



THE PHOENIX ALLIANCE
RISE FROM ASHES

News from the Nest

First quarter 2025

January * February * March

Human Trafficking Recruitment Online

On February 25th, 2025, fifteen-year-old Katie Smith¹ decided to meet with who she believed was a new friend. She'd met him on Instagram. She carefully followed his instructions—erasing all messages before leaving the house. Her parents had installed monitoring software on her phone, but not on a tablet she had access to. Two days later she was found over 100 miles from her home. Two men were arrested and charged with human trafficking and kidnapping.

Five days before this, another fifteen-year-old girl was lured away through social media into the arms of traffickers. She was missing for a week and found a half-hour from her home. While there was no apparent connection between these two cases, the girls came from Siler City and Spring Lake, North Carolina—both within two hours of our headquarters.

How are predators so successful in luring kids through technology? They create fake profiles, establish a relationship, and build trust. They are experts in sniffing out vulnerabilities, such as being in foster care, being abused at home, being bullied, or feeling lonely.

Sometimes, parents are able to intervene before their child disappears. In a 2019 case in Wisconsin, a 13-year-old girl was targeted by a 49-year-old man from Louisiana. He had arranged for the young girl to travel to him. Fortunately, her mom found out just in time.

These cases are just a glimpse into a growing crisis. Predators use social media to target and manipulate children at an alarming rate, often without parents realizing it until it's too late. While the threat is real, there are practical steps we can take to protect the vulnerable.

For our own families:

Talk about Internet safety early and often. This needs to be ongoing from the time they are allowed on a device. Keep devices in shared spaces in the home and monitor them regularly. Make sure your kids check with you before downloading any new apps and warn them that anyone can create an app. Never allow devices in bedrooms after bedtime. Educate yourself on various social media platforms. And remember that predators can get to your kids through online gaming as well.

For the children who don't have parents who care:

It's heartbreaking that there are so many kids in the world who don't have parents protecting them. How can we help?

1 - BE PRESENT. Teachers, coaches, mentors, and youth leaders have unique opportunities to recognize when a child is struggling. If you work with young people, take time to build trust, ask questions, and be a safe person they can turn to.

2 - EDUCATE. Many kids have no idea how trafficking works or how predators operate online. Schools, churches, and community groups can host awareness events, share safety resources, and teach kids how to protect themselves.

3 - ADVOCATE. Get involved with local organizations that support at-risk youth, whether through mentoring, volunteering, or reporting concerns when you see red flags. The more eyes and voices we have speaking up for vulnerable kids, the harder it is for predators to go unnoticed.

4 - GIVE. Our organization works every day to fight trafficking and protect children, but we can't do it alone. Your support—whether through your time or finances—makes it possible for us to reach more children before it's too late.

Together, we can create a world where no child is left unprotected. **Will you be part of the solution?**

¹ Not her real name



Local NPO and police join forces with TPA!

The Reidsville, NC police department recently selected The Phoenix Alliance to receive funding raised by another local non-profit called "Up with Christ - Down with Crime." A big thank-you to both organizations for their vote of confidence and support!

David Wheeler, app developer extraordinaire!



We have been blessed with the services of David Wheeler, Ethan's cousin. He has developed an awesome custom application to manage our Egg My Yard Easter fundraiser.

Check out the app, order eggs and/or volunteer to help at egg-my-yard.com.

Update on Ethan

In our last newsletter, I explained that our co-founder and Executive Director, Ethan Wheeler, was going to step back from many of his duties for a season.

I explained that this was a tough decision for all involved, and that Ethan still cares deeply about the organization's mission and those we serve. However, he needed to focus on building up his "side hustle" business ([Chapter & Verse Studios](#)) to a place where it would be more self-sustaining.

I'm happy to report that the plan seems to be working. Ethan's main TPA involvement these days is consulting on various administrative tasks and assisting Kimberly in the Juvenile Detention Center visits. His business is going well, and my interactions with him have been encouraging. Again, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at ted.wheeler@thephoenixalliance.org

Ted Wheeler, Board Chair



Egg My Yard is coming up!

We are excited to see how this year's Easter fundraiser goes! We are working with Rachel Hambley, an Event Coordinator to manage [Egg My Yard](#). With Kimberly's support, Rachel had to hit the ground running. As of this writing, Rachel and Kimberly are working hard to make it a success. Stay tuned for the results.

Indiana update

Aftercare for survivors is a vital component of our work. Here are a few recent aftercare victories in our Indiana office:

- Secured a rehabilitation placement for a survivor facing substance use challenges.
- Assisted a survivor in navigating complex family dynamics, focusing on healthy conflict resolution and rebuilding relationships with appropriate boundaries.

God is moving in the lives of these survivors, bringing healing, restoration, and hope. We are honored to walk alongside them as they step into the freedom and future He has for them. Thank you for your prayers and support—every life is precious in His sight!



Thailand Update from Julie Cheng

Kimberly Wheeler and I had an incredibly encouraging visit with Kanya in Chiang Rai this January. It blessed my socks off to see that young lady in action! Kanya has such a beautiful, tender, compassionate, evangelistic heart. Everywhere we went she talked with the locals, showing genuine concern for their challenges and rejoicing in their triumphs. During our visit, we came across so many young ladies that Kanya is impacting. It was evident that she is well-loved and respected, and that God is using her in many lives. We were able to see the Arukah Home that Kanya founded as a refuge for those at risk or recovering from trafficking and we met the current residents. The space is meeting the needs right now, but being there in person birthed a dream in me for what Arukah could be in the future. I would love to see Arukah become a registered Thai foundation and purchase a 3-bedroom home with a yard for a peaceful oasis conducive to recovery. Kanya dreams of having space for a garden. We'll need to raise additional funds to accomplish this. Will you join The Phoenix Alliance board in praying for God's direction for Arukah and Kanya in the months and years ahead?

