so today, the United Nations World Day against trafficking in persons, I'm especially delighted to be joined for the next 20 minutes or so by Yvonne Chen, who since May, last year, has been director of private sector engagement with ECPAT, USA, Yvonne, welcome to the show.

Yvonne Chen: Thanks for having me.

Julian: Pleasure. Now, I know you started your career in refugee rights. But I thought perhaps you could just tell us a little about yourself and your background in preventing human trafficking.

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Yvonne: Definitely. So my name is Yvonne Chen. I am, as mentioned, the director of private sector engagement, ECPAT, USA. So I actually came into this work over a decade ago, I had started refugee rights and really just happened to really fall into anti trafficking work. And so I had discovered so much about trafficking and the intersection, I really ended up working in a safe house starting at a safe house for survivors of sex trafficking. And through that, I really learned how to understand the issue more but more on a personal level. So I understood these survivors as humans, I understood, who liked to talk on the phone the most, or who did not like to clean as much as other people. So I learned it as they were humans and their story. And their experience was not the only thing that identified them. So then I moved on into just continuing and direct services, I then started to focus a lot more on education, training and awareness, really thinking about how important it is for people to understand what trafficking is, because for myself, I definitely had a different understanding of what trafficking is. And when I started working into it, working in it, I realized that there's so much trafficking that's happening around us that I was not even aware of. And so it really just helped me shape kind of the work that I'm doing and currently now really thinking about private sector engagement, really thinking about how corporations and businesses can really think about how to train and educate on trafficking. Unfortunately, traffickers are very smart in finding loopholes in ways to traffic people. So it's really just my passion to really think about how to engage in that

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Julian: Wow, very much a sort of vocation for you that that's fascinating, I think, and seeing the personal side of everything as well, the sort of from the original house that you're in and stuff. Can you tell us a little bit about ECPAT? Maybe and the work that ECPAT does and that you do within us?

Yvonne: Yeah, so ECPAT USA is a nonprofit agency, we're actually formed under, we're also an umbrella organization of ECPAT International, we are all over. But we in ECPAT USA, we specifically focus on advocacy and prevention. So we do have a youth program that specifically focuses on talking to young people about healthy relationships, about online safety, about trafficking, and really engaging them and thinking about how to navigate these scenarios that do really impact them and a lot of people are vulnerable to. We have a legislative advocacy and policy and we do work on legislative means on a federal, state and local level. And then we have our private sector engagement which I had mentioned before, we really believe in providing free resources to people as well. So really ensuring that there are resources information accessible to people who want to learn about anti trafficking work and who want to learn on how to identify and understand what trafficking is. We also have a survivors Council. And our survivors Council is really important to us because we believe in involving survivors and elevating survivor voices in the work that we do. And we also have two board members who are members of our survivors council. So we take it really important, we take it, it's crucial to us to be able to involve survivors in the work that we do.

Julian: How do people find out about that, is all available on the website?

Yvonne: Yeah, people can find us at www.ECPATusa.org. They can also reach out to us at info at ECPAT usa.org and find out more information and see how they can partner with us.

Julian: in terms of trafficking itself. Do you think it has changed since the pandemic has been on?

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And if it has, what do you predict, you know, for the near future in terms of obstacles and challenges for us and anyone else trying to help prevent it?

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Yvonne: I think the trafficking has definitely changed in that a lot of things, the pandemic has really affected everyone. And so while vulnerabilities increased for everyone, vulnerabilities increased even more for those who are already struggling and who are already at risk, but who are already also dealing with so much more than others. So it is really important that we remember that, I think, because the pandemic really came at a time where it, that was just what we were all we were thinking about. And hearing ECPAT, we were concerned that so many people were spending so much time online, especially on people how traffickers were going to utilize that. Over that time, over the pandemic, researchers had actually noticed that COVID-19 pandemic had created circumstances that increase the risk of trafficking. And so making it harder to deliver comprehensive services to support survivors. At one point, the FBI had issued a warning about a potential increase in risk, as the internet was increased as a channel for sexual exploitation. So it is really just thinking about how important it is to be aware that these things are happening. And so

these are some of the things that we were noting and ECPAT, USA created a these online safety guides for parents, for educators and for youth, because we thought it would be really important for people to understand the types of terms that people should know, people should watch out online, and also just how to understand and set privacy settings. Because those are also changing as well or have changed. So it's just a resource that we have in different languages currently.

Julian: But I suppose I hadn't even thought about that. But there is a very sinister side as well to the fact that we're all sort of online so much more during the pandemic. That's very scary. Yvonne: Definitely.

Julian: For people like me, who are sort of about to get back on the road as a sort of seasoned business traveler, what advice would you give people like us to help do our bit to try and combat trafficking?

Yvonne: I think it's really important to remember that one person can affect change. And so I think often when we talk about trafficking, it can feel very overwhelming and it can feel like you don't know what to do and you are not sure even how to act. And so it's even terrifying or paralyzing to even see think if you can notice trafficking happening, what do you do? So I think training and education is really important, it is really crucial that we understand the more awareness that is given and the more awareness that is allowed and with more education, you can have more eyes on the road. And so it is one of these things, we do have a hotel elearning, that's available for people, we also have a travel management training that is available as well. The hotel elearning is available in 17 languages. And that is free right now. And then we have our travel management training, which will be free, starting in the fall. And so it's just important to keep that in mind. And as companies who needed customizations, definitely feel free to reach out to us. And we can definitely see how to customize that for you and how to ensure that these trainings and education really target the audience that we want and and target the specifics of your company. So it is just, I really want to emphasize you really can make a difference. I think also along with traveling, trafficking is happening in our communities. And so I had a lot of people wondering if trafficking had stopped during COVID. But unfortunately, trafficking had only increased because of the reasons I had mentioned earlier. And so, but one person can really affect change, if you notice these things you could potentially report or there are also helpful ways and also safe ways to report trafficking. Julian: I think that's a great inspiration in a funny kind of way. The fact that you say even one person can make a difference. I think that's probably something that many people might not feel is the case and might turn a blind eye or disregard some of the symptoms that they may see. And you mentioned about customizing the sort of services for customer for companies themselves. Is that the sort of main advice you would give to companies to say, you know, we can work with you to make sure it resonates more with your employees, are there different things that you would do with companies?

Yvonne: Yeah, there's definitely a few things. We definitely encourage training. I really think that it's powerful, as I miss in person trainings. But apparently, you know, we do have online webinars that we do so definitely that we do have a program called the Code. And so it's the tourism Child Protection code of conduct. And it's actually the world's first and only voluntary set of business principles that travel and tour companies can implement to prevent sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. So the club provides these awareness tools, support to the travel and

hospitality industry, as CWT is part of the code as well as a member, so we recommend people joining that because we do have

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advice on trainings, advice on policies that people should have in place as well. I think if we're talking specifically about companies, we can also think about liability and trainings and education and what maybe third party people were using and resources. So that's definitely something that's available to people, that code is a real international code of conduct. So we have members all across the world. At ECPAT USA, we also have a partner and protection program. So it is a more targeted and customized version of a partnership. So in our partner protection program, we would have consulting hours and just really looking at your company and seeing what your needs are. Is it employee engagement? Is it also really thinking about what are some specifics that are unique to your company that others do not have? And how can we have trafficking anti trafficking lens in that, because I think some of it to help people understand is, a lot of these things people look out for already, you know, no company is going to say that they support the exploitation of human beings, let alone children. But really thinking about if there are specific things that people and companies are already looking at, how can we let that look at that through an anti trafficking lens as well?

Julian: And as you say, you mentioned that CWT signed up for the code, and thus that I've had experience of it. And I can thoroughly recommend it as a useful source of information and training for people. So in your own experiences do you have, is there an example or an anecdote that you use from your career, working with survivors that perhaps has inspired you in your mission or something that has triggered development in your behavior, to strive to do other things?

Yvonne: I really just think about how they're people. I think a lot of times, that's something that I have really stuck with in my career, really thinking that there's stories that people are, but they're not only their stories, and I think starting out in the safe house and working in the safe house, I didn't know a lot of people's stories, I just knew them as being in the house and taking care of them and making sure that things were running smoothly. But I think part of it is really understanding that it can happen anywhere. I think that's definitely some of the things that I've had really great experiences, and really lucky to work with survivors and known them for 10 years, perhaps, and just seeing their lives change. I think through services, seeing their lives change, also just for themselves and for their resiliency, we have to talk about resiliency of survivors. But with kind of the career that I've had, I've also thought a lot about why people need to be resilient, and how can we encourage ourselves to look at some systems. So poverty has a big part to do with trafficking as well, because there's always vulnerabilities, if someone is in poverty, we're talking about racism, has a really big part of it, as well. And so that's just kind of some of the things that I've really thought about, because ideally, we don't need people to be resilient. And if we take care of each other, and if we really think about this issue as a collective issue, and as a societal issue that we can tackle together, then I do think that's just one of the things that I've really taken away from my own work. And doing trainings is really important. I've had so many cases where whether I was doing trainings for hospitals or community based organizations, and helping people understand what trafficking is, and helping them identify people who've been trafficked in their

communities, and how they can help with that, because I think it's a lot of times people who are in trafficking or who are being trafficked, do not know that it's happening, or they don't have the words or the terminology to use to capture that experience. And so I think that's just definitely something that I've really learned as well. We've had so many people identified through the trainings that I had done, actually. And for the travel management training, we did have someone who was working at another company who was actually traveling on their own time, on vacation, and they were on a flight and had seen something, they had seen a young person or two young people with an older person and kind of felt like something was going on. The young person didn't really have any belongings maybe a small backpack

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didn't really seem engaged seemed kind of

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I think, what their words were, kind of out of it didn't really, seem nervous a little bit as well and sad and down. And so this person had just kind of observed what was happening. They really felt like something was going on. They actually reported it to the flight attendant and the flight attendant got involved and essentially what happened is this person was potentially going to be exploited. And so that's definitely something that's powerful, I think, and it's really just these instances

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If we pay attention, I think we can make a difference. Because I think the biggest thing is to not pay attention and not realize what's happening around you. And that's when things happen. And that's when people feel that they're invisible. And that's when people feel like no one is willing to help them. And no one cares. And traffickers come in at that time and say, You know what, I care for you. And I noticed you. And that's how a lot of times trafficking can happen as well.

Julian: So you mentioned a bit earlier about the survivors Council and the fact that you have a couple of board members who's on that, what is the survivors Council, can you tell us a bit more about that, please.

Yvonne: We really recognize that it's important to involve survivors, people who have lived experiences. In these conversations, we want them, we want them there for guidance on how to protect vulnerable youth, how they can craft legislation with us and policies that will be the most effective in preventing child sex trafficking. We allow for the survivors Council, it's currently comprised of 13 to 15 people, they all have had experiences of trafficking, and really allowing for a direct line of communication between like those working such as, like our ECPAT staff to work to end commercial sexual exploitation, and with people who have lived experiences and are the true experts in this realm. So it currently includes women, men from all different backgrounds and experiences. And the diversity is really important to us as well, we want to ensure that we

acknowledge that these stories, and they would say the same, and their experiences are not the only experiences that survivors have. And so this is just as a group of people who have that. And they want to think about the experiences that they've had, and also find more survivors who are interested in joining this council. So they kind of serve as subject matter consultants, they're definitely compensated for their expertise as well. And we want to have, we do have survivors all across the US right now. We want to involve more people. If people are interested, they can go to our website, and survivors can ask for more information on how to join the council. But we really just support their voices and their autonomy to lead and connect with others as valuing their experience and really just understanding that they know this issue. And so even if my own instinct is that is different, or if my own instinct is that I want to help. But if they tell me that's not the best way to help, then we listen because they're the ones who know best. And so that's just definitely something that we really value.

Julian: Can you tell us a bit about the, this may be the wrong word, but the sort of outcomes for survivors? Yvonne: Definitely. So you know, I think part of it is really just thinking about involving what their wants and needs are and what their hopes are for people. So actually, we, in listening to survivors, there were a few podcasts. Sorry, not podcasts, because I'm on a podcast, a few webinars that we had done over the course of the summer in the past year and a half. So one of them was around, in response to conspiracy theories that were happening across, specifically more of the United States. But there were also conspiracy theories just around trafficking as a whole. And I think a lot of times when people think about trafficking, there's very specific images that people have, maybe movies that people have watched. And it's only one aspect of how trafficking can happen. So the survivors actually wanted to do a webinar, and it's called Survivors get real about sex trafficking. And it's actually on our YouTube page. In response to a lot of events that happened last summer. We also have a blog series that's from survivors really answering questions about their experiences, what they think about the intersection of race and trafficking. We also have other webinars that feature survivors really talking about the criminalization of youth, of color. So they're just kind of a few of these things that we have had in terms of what we're talking about outcomes. But I would say survivors, they really want to get the word out like a lot of the survivors I've worked with, they really want to ensure that people are knowing what is happening. So kind of how I mentioned that there was potential victims identified on that plane, getting referrals when we do education. I think that's kind of what's important to think about how potentially you could be seeing someone that is trafficked or is exploited, and how can you make that one step or that little step? You know, another example that I think about is during the Superbowl, there was

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an organization that ECPAT USA had worked with called the Soap Project, a survivor led project, and they do a lot of outreach at different big events and sporting events.

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But one of them, one of the stories was that one of the things that they do is give a list of missing use, along with their packages, along with training, the free hotel training that we were having, that we do have and linking them to that. But one of the staff members at the hotel felt like they actually had recognized one of the missing youth that was on that list. So I think it's things like that, that are really important to understand and how we can help survivors. But I think also how we, it's just important that we involve them as well and involve survivors in this work that we do. So those are kind of some of the things that I think of in terms of some of the outcomes. And I have, I have survivors who have been out of their situation for a long time. I have their experiences range from, they're raising their kids, they're going to school, they have their own businesses, things like that. So there are definitely just so many stories. But I also think it's important to remember that people need resources. And so without resources to help people become stable, it's really hard to get out of a situation and a cycle. Because if you don't have enough resources, how can I expect you to survive?

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You know, and I think that that's what a lot of people are struggling with when they're in the trafficking situations. What are the other options for them?

Julian: Wow, and so obviously, there are resources they can call on through ECPAT. The key message that I've got from this says that any one person can make a difference. So we all need to be alert and aware. Wow, Yvonne, thank you so much. That was some fascinating and thoughtful insights there. We're now hopefully we're better prepared to help prevent the development of this current industry. But for now, I'm afraid we're out of time, really. So thank you again, to Yvonne Chen from ECPAT, USA for joining us today. Thank you, Yvonne.

Yvonne: Thank you so much.

Julian: pleasure. And to all of you. Thank you for listening and farewell and until next time we meet on the fly.