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Q+A: Kaffie McCullough on Craigslist

A top advocate for stopping child prostitution is skeptical about Craigslist's decision to pull its 'erotic services' ads.

by [Katelyn Beaty](#)

The same feature that has made Craigslist so popular - namely, unlimited free advertising - has brought the decade-old website under heavy criticism for providing unmonitored forums for prostitution in its 570 city hubs. After several state representatives met with Craigslist attorneys Wednesday, [the site agreed to remove its "erotic services" section](#) and replace it with an "adult services" section, in which posts will cost \$5-10 and be manually reviewed by staff before going up.



While adding oversight to the free-for-all forum is an improvement, it's simply not enough - especially for stopping the sexual exploitation of children. Kaffie McCullough, who for eight years has led a statewide campaign to stop the prostitution of children in Georgia, is one skeptic. Her initiative, the Atlanta-based [A Future. Not a Past.](#) program, a wing of the Juvenile Justice Fund, released a study just this week on Craigslist and child prostitution. It showed that out of the 334 known adolescent girls in Georgia's sex trade, about 53 percent are advertised through Craigslist's erotic services section - what McCullough calls the "ground zero for pimps to profit from children." Further, the number of girls being pimped on Craigslist rose dramatically from November 2008 (100 girls) to February 2009 (176).



McCullough spoke recently with blog editor Katelyn Beaty about Craigslist's decision.

What was your response to yesterday's announcement?

I'm grateful that Craigslist is trying to monitor what's happening, because their erotic services [section] was clearly a place where young girls were being prostituted. I have mixed feelings as to whether this is going to work. I'd want to know what they mean when they say they're going to "monitor" it. And without training staff, for instance, the research that we've been doing since August 2007 says that

people were not accurate when they'd make estimates as to whether somebody is young or not. I'd like to think Craigslist would be open to having training so that staff can screen more effectively.

I realize that all of this makes it harder for the perpetrators, but . . . the reality is that even if Craigslist had totally taken it down, that wouldn't stop the problem of the prostitution of children - it would just spring up somewhere else.

Why has Craigslist become a hotbed of prostitution?

Craigslist is so easy, and so accessible, and so large. In other words, when we first started our research, we looked at other places, but it happened to such a greater extent on Craigslist that there was no point in taking the time to monitor the other websites, because the amount that was happening on Craigslist so dwarfed everything else.

Are they going to be going on every single Craigslist site and monitoring it? I don't think they have the staff. It's a massive undertaking when you have all the major cities in the United States. Before they put in the \$5 surcharge [for all erotic services ads], we were seeing about between 1,000-1,200 ads a day in Atlanta. Now we're down to about 500 a day, but that's just in Atlanta.

What advice would you give to Christians who want to learn more and prevent child prostitution in their own communities?

We have an organization here in Atlanta called [Street GRACE](#). It's a collaboration of churches that are banding together. It started in a Presbyterian church that was supposedly on a street corner where child prostitution was happening, but I would suggest to your readers that they contact Street GRACE and begin to form similar coalitions in their own particular city, because the more we can start to have networks all over this country, the better off we'll be.

It's not a fun job. In fact, we looked at one ad [in a webinar training session Tuesday], and I was ready and steeled, but one of them looked so young, I just started to cry. I surprised even myself. This young girl was totally naked, on all fours on a bed that obviously looked like it was on a motel, and she looked so young. And we flagged that ad, and it was still there later. Even after you flag it, someone can just put it back up, or just take a different picture. So I just have a lot of questions.

I know Craigslist is trying to do the right thing, and whether that's because they're getting pressure or because they want to do the right thing because it's the right thing, I don't know. But I would never want anybody in the public to think, "This is going to make it go away," because it's not going to go away until we as a society start saying, "This isn't okay," and we're going to encourage our DAs to prosecute and our police to arrest, and we're going to talk to our men and find out why buying sex period is okay, and how oversexualized we have become in this culture that it's okay to look at kids as sexual objects.