

EPISODE 7: Chloe Setter Interviewed by Dr. Tina Davis

TINA:

I wish to warmly welcome today's guest, Chloe Setter, who works for the organization Lumos and is based in London, UK. Chloe is a senior advisor for Lumos in the area of anti trafficking, modern slavery and voluntourism. And she was previously head of advocacy policy and campaigns on child trafficking for ECPAT UK. Welcome, Chloe.



CHLOE:

Thank you. Thank you, Tina.

TINA:

Tell me about Lumos, the broader work that your organization is doing.

CHLOE:

So Lumos is an international children's charity that was set up around 13 years ago by the author JK Rowling. And we have the aim of ensuring that all children can grow up not in institutional care but instead in a family based care setting. So we're really working to end this harmful practice of institutionalizing children. Because based on 100 years of evidence, we know that institutional care for children is devastatingly harmful impacting negatively on child development on even on physical health, certainly on emotional health and negatively affects the outcomes in life chances that children have. And we believe this is unacceptable, and certainly is avoidable. And so we work to help governments and partners and other organizations that run orphanages and similar institutions to transfer and transition into family based care settings. Like we've seen in many countries, such as the UK and Australia and others. We don't rely on large scale, particularly institutional care anymore. We want to be able to do that around the world and ensure that all children can have the setting that they need in which to thrive.

TINA:

Your founder is the celebrated author JK Rowling. Can I ask why did she want to found an organization particularly?

CHLOE:

Yes, it's a big question. We get asked a lot. Because, I mean, obviously, there are some links I mean, Harry Potter himself is an orphan and and I think some of her book touches on on, you know the childhood of children and the importance of the relationships when you're growing up. But really it was triggered by her reading an article in the in the Sunday magazine newspaper and seeing some images that she found upsetting of children in Europe, I think it was in the Czech Republic in caged beds in an institution. And this was 15 years ago, and I think she was really, really upset that that was still happening. I think she had assumed like many others probably have those kind of horrific images of children in Eastern European Romania, Bulgaria had had been dealt with and tackled. And so she was shocked to learn so she she spoke to various people in the child protection sector and got together a group of experts and that's where, where Lumos began, and she really saw this as a problem that could be solved and I think that's what attracted her to it. But obviously, she's a very generous philanthropist on a number of issues, but the Lumos is her only charity that she has founded. And she is she's currently on life president as well.

TINA:

Okay, so she's very engaged in this, where do you do your work? What's your scope for your work?

CHLOE:

Well, the first sort of, maybe sort of eight years or so of Lumos, we did focus our work in Eastern Europe. And we developed a sort of broad expertise there, I suppose, of working with partners, with governments. And our model is very much not about us going in and trying to do things in countries it's it's very much about working with local partners, and really sort of capacity building. What we're talking about is system reform. It takes decades so it's not something you can just go in and go out. It takes a very, very long time to transform and transition systems that are quite entrenched. And what we see is where there is an institution, then it is always full of children, you never find an empty ones. But that's not reflective of the need. It's actually, if you build an institution, you children will be placed in them. And in that sense, they become like a magnet for both money and, and, and children. And so we worked over a long period of time with partners, and we saw a shift really in the European Union away from institutional care. And it's not certainly not finished, or completed by any means. But we we have certainly seen a reduction in a number of countries. So for example, I think in the last 10 years, we've seen around an 86% reduction of numbers of children in institutions in Bulgaria. And you know, that's quite a staggering amount. What we have to do in each country where you work is look at what is the situation on the ground and each country is different, you can't even in Europe, you can't sort of label them all the same and have the same approach. So the very first thing you have to do is assess and move You what the current situation is? How

many children are in institutions? How many institutions? What do those institutions look like? What's the size of the competition? Are children in touch with their families? What are the needs of the children to they have disabilities or special needs? Before you can do anything, you have to assess that. And it really is individual case by case orphanage but also individual case by case in terms of children, then it's the case of looking to see if any of those children could be at home and back with their families. And one of the statistics that people find quite quite shocking when we talk about our work is that on average, 80% of children in so called orphanages have a living parent, and most of them certainly have a wider family. And with the right support, most of those children are able to live with their birth families. The reasons there are many include things like poverty, disability discrimination, really a lack of resources in in areas, that means that children end up in institution because there's not the resources, infrastructure services to, to have the move in the community.

TINA:

I was just going to ask about that the root causes because they're complex and not just one, I mean, there are several complex causes for this. So how do you go about working towards, you know, you said some of them, poverty, discrimination and so forth. Can you give a particular or any specific examples on how you approach such huge and complex problems.

CHLOE:

Yeah, I mean, it really is, it really is. There's no one silver bullet and it's, it's usually involves working across a lot of different areas. One of the big things that you have to do in order to do this successfully is you need to have the support and buy in of the local government and national government in the country. It's no good just going in and trying to close just one orphanage and another one could pop up a few weeks later. It really needs to be something that there's been commitment to by government. And we find that that's really crucial.

TINA:

So you work politically and and you also then collaborate with existing local organizations or?

CHLOE:

Yes. So with local partners like NGOs on the ground here in Europe, broadly, most of the institutions are run by the state. So in that case, it really is about working with the state. But Lumos has also expanded to work in a number of other countries. And that can mean working more across with NGOs and faith based organizations. I mean, we really see it as a preventable problem in it's usually, you know, mostly desperate parents who that their only option is to put their child in an orphanage or an institution. But with support, most of these families could care for their children. And it's usually about you can't just close an orphanage without having

develop the other systems that are needed to make sure it's done safely. So whether that's building up the foster care system, if there is one or starting one, if there isn't and developing the community based services. And it can be simple things in some cases but allow a child to stay at home. It can be something as small as ensuring that the parents of a child with disabilities have respite care at the weekend, which means that they have a break or that their home is kitted out so that they can be accessible, it can be small things and the money can be better spent. And we find that broadly for most children, and that's excluding children with disabilities, but for the majority of children, it's far cheaper to keep them in families and community based settings than it is to keep an institution it's six to eight times, on average, more expensive to have a child in an institution. So it doesn't just make sense from a child development perspective. And in terms of it's also a cost effective situation.

TINA:

And you work specifically on tackling what's called orphanage tourism and voluntourism. Tell me a little bit more about what that looks like or what is that?

CHLOE:

They must have had done bits and pieces of work around anti trafficking. Just because naturally working with children institutional care means you come across lots of cases of abuse and exploitation. And so they really wanted to invest in that area and try and actually tackle some of the drivers. So broadly, we say that child trafficking and institutional care related in in sort of four ways and it's quite a complex interplay, because we see orphanages as acting as both a source of potential victims but also as a destination for exploitation. So we say that there are body four ways in which these things interact. So one is that children are trafficked into institutions for various forms of exploitation. Secondly, they are trafficked out often we see that in the case of illegal traffic for legal adoption, or trafficked into sex exploitation. Thirdly, we see that children who have already been trafficked. Of course on a company children are placed in institutional care, often as a sort of protective response. And fourthly, we know from from evidence that children who grow up in institutions are more vulnerable to trafficking even after they leave purely because of the impact of institutionalization, which renders them more vulnerable to all forms of abuse really, because sometimes impaired cognitive development issues with attachment issues around emotional development. And just like lacking a protective environment, such as a family which you as a person go back to you in your times of trouble and need and, and care leavers who needs institutional care, often given very little support or no support when they enter into the community, which leaves them hugely vulnerable. So we wanted to explore those four different areas. And that's what we're trying to do at the moment. The issue of tourism comes in because there's a particular form of trafficking that's beginning to emerge and we discussed called orphanage trafficking and what we mean by that is where children are trafficked into an institution such as an orphanage for the purpose of financial gain. And by that, I mean, where the orphanage directors orphanage owners have recognized that

orphanage is a big business and very lucrative options in many places. And so they've realized that children can be commoditized in that sense, and that if you have children in orphanage, it's often very easy to fundraise for them, kind of exploitation of that of people giving to orphanages and people visiting and volunteering in them. It's actually creating a kind of lucrative business and industry.

TINA:

Where does this happen?

CHLOE:

Well, the data is something we struggle with in the sense that it's very hard to measure this issue. But we know it is happening from anecdotal reports from research that's been done in a number of countries around the world, such as Nepal, India, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, countries in South America. Cambodia, Vietnam, it's really quite widespread. Essentially, we see it mostly happening in countries where there is poorer kind of child protection systems, weaker child protection systems, and where there's a particular way, there's an industry of tourism. And when those two go hand in hand, we see that local orphanage directors have recognized that the footfall of tourists and visitors, which ones usually Westerners, is actually an opportunity for them to make money. We have a documentary by HBO that we've been involved with coming out in the next couple of weeks. There's an orphanage owner in Haiti, where we see this problem firsthand through our work, and he describes the children as the bait and the American donors as the fish. And he says that quite candidly, to be honest, and it's really easy to see why because we did some research because it's very, like I said, it's hard to sort of get data on this. So one of the things we tried to do to better understand how this is a business is look at the financial flows. So we did a piece of work in Haiti trying to track some of the donations going into the country. And Haiti is a country where only 15% of the orphanages are registered. So vast majority of them are unaccountable working without scrutiny, not, you know, not registered with the government. And with around 30,000 children in institutional care in Haiti, what you see we will manage to track it was up to 100 million US dollars in a year going into what is this largely unregistered system. That is a huge amount of money. It's 130 times the entire child protection budget for Haiti. And you recognize when you see that the amount of money that where is that going, you look on the ground and you see the orphanages and you certainly can see in most cases that is not going to the care of children. It's only then when you start to realize just how big businesses can be.

TINA:

That's a massive amount of money. And so where does the actual fundraising happen? Is it then happening in the US and other countries? Western countries? Or both?

CHLOE:

You see it in a number of ways. It's often quite informal in a place like Haiti, where a lot of people wouldn't necessarily trust to give money to the government directly. So they give to orphanages and orphanages is a really kind of tangible thing to give to because they already exist. So you know, you've got this building with vulnerable children. And so when people give money, they assume that that money is going to the care of the children, and it's a it's a tangible way of giving assistance and help. But perversely, there's been reports of children being kept in deliberately poor and malnourished conditions and the orphanages been deliberately kept with very little materials and furniture, to deliberately inspire people to give more money. In that sense it's a very perverse business model, where you the less you spend on your sort of product, in this case, the children, the more money you can sometimes raise and obviously that's not the case in every orphanage, and we certainly don't say that there is trafficking in every orphanage. But what we do believe strongly is that all children who live in institutions are more vulnerable to trafficking and to abuse. And, you know, that's demonstrated by many years of evidence and institutional inquiries around the world have shown that risk is far higher.

TINA:

In Haiti, you have a group of children who also called restavecs, so I suppose, would be one of the groups vulnerable. Could you please explain a little bit more about the different children who are vulnerable to this form of exploitation?

CHLOE:

Well, restavec children, so by that we mean, children who are often sent by their parents to work in another house, usually in domestic servitude as a sort of servant. And that's often again, driven by poverty. It's where often the parents themselves lack the resources and to look after their own child. It's sort of a service that's provided to perhaps a more wealthy family, because parents can't afford to look after their children but those children are certainly, definitely, vulnerable to this. The other option in Haiti, if you don't want to, you know, if you can't put care for your child yourself because of poverty is put them in an institution, into an orphanage and many families are really, really feel as their only option. And often one of the key drivers in Haiti is is education, which has to be paid for in Haiti. So many parents send their children to an orphanage because they believe that they'll get an education there, in many cases, that never actually happens. We've got evidence in Haiti of what's called child finders who are paid on a on a child by child basis, where they go out into often rural communities and impoverished communities and actually try and recruit children from families with promises of education and a better life in the orphanage. And sadly, a lot of parents see that as their only option. But again, if that vast amount of money that we see flooding into these unregistered orphanages was actually put into the child protection system put into family based care, and children could actually, you know, stay at home with their families, which if you listen to young people is

nearly always what they want is to grow up in their own family and not be separated. It's very sad to hear that we had a young man from Haiti speak at an event we had recently and he had a family and he said, I didn't have a single happy day, in 12 years in the orphanage. And he also talked about the number of volunteers coming, he said there was maybe 100 volunteers that he remembered coming in and out of his orphanage. And you can only imagine what that does to a child's emotional attachment.

TINA:

If I hear you, you're saying that this is solvable. And there are in many cases, there are also families who are there, you know, parents or more extended families. But what about the aspect of voluntourism and as you mentioned, now, I mean, I know people who, you know have taken a gap year from their studies or work and who well intended go to countries, I don't know, Cambodia or India around the world, to offer up their services. And I've also met young people when I've been on field work, who's who's done this and who I'm sure have good intentions to them when they are out there. What can you say about this practice? that's grown as well. I mean, it's become very common now to do this voluntourism.

CHLOE:

Yeah, certainly volunteering is a wonderful thing. And it's great that there are people who want to go and help others less fortunate than themselves. So we certainly encourage that still, but while most people who support orphanages are doing so with the best of intentions, this well intended volunteering or donations providing into institutions is helping to create this industry. And this in turn creates a demand so children are actually being trafficked into care institutions in order to deliver services and a place for volunteers to go, in order to make people rich, it's actually not helping. And that's our campaign that we have just launched is called helping, not helping. And we're trying to sort of raise awareness of the harms of orphanage tourism. Although it might feel good at the time to go in there and spend whether it's a few hours or a few weeks or months with a child. It actually it's very, very harmful. And most people aren't aware of that. And I think if they were something they might reconsider, there's certainly a lot of evidence around the psychological attachment disorders caused by having a regular turnover of mostly unskilled volunteers coming in with very vulnerable children who are already being separated from their families and have attachment disorders existing. That turnover of people coming in forming a bond and then leaving it is absolutely devastating for children. And it leads them to either generally to become one of two ways. Either that they make attachments too easily and give their love and their affection too easily which obviously renders them vulnerable to abuse, both at the time and in later life, or they detach from the situation and find it very hard to form attachments and both of these things obviously, are not good. We wouldn't accept unskilled teenagers or young adults, or unskilled volunteers just coming into our nurseries or our primary schools without any checks, and having unfettered access usually with no supervision to large groups of vulnerable children and let them cuddle

them and kiss them and, you know, put them to bed like it just would not not be allowed. And there's good reason for that. Sadly, institutions attract people with bad intentions as well as good ones. but also there are issues really around, you know, sometimes volunteers are taking away jobs from local people. And if you're volunteering in a in an orphanage, that could be a job a paid job, but why would the orphanage director pay someone to do the job if there's a volunteer that will come do it for free and probably donate money at the same time. There's also issues around culturally appropriate care. Reports from someone I know he worked in Nepal. And he was explaining that some of the children in orphanages had essentially been raised by Westerners, and they essentially been denied their own kind of cultural heritage and grown up being singing Western songs, eating with knives and forks, and then when they have to leave, they are actually quite like not prepared how to live in their own culture because institutions are normally like bubbles - they exist and the children have very little to do with the local community in the local world. And then obviously, the worst case scenario is that in these situations is is driving trafficking and this isn't just Lumos, saying this. This is actually you know, backed up by by evidence, but also by government advice. In the last few weeks, we've seen the foreign office here in the UK, change their travel advice and warn people of the serious unintended consequences of orphanage volunteering and tourism. Which I think is quite striking. If the government is saying there is this risk of contributing to child exploitation. We're hopeful that young people and their families and parents who are sending them help them to pay for these trips actually recognize this is this is risky, both for the individual but also the harm that can be caused to communities.

TINA:

Is there an aspect of white savior complex here that, you know, sometimes it's difficult to talk about, but I think it's necessary to talk about.

CHLOE:

Yeah, I agree with you it is necessary to talk about and we Yeah, we would certainly say that that is evident in some cases, and, but what we don't want to shame or criticize the people who have done it, I mean, there's people who are at Lumos who have done it in their past. I mean, it's, it's been a rite of passage for many young people for many decades. And we certainly don't want to sort of make people feel ashamed for what they've done, particularly when they've done it with good intentions. But like a lot of things like plastic use, like, you know, environmental issues, the more we learn about them, it's hard to look away and we can't say that we didn't know we can't say that if we know that there's harm. And we know there's a link to trafficking, we it's our job as Lumos to educate people about this. And we obviously we have a significant young fan base, given our founders involvement with our work. And so we feel that people do need to be educated, informed so that they can make ethical choices. And we feel that broadly at the moment, young people do want to make ethical choices, you know, they are seeking out this sort of information. They want to be good citizens of the world and activists on various issues.

And we want this to be an issue that people people take up and take up the fight for, because care reform and institutionalization and not words that you often hear young people talking about. But we want to change that we want, you know, this is an urgent human rights issue. And then we've got, you know, upwards of 8 million children living in institutional care in the world, often hidden away, and forgotten about not included in global data surveys, not included in child protection systems and they were really isolated so at risk of trafficking and abuse, and we need, you know, a sort of army of young people and others to sort of help us fight this fight.

TINA:

When you know better do better, basically,

CHLOE:

Yeah, we always say, don't just think you're helping, know you are. It's very easy to go along. And, and it might feel good, like I said, to sort of have some pictures and have a cuddle with some cute children and feel like all these children are so unloved and I've gone in and help them. But it's about thinking about the deeper issues of why those children there, what have you really contributed to their to their development to their life? Like, has it really helped them? Or is there a better way that you can help and in that sense, we urge people to seek out courses that actually prevent family separation. So it can be something like working at a broad range of things you could do, but working on health services in the local community or education, spend your money in the local communities to help generate the economy there. There's a large number of things you can do that may or may not include volunteering, but certainly do not. volunteer in an orphanage because it is not helping is our message.

TINA:

So tell me a bit about the campaign you recently launched called helping not helping, what do you seek to achieve with this campaign?

CHLOE:

Well, we want to change social attitudes about voluntourism or as it's known, orphanage volunteering and tourism, and particularly raise awareness of its role as a driver of family separation and the driver of trafficking. So we're calling on young people to engage in the campaign to share this campaign video, a short 60 second video and a website with resources to explain what the harms are, what the alternatives are, and how young people can get involved. We're also calling on businesses and educational establishments such as universities and colleges to adopt a specific short policy that not only helps educate staff and tackle this issue but also protects their activities because if you see this as a supply chain issue, which I think is possible to do, you know if your company and your your school, your school or college is

organizing these trips, either as part of your corporate social responsibility or, you know, a trip for your pupils. Actually, if there's a link and you are potentially involved in it even inadvertently, involved in contributing to child exploitation, that's something that people need to be aware of. And I think we will begin to see more and more of that. And a number of large volunteering, global volunteering companies have actually made commitments to stop sending volunteers to orphanages. Tumi, which is one of the world's largest travel companies has prohibited any promotion of orphanages or trips across its network. So there is a momentum at the moment and this campaign is feeding into that. We want businesses, educational bodies to stand up and actually make sure that they come out strongly to say they do not engage or support orphanage tourism until we get businesses as well as individuals and schools to join the fight then it will continue and so we need a wider variety of stakeholders to help with this campaign.

TINA:

So this should be part of a curriculum maybe to teach younger students and pupils about the harms of doing voluntouring abroad.

CHLOE:

There's one of our partners, we think orphanages has developed some, some materials like lesson plans and so on for schools that are currently being piloted in the UK, and I believe in Australia, that's also the case. So there are some resources out there and we're hoping to help circulate those with the campaign and reach young people. And when we did some research, a survey of UK students age 17 to 22, as part of our when we were launching the campaign to really get insight into what our students thinking about these issues. And as as it expected, we found that most of them were not aware of the harms. The vast majority of them did not know that 80% of the children in orphanages on average have a living parent. And we also found that interestingly, where they had visited or volunteered or in an orphanage, those trips had been arranged by someone other than themselves, which I thought was very interesting. So broadly that either a company or business that sells orphanage trips or or their school or university. So that's why we need to reach those establishments as well. It's not just about reaching the young people to make informed choices. It's also they're a lot of schools and colleges that are organizing these trips, probably blindly, in good faith thinking they're doing a good thing and an educational experience for their pupils. But so we certainly need to raise awareness in in those places. And but it is a big campaign in the sense that we've got a long way to go to really change these social attitudes. And we starting off, you know, focusing on the UK, but we're going to move to looking in the US as well, which has a huge philanthropic volunteering effort. A lot of that is faith motivated. So you know, there's a lot of work that needs to be done with with faith organizations, but again, we see broadly there are changes happening in that sector too, for example, you know, the Catholic Relief Services, we're working with them on a very large scale project in a number of countries, called Changing The Way We Care.

Catholic Relief Services are one of the huge supporter of orphanages previously in countries across the world, but they've made care reform one of their five strategic goals this year. And so we're beginning to see organizations wanting to change realizing that the way that things have been done up until now isn't the best way anymore. And then recognizing that need for reform.

TINA:

It sounds that you're really pushing for a paradigm shift. Up until now, I'm sure people who have been volunteering, think they've been doing it for the greater good. What are the challenges you are facing when trying to shift people's perspectives and practices in this area?

CHLOE:

One of the biggest things that we face is that a lot of people think that orphanages and institutional cares is a good thing. People think sort of slightly rose tinted spectacles of view of like, lots of children in an orphanage, you know, it's even romanticized in literature like Annie and so on and like, you know, children together having a fun time. So there's a piece of work about sort of actually really educating about the realities of life in an orphanage. And that's why we work a lot with young people who've grown up in institutional care who are self advocates and who, who actually are wanting to go out and speak to the world about the realities. Some of them are, you know, angry at, the experiences that they've had the other pieces that people want to, they might recognize that the orphanages are a bad thing, I think that they think they're a necessary thing, particularly in low income countries. And the one of the things we say to that is, we're not trying to change the world overnight. This is care reform, it is going to take decades, it's going to take a lot of work and resources over a long period of time, and it needs to be done safely. We're not asking people to suddenly pull their money out of an orphanage or pull resources quickly. We're asking people to seek out change and to do that with experts and to do it safely so that children remain safe, but institutions are manmade concepts, and perversely, they've mostly been phased out in higher income countries with some exceptions. But it's something that the broadly the West in particular has exported to countries abroad. And we see that in many countries before institutions existed, there was quite a developed sort of system of community stepping up if there was a child that had been orphaned, and the wider community and kinship, kind of care model coming into play. And we want people to go back to that model, because actually, that is better for children. We don't need these kind of archaic institutions any longer, but it is going to take time to do it. We need the evidence to show the impact of different forms of alternative care. We need to continue to keep talking about the harms of institutions. A lot of it's linked to the sustainable development goals. I mean, it's underpinned in children's, like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the child for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality should grow up in a family environment in atmosphere, of happiness, love and understanding, see what we're doing is underpinned in in child rights, we have to just keep fighting the fight really and trying to advocate for these young people with them. Because we cannot sort of accept that this is a sort of necessary harm that

exists in countries, we have to challenge that and as I said, often it's more cost effective. So that's an argument that can be quite successful with governments in particular.

TINA:

My final question to, you, Chloe, is, where can the listeners find more information about your campaign, if they wish to learn more.

CHLOE:

Lumos has its own website, obviously, but we really would encourage people to visit the helping not helping campaign so that's available at <http://www.helpingnothelping.org> and there you can find a wealth of resources about orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking and the links and also the alternatives and the policies that we're asking people to sign up to as part of the campaign, to protect children and protect their own activities. So we would urge people to do that to watch the film to use the #helpingnothelping online, and the look on Lumos' website if you'd like to learn more about the sort of the scientific research in this area and the progress that's being made across the world, and to be champions of care reform, think that's what we really we really want people to be to challenge the norms and to strive for better for children.

TINA:

Thank you so much, Chloe Setter, this was highly informative, and I wish you all the best of luck with your campaign.

CHLOE:

Thank you so much for having me. Thank you.