

The WATCH Chronicle



WATCH is a court monitoring and judicial policy non-profit located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. WATCH works to make the justice system more responsive to crimes of violence against women and children, focusing on greater safety for victims of violence and greater accountability for violent offenders.

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Lauren Ryan has served as Minnesota's Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door director since 2013.

Former WATCH intern now heads Minnesota's Safe Harbor Program

First of two parts

In 2006, while attending William Mitchell College of Law, Lauren Ryan monitored cases of domestic violence and sexual assault as a volunteer for WATCH. That experience, she says, helped point her toward a career dedicated to serving victims of violence and exploitation. Today, Ryan directs the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door program for the Minnesota Department of Human Services, leading the effort to steer Minnesota youth who engage in prostitution to supportive services. Since 2011, such youth have been viewed as victims and survivors, not criminals.

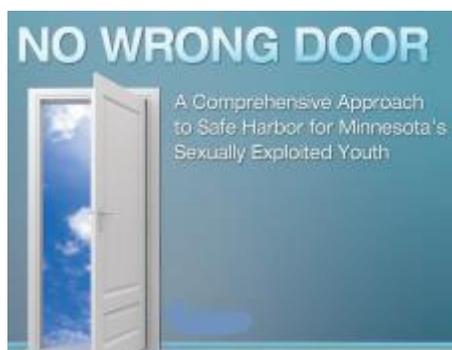
The *WATCH Chronicle* had a chance to sit down with Ryan and learn about the successes and challenges of Safe Harbor since it was fully launched in 2014.

Q: Was your time with WATCH your first experience seeing domestic violence play out in the courts?

A: Yes. As an undergraduate, I was a juvenile probation officer, and I worked for a juvenile drug court before law school. A lot of the kids I see now—the same population that is trafficked—were the kids I was seeing in drug court. But WATCH was my first experience working with domestic violence.

Q: Do you work mostly with service providers or does your work encompass areas beyond that?

A: One of my main focuses is the grant management of the providers across the state that receive funding to provide Safe Harbor services—making sure they're supported. It's also working with other state agencies, counties and tribes to make sure Safe Harbor is implemented. So there's the decriminalization piece, then making sure there are supportive services and that they know what sexual exploitation is.



“If you pick up a youth at 3 a.m in a hotel room and they are totally resisting the help of services, forced intervention isn’t going to work.”

Q: It’s been almost two years now since Safe Harbor fully went into effect. Do you feel that by now the mindset shift [of decriminalizing trafficked youth] has taken place and, if so, that the changes going forward will need to be more subtle?

A: That’s a good way to put it. The bright line of, okay, they cannot be arrested, is clear. The aftermath is not so much, especially when they’re involved in systems, whether it’s child protection or maybe they committed other crimes and are on probation.

Now [the question is], what’s the appropriate response? The use of detention and locked facilities is really a hot topic for this population. The appropriate roles for child protection and child welfare is another question, especially when the trafficker is a non-family or household member. Is it appropriate for child protection to come in and investigate when the perpetrator is a nonfamily member? And then there’s law enforcement. What do they do when they find a youth in a hotel and maybe the shelters are full, or maybe they don’t have a shelter close to them?

Q: It sounds like there are so many considerations around trafficking.

A: Yes. I think it’s two philosophies colliding a lot for professionals. One is coming at it from a safety perspective. Obviously, child protection and law enforcement come from this perspective. It is their professional responsibility—they are ethically bound to protect this child—and in some instances they see that as protecting them from themselves, if that is the urge to run away and return to their trafficker that is potentially causing harm. So whatever they can do to stop that, whether it’s placing them in a locked facility or taking them to family members, that’s their approach.

The other approach, and most of this stems from homeless youth or domestic violence advocacy, is the notion of self-agency: We need to be there to provide voluntary services according to the goals and needs identified by the youth. And those are only going to be effective once the youth is ready to accept those services.

So if you pick up a youth at 3 a.m. in a hotel room and they are totally resisting the help of services—maybe they are in love with their trafficker—forced intervention isn’t going to work. So those are the two different philosophies that are trying to find a middle ground. And I think there’s validity to both.

Q: Is part of your job trying to find that middle ground?

A: Yes. I completely understand both perspectives and I don’t think the goal is to get one on the other’s side. It’s to bring people together at least to understand each other. There’s a purpose for each role; it’s all there to support the youth. It may be protection, it may be safety. It may be that they really need an advocate, to have a voice. □



IN THE NEWS

Questions surrounding Jacob Wetterling abduction are answered, 27 years later

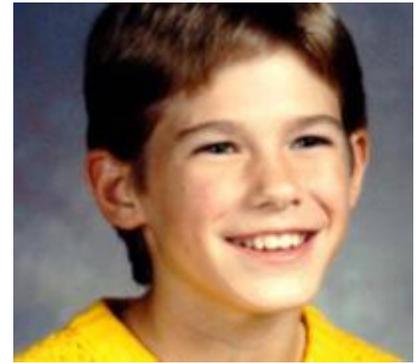
Since 1989, a family and an entire state were haunted by a question: What happened to the 11-year-old boy who was abducted on a rural road in St. Joseph, Minnesota? Earlier this month, the mystery was finally solved [when Jacob Wetterling's murderer recounted in federal court the horrific details of the boy's final hours.](#)

Danny Henrich, 53, said he kidnapped the boy, drove him into the countryside and sexually assaulted him before executing him. He confessed as part of a deal with federal prosecutors and after leading authorities to Jacob's shallow grave in the town of Paynesville, in central Minnesota.

Heinrich pleaded guilty to one count of receiving child pornography and is expected to spend 20 years in prison. The unusual deal was struck with the approval of Jacob's parents, Patty and Jerry Wetterling, who have become advocates for missing and exploited children.

Read the *Star Tribune* report [here](#).

Read the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* report [here](#).



Jacob Wetterling was abducted in St. Joseph in October 1989; his remains were found earlier this month.

Ryder Cup brings trafficking concerns

The Ryder Cup comes to Chaska later this month, bringing concerns about the potential for a spike in sex trafficking.

[In an Aug. 26 report](#), Liz Collin of WCCO-TV detailed how authorities are combing online websites like backpage.com and residents are being urged to report suspicious activity in neighborhoods where there are hotels and homes to rent.

Chaska's population is expected to swell from 20,000 to 80,000 when the Ryder Cup begins at Hazeltine National Golf Club on Sept. 30.

Watch the WCCO-TV report [here](#).

