

Human Trafficking in America's Schools Case Study

At the end of the school day, Officer Cole responded to a report of students fighting around the corner from the school. While looking for the fight, he saw student Carla getting into the passenger's seat of a blue Chevy Tahoe driven by a male approximately 25 years old. This piques Officer Cole's interest since he has seen Carla leave many times on foot and thought that she walked to and from school. He was curious as to why her ride did not pick her up in front of the school.

Officer Cole spoke with campus security, Kelly to discuss the fight call and said that he saw Carla get in the car with the older male. Kelly stated that in the last few days while she was doing her regular campus sweeps, she has found Carla crying in the bathroom during third period. Kelly has also noticed that Carla has been disengaged from her regular social group.

Officer Cole spoke with the attendance clerk about Carla's attendance and was told that Carla had regular attendance until about two weeks ago when she began to show up to school late and was missing her third period, English class. The attendance clerk said that Carla's mom has never received a returned her calls.

Officer Cole shared his findings with the Assistant Principal, Mr. Simmons who told him that Carla's grades have declined and he recalls her name coming up after an incident in her English class. No discipline record was submitted by the teacher, so Carla's involvement was unclear. This prompted the officer to speak with the English teacher, Ms. Walsh. Ms. Walsh was also concerned about Carla's truancies and decline in her academic performance. Ms. Walsh said that she had contacted Assistant Principal, Mr. Simmons a few weeks ago, regarding a disruption between Carla and another student, Liz. Ms. Walsh had no idea what the disruption was about. However, she does recall the girls arguing about a purse. Ms. Walsh also shared that she remembered Carla carrying a very expensive purse for a brief time and ever since the argument, she has not seen Carla with the purse. She has seen Liz with a similar one.

Officer Cole decided that it was time to speak with Carla. He called her into her office and asked her questions about the purse and asked if Liz took it from her. Carla told Officer Cole that she was borrowing the purse from Liz and returned it after an argument and it is no concern of the school or the cops. Officer Cole asked about her change in her behavior, attendance and friends. Carla became angry and began to shut down the conversation. When Officer Cole asked how she got to and from school, she reported that she walks. He further asked if she ever got a ride home from family or friends and she stated that she only lives 3 blocks away so she never gets a lift from anyone and demanded to leave.

A short time later, Officer Cole is contacted by Campus Security Kelly, who tells the officer that she found Carla crying in the bathroom again. Carla told Kelly that she was scared of Liz and her Liz's boyfriend and felt she was in danger, because people know that she was speaking with Officer Cole and she will be labeled a snitch.

Officer Cole arranges to meet Kelly and Carla in an unoccupied office where they won't be seen by other students. Carla breaks down and tells Officer Cole that she was recruited by Liz, to make money by "partying with guys". Carla said she did it a couple of times at a motel room. Liz and Steven would get Carla and a couple of other girls drunk and high and older guys would come into the room and have sex with them.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this webinar are those of the presenter(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

Afterward, Liz would give Carla money and Carla bought a \$200 purse with some of it. After doing the parties a couple of times, Carla said she wanted out because the guys were old and gross. When she told Liz, Liz said that she would beat up Carla and took the purse back. Liz has been threatening to kill Carla's little sister if Carla didn't get back in the game.