

Kieryn: I'm Kieryn.

Eve: I'm Hannah. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn: We're two Quiverfull escapees, talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.

Eve: Hi Kieryn.

Kieryn: Hi Hannah, hi everybody. Welcome to the Kitchen Table Cult podcast.

Eve: Yeah! We're back for one more time before [inaudible 00:00:44] hysterectomy.

Kieryn: Yes. Yes, because time is a thing that passes and I don't know how to judge it. So next week, we will have an Afterdark episode when I am extremely on painkillers. But this week, we have an actual episode that will launch by the time that I'm out of the hospital.

Eve: Yeah! That will be good.

Kieryn: Also, thank you to Aaron for making the podcast last week.

Eve: You saved our butts.

Kieryn: And editing it, and doing all the cool shit. Yep.

Eve: And we want to thank John Daniel slash his band, The Heavens, for our music clips that we use in this podcast. Super useful, yeah.

Kieryn: They're so pretty good, yes.

Eve: So, what are we talking about this week?

Kieryn: Well, I think we should talk about homeschooling because we've touched on it a bit, but we haven't really gone into detail, and that's something that's fundamental to understanding everything else.

Eve: And it's kind of really important to understanding us and why we do what we do really tends to come back to homeschooling.

Kieryn: So what is homeschooling?

Eve: Depends on who you ask.

Kieryn: It really does.

- Eve: Yeah, homeschooling is educating your kids outside of standard systems, educating them in an environment that's at home usually. And it doesn't mean that the parents are doing the teaching, but it does mean that you're not going to school.
- Kieryn: Right. You're not part of the public education system or the private education system. It's you're basically on your own with whatever resources your parents can provide you with.
- Eve: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And there's a whole lot of curriculums out there that you can use, a lot of the same textbooks that you can get in the public school are available for private purchase and use, and there are some really great homeschool teachers who are certified teachers or educators, and who are able to use those resources the way they're intended. And then, sometimes, you get people who don't understand how those tools are supposed to be used, and they try to use it and sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't.
- Kieryn: Yeah. Do we know much about who homeschools? Sort of.
- Eve: Well, most of these people are ... don't trust the government and so they don't want to get recorded or counted. And most states don't require you to report that you're homeschooling. But from the data that we do have, which is limited, what do we know?
- Kieryn: We know that, at least in 2012, 83% of home schoolers were white according to the NCES, which stands for ... I don't remember right now.
- Eve: It's I think the National-
- Kieryn: National Center for Education.
- Eve: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Kieryn: Yes, that's a word. Statistics.
- Eve: Statistics. We can say it.
- Kieryn: [crosstalk 00:04:03] can. I really can. This is fun.
- Eve: Do you remember NCFCA debate coaching? Talking about this is a word that home schoolers mess up the most and we need to sit around practicing this word?
- Kieryn: Yes.
- Eve: Yeah, it's pretty true. And it's pretty much, yeah, it's pretty much white people, and I think that's because there's a lot of privilege that goes into homeschooling. You have to be willing to assume that you can work outside the system without having consequences. You have to be willing to assume that you don't need the extra support.

So you have a parent or a caregiver whose able to stay at home and homeschool, and that requires a lot of financial stability. Yeah, you have to be able to do that.

Eve: My family, I would say we were pretty squarely middle class, but we definitely had scarcity mentality because we had so many kids and so little money to go around. But my dad had a really steady white collar job, and my mom was college educated, and so she felt like she had the tools to homeschool us, and she felt she had the stability to homeschool us. So it's not something that you find people who have a lot of financial instability in their lives gravitating toward naturally.

Kieryn: Right. Yeah. And it's not to say that people who are home schoolers or people of color don't homeschool. They exist, and I think some of the demographics of that is changing now, but we don't have the data to reflect that quite yet. But, it's becoming more common at least anecdotally to have poorer people-

Eve: Well-

Kieryn: ... and people of color starting to homeschool now or [inaudible 00:06:03].

Eve: Well, I knew a lot of really poor home schoolers that dad had blue collar jobs, and was hustling and putting together two or three different sources of income to make it work. But the ideology behind that of, "I can step outside the system and there's not going to be any backlash," is very, I'd say, white privilege.

Kieryn: It's extreme white privilege, yeah. Homeschooling is really ... It's an option if you have privilege and that's how I kind of like to describe it to people is there's a lot ... because you're taking on higher education system as one person or two people, so that requires-

Eve: There's a lot of-

Kieryn: ... privilege.

Eve: Yeah, there's a lot of exceptionalist thinking that goes into it. You get a lot of people talking about ... it's kind of the divine rights' kind of thing. You get people talking about being called, you get people talking about, "Well, this is good for them because they're different than anybody else and they're special." And it really, again, just that's an extremely white mentality.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, and it sort of started gaining popularity in the 70s and 80s around the moral majority where everyone didn't want to be part of desegregation and wanted to keep their kids away from those kids. So it gained a lot of traction as sort of a white flight of people not wanting their white kids to be in school with kids of color.

Eve: Right. Well, and you have Brown v. Board happened in 1954, and then Engel v. Vitale, which is the court case that ended prayer in schools, and so that was unconstitutional. That was 1962, and so you get these two things where religious people are losing ...

religious whites are losing privilege. And so, they're starting to feel like their place at the top of the heap is being threatened. And because they're special, they're going to create their new system.

Kieryn: They're called by God to do this.

Eve: Which is just ... it's such a load of entitled crap, but I mean, historically it makes sense. It's part of it, the mindset and the times. And we're here cleaning up the mess that they made.

Kieryn: [crosstalk 00:08:43].

Eve: Do you remember having many people of color in your homeschool community?

Kieryn: Yeah. So in Florida, there was actually a pretty large Latino community. So there were a lot of homeschoolers of color, but there weren't a lot of black homeschoolers. In Atlanta, when I moved there, it was predominantly white. So it depended on where I lived. But, even so, the homeschoolers of color were in the minority. So there were still a lot more white homeschoolers than anyone else.

Eve: Yeah. In our homeschool group in California, I mean, where we were living in California in the Central Valley, there really weren't that many black people. There were a lot of Latinos, and so we did have some Latinx diversity in our community, in the homeschool world. And then, again, when we moved to Richmond, it was a much different racial demographic. And even then, we only had, I think, in our church I knew of two black families and both of them homeschooled. It was interesting because it didn't feel like there were very many ... not only were there not very many black people there, but they were very much not making waves. And, I mean, that makes perfect sense as a white dominated community and these people, most of them are pretty racist.

Eve: As I grew older, the more I realized that that was a part of that community was this really aggressive, quiet racism that was part of the homeschool world.

Kieryn: Yeah, that's something that I came to understand as I got older as well, which was just that like initially I was like, "No, we're not racist." "What? What are you talking about? Everyone is fine. We don't care." But the things is it is actually super racist, it's just an undercurrent that is constant and it's so ingrained that you don't notice it until you figure out how racism works, and you realize it's systemic. And then you're like, "Oh no. This is entirely based in racism and white supremacy."

Eve: Yeah, I mean, because of that community and that background, I definitely haven't done any of the heavy lifting necessary to undo the damage done by that. And that's something that I have started to work toward, but I haven't really put in the time and I need to. But it's systemic in that community. I mean, as we've said, it's kind of white flight from the school systems, and that's where it started, and you can't get away from that origin.

Kieryn: No, it's really frustrating. It's actually kind of interesting because I am Lebanese and Portuguese, so I'm not white. And when I moved to Georgia, that's when I started realizing and facing sort of racism against all of brown people because in Florida, everyone is dark like me, so it's fine. But when I moved to Atlanta, we had child protected services called on us when my mom had a baby because they thought we were Iranian terrorists. And it was at that point that I started grappling with race. I mean, like, "Oh."

Eve: Was that right after 9/11? When was that?

Kieryn: It was several years after. But yeah.

Eve: Got you. Yeah, so how did that impact your experiences as a teenager in TeenPact, and NCFCA?

Kieryn: I hid my skin. I hid it. I wore long sleeves, I wore long skirts. It worked because I was being modest, and I just tried to look super white and super pale. And yeah, and that was something that I didn't really come to understand until I was an adult and started thinking things through and realizing, "Oh, no, that's just a lot of internalized racism also." And my parents tried really hard to be white. So, that was very much part of my culture.

Eve: Got you. Got you. So why did your parents homeschool? What drew them to it?

Kieryn: Initially, it was because ... So the story goes that I knew how to write my name and I knew my colors, and whatever it is that you need to know for first grade. And the private school that I was going to didn't want me to skip. And my mom was like, "I know how to teach first grade." So they're like, "We'll just teach you. We'll just homeschool." My mom had been to ... she went to Flagler for deaf education, so. She never graduated, or finished, or anything, but she had enough that she felt like she could do first grade. And at the same time, she was kind of being pressured by some friends at church to homeschool because they were my brothers best friends and they wanted-

Eve: Okay, so there's a big homeschool community in your church already?

Kieryn: Yeah. So it was a mix between peer pressure, and "we want you to be able to start first grade when you're five ... " or four, whatever age I was. And then, it just sort of went downhill from there as they got involved in a religious homeschool community.

Eve: Right. For my parents, I think it was a pretty natural progression. Most of their peers from the church in San Francisco that they had been at were homeschooling their kids. And so, it was all their friends are homeschooling. And we moved to Visalia when I was pretty little, and then we had my next sister down, and the schools where we were weren't great. And so, it seemed like a natural like, "Well, we'll do this." And my mom, she had a bachelors of science in nursing. She hadn't had really great school experiences, and so she was kind of excited to try something different.

- Eve: And so, they did that, and we did that until ... kind of taking it year by year until fourth grade. Right before I was about to go into fourth grade, my mom was pregnant and she was due in December. And so, she thought, "Oh, it might be easier to put Hannah in school." And there was this private Christian school that she liked the sound of and was thinking about it. And she brought it up with my dad and he was like, "No, that's not what we do as a family. We homeschool."
- Kieryn: Oh, wow.
- Eve: So that was when it stopped being a year by year consideration, and became a, "This is our family identity."
- Kieryn: Yeah. It became my families identity pretty shortly after homeschooling. After becoming involved with the homeschool group, my parents were like, "Oh yeah. No, this is what God is calling us to do, and it is now the only thing we can ever do."
- Eve: Right. And my dad took the first [inaudible 00:16:27] I mean, really seriously, where it talks about teach your children the ways of God when you're at home, when you lie down, when you walk along the way. So he believed that it was God's calling on parents, and that to do anything otherwise was functionally an abdication of your calling as a parent. [crosstalk 00:16:49]-
- Kieryn: Yep. My parents also believed that, and that was a large part of it.
- Eve: So, this plays into the concept of parental rights and how the United States has not ratified the UN Rights of the Child Act, and largely because of home schoolers lobbying against it, and states like Virginia have what's called a Parental Rights Amendment, now, added to their Constitutions. Where does this all come from? Because these are all homeschool lobbying efforts.
- Kieryn: Right. That are led largely by Michael Farris and people from and related to HSLDA, and just sort of ... I'm not sure why that was a thing that started, but they believed that there is a God given unalienable parental right that parents have control over their children until adulthood, and that nobody should be in their way and they're trying to make that ... I mean, ultimately, they want that it in the US Constitution. That's the end goal really.
- Eve: Yeah. Well, I think a lot of it comes back to what that bible verse and my father's interpretation of it, and so it ties into, "You are responsible for your child. The government is not. And to do anything that gives the government obligation to look out for children is an abdication of your parental duties." And they've turned that into a religious rights issue. So it's kind of turned responsibility on its head, and made it an authority problem.
- Eve: And I mean, I remember we used to ... all of the parents that I knew who were homeschooling were probably also believed in spanking and corporeal punishments of

various kinds. And so, there are all these conversations about how do we evade CPS? How do we evade being caught for-

Kieryn: Persecuted.

Eve: ... not having our kids in school? Yeah, it was seen as a persecution, but also how do we spank and not leave bruises? How do we stay inside at certain hours of the day so nobody calls the [inaudible 00:19:21] officer on us.

Kieryn: Yeah, that was all part of mine.

Eve: And all that was coming from HSLDA.

Kieryn: Yep, yep. My parents hadn't even thought of it until they joined HSLDA and were like, "Oh my god. We can't be outside during school hours?" "Oh my god. We can't spank our kids as much as we thought?"

Eve: Yeah. So what does HSLDA do? HSLDA stands for ... ?

Kieryn: They-

Eve: The Homeschool Legal-

Kieryn: The Homeschool Legal Defense Association.

Eve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kieryn: Yeah. Initially, they try to legalize homeschooling, and now, they try to keep it unregulated.

Eve: Well, and I think the part of the problem is that they wanted to get it on the books state by state. And homeschooling when it started, it wasn't started by Christians. It was started by hippies and liberals as a way to have more [inaudible 00:20:18] child centric, student driven, educational approach. It's a popular option for child stars, and savants, and-

Kieryn: Olympians.

Eve: Olympians. But when Christians got into it, it became this, "We need to get this on the books as a religious liberty concern."

Eve: Well, we're going to take a short break, and get into our own experiences a little bit more.

Eve: So the age old question that we would always get as kids, and now, as adults when we tell people that we were homeschooled, did you like being homeschooled? Do you like being homeschooled?

Eve: So I got that question almost anytime I went out in public during school hours. We'll be at the grocery store, and somebody will be like, "Why aren't you in school?" And my mom would be like, "We're home schoolers." And the lady would be like, "Do you like being homeschooled?" And I kind of look at my mom, I kind of looked at the lady and think about how much do I tell her? Because I don't want to get in trouble. And I do like being homeschooled, I did like the freedom, but I also knew the response I was supposed to give.

Kieryn: Yeah. Yeah. I was asked that also basically whenever I left the house. We were coached on the answer, which was obviously, "Yes, we love homeschooling. It's great." And I got really good at just being like, "Yeah, it's cool." And then, people would ask me about socialization, and I'd be like, "I mean, I get to meet with people of all kinds of ages, so I'm more socialized because I'm hanging out-

Eve: Yeah, that was-

Kieryn: ... with adults right now."

Eve: That was my dad's big thing is like, "Yeah, well we don't believe in you hanging out with only your peers. And you need to diversify your ages of friends and be able to talk to anyone."

Kieryn: Yeah. So as an adult now, I work entirely with people who are within 10 years of me all the time, and not people who are necessarily 40 or 50 years older than me as much. They're still there, but it's not as much. Most of what I do is my peers.

Eve: I interact with a lot of my peers and I interact with a lot of older people. But it's true though, I do get along with older people better than my peers because I don't know how to relate to my peers. Because all of their comradery building techniques are based on shared media experiences from growing up, and which cartoons they watched, and what music they were into, and where were you when that movie came out, and what did you do for your first boyfriend or girlfriend in school? Like-

Kieryn: I don't have those. I don't have any of those.

Eve: No, I don't. That community, that culture doesn't exist for us.

Kieryn: No. So it's weird. Because my upbringing and life experience is so much more similar to people who are my grandparents ages than people who are my ages. And this is just how it is right now.

Eve: I get along with 70 year olds far better than I do with 30 year olds.



Kieryn: Yep.

Eve: So I think I liked some of the freedom of being homeschooled. I mean, I used to get all the questions of like, "Do you wear your pajamas all day?"

Kieryn: Oh my god, yeah.

Eve: "Do you just do whatever you want?" And I, "No, I had to be out of bed at 7:00 AM, or my mother would send the twins to jump on my head and scream at me to get down and help and make breakfast for somebody. And we had to have all of our chores done by 8:00 so we would be in the living room for bible time by 8:30, dressed and showered and ready for the day. And having had all our personal devotions done as well as before we would spend an hour doing family bible time and worship that my mom would lead, and would always end somebody melting down and having a spanking, and all of us waiting in the living room until she told us we could go and do our school."

Kieryn: Yep. That was extremely similar. I had to be upstairs, out of bed, dressed, ready and giving people breakfast by 8:00 AM. And if I wasn't feeling well that day or something, I would be in trouble and yelled at and people would come and jump on me. And I had to feed, bathe, and get everyone ready for school, do all the dishes, do all the chores, all that by 9:00. And if my education took me longer than two hours to do, that was problematic because I needed to be making lunch at 11:00.

Eve: My mom was pretty good about giving me space during high school to do my own thing, but that also meant that I didn't have supervision. And I think I got ADHD, I don't know, but I would be really... I would get into hyper focus. I would read something and only do one thing, or I'd be unable to focus and I'd float around the house, trying to find a better spot to do my school because I couldn't work here because it was too hot, and I couldn't work there because I was cramped. And I couldn't work, you know.

Eve: So when I had parental supervision, for my academics, it was always a punitive experience because it would be like, "Oh, well you haven't been doing your schoolwork well enough. So now, I have to come get involved and work with you and [crosstalk 00:26:28]."

Kieryn: [crosstalk 00:26:28] trouble. Yeah.

Eve: Yeah. Yeah. And so, in college, I had one class. I was in a symbolic logic class, and the professor was really generous with office hours and stuff. But it was my first semester of freshman year, and I was terrified to go ask for help. I was terrified to go talk to him. I didn't understand a lot of the stuff that was going on, and I was doing a lot of work on my own. But I really should've just gone to his office and gotten help, but I was still so scared to because I didn't want to be in trouble.

Kieryn: Yeah. All of last sem ... Well, my first semester at school and even last semester, also was like I have ADHD, and I'm struggling, and all of what I do is math and science, which is everything that was neglected. So I have no framework for any of the things that I'm

learning. And I didn't know how to ask for help, and people were like, "Ask for help." But I'm like, "But I literally don't know how." My parents gave me books when I was 10 and expected me to do them, and then stopped my education five years later. That is my high school experience. I had no ability to ask for help.

Eve: Yeah. I had to learn the hard way how to work with groups. I mean, how to pace yourself in a classroom setting is still very hard for me. I just don't follow the rules, and I don't-

Kieryn: I don't know what the rules are.

Eve: ... remember them until ... I've usually made a fool of myself.

Kieryn: Yep, yep. I got in trouble for putting signs up on campus because I didn't realize that they needed to be stamped by the administration.

Eve: Oh by Student Life and Learning.

Kieryn: Yeah. I was just like, "I just put up flyers. Everyone else was putting up flyers. I didn't realize there were rules attached to this." I don't know how to operate in this system because this is not a system I ever had to deal with before.

Eve: Right. So it's tricky because a lot of these things apply to office life, and organizing people in general, and there's a lot of social cues that we're missing. So I mean, sure I had friends, but we were all just as weird as each other. We were all-

Kieryn: Right. [crosstalk 00:28:44] friends on the internet who were the same as me.

Eve: All nerdy, obsessive, socially anxious, and honestly, really shutdown and traumatized in various ways. And so, yeah, of course we had socialization, but it's not the kind of socialization we needed. I didn't interact with anyone who was diverse in any way other than [inaudible 00:29:10] typical for a long time.

Kieryn: Yeah. I didn't actually meet anyone who was significantly different than me until after I moved out.

Eve: I didn't until after, probably, after college, and maybe even after probably the year after I got married was when I was starting to actually interact with people with very different backgrounds and I sucked at it, and I had all of the curiosity and interests, but also, just no tools and no ability to know how I was coming across, or how to be just a normal, compassionate, socialized human.

Kieryn: Yeah. It's only been the last two years, two or three years since I moved to the west coast that I've actually had a variety of friends that are all not the same as me, and they all have different stories, and different things, and we have different things in common and it's weird. It's really awesome.

Eve: I love it. Yeah, I love it!

Kieryn: But it's this new thing. This new skill that I'm only developing in my mid 20s is getting to know people and become friends with people who grew up differently than I did.

Eve: Yeah. And I guess, again, this kind of goes back to the white supremacist roots of homeschooling, is that this fear of the outside world is built into how we're raised. And it maybe is not intended as racist, but it's definitely part of the mindset with theological superiority. Like, "Oh. Well, we know how the bible is read, and we got our faith right, and you don't. And so, we're not going to interact with you because you're," quote on the quote, "of the world, and you are sinful." I mean ... So all of these things, we're part and parcel of it, and it gets worse the further you dig down into the layers.

Kieryn: Yep.

Eve: So what's going on with homeschooling now? What is the state of homeschooling in America?

Kieryn: I mean, that's a good question. We don't really have the data for it. We know a lot of people are doing it. I know that when I talk to people about current events, and I tell them that I was raised on this side of it. They're like, "What do you mean?" I'm like, "Well, so homeschoolers were a huge part of the reason that the Tea Party was able to do so well, and the reason that so many people are able to be elected in the 2010s ish."

Eve: So let's get into that a little bit. I was not politically active at that point and you were, so tell me about how that happened.

Kieryn: Yeah. So with TeenPact and with Generation Joshua in the early 2000s, early, mid 2000s, when I was going to all the camps, we were training to be activists, we were all training to run for election, we were all training to run campaigns to be politically involved, to take over the federal legislature ... like happened in 2010. So even though I wasn't on the scene, I had left at that point by 2010, but it was weird watching it happened because it was all of everything that I had been trained to do in 2006, 2007, 2008. And it was all people who were vaguely connected to me who are running for office through Patrick Henry, Generation Joshua, TeenPact, and they had all of the homeschooled students behind them. The homeschool students are the reason that Tom Cotton got elected. They came out a lot for Pence, a bunch of the Tea Party activists, their campaigns were fueled by the activism, and work, and labor of homeschooled students.

Eve: Whenever there's a bill related to homeschooling that goes up in a state legislature, it's really interesting to be doing lobbying on the pro-regulation side because every time I talk to an aid or a staff member, and I say, "Hi, I'm calling about this bill," or, "I'm here about this bill, and I'm a homeschooler," they get this deer in the headlights look of terror because the home schoolers come out in droves.

Kieryn: Droves.

Eve: They just come out in droves, and they're angry and they don't understand the motives behind a proposed piece of legislation, they don't understand the nuances.

Kieryn: All they know is they're being targeted and-

Eve: They feel .. yeah. They think-

Kieryn: ... punished, but it's not the case.

Eve: And they believe that it's religious persecution and they just go to town with their rage. And so, these offices are bombarded with angry constituents who are anti-regulation. And so, when I come up and I say, "Hi, I'm here and I'm pro-regulation, and I'm a homeschool alum." The relief ... it's just like they instantly relax. And they're like-

Kieryn: It's palpable.

Eve: It's palpable, and they're like, "Oh my god. I'm so glad to hear that. We've been getting so many calls. We don't know what to do with this. We thought this was a good idea-

Kieryn: Every office I went to-

Eve: We had no idea that anyone was on the other side because we were only hearing opposition."

Kieryn: Yep. Yeah, that was the same experience I had in Sacramento earlier this year because they had introduced some bills in California, and I was like, "Oh, I should go and meet with everyone in the education committee." And every single person that I talked to had that same reaction where it was deer in the headlights, and then I was like, "No, I'm on the other side. Also, I'm a homeschool alum." And then, they were like, "Oh my god. Okay." One of the legislators who submitted a really good bill actually pulled her bill because she got just inundated with phone calls from angry people just chewing her out, and she was like, "I clearly don't have enough of a stake in this to try." And I was like, "So talk to me next time and I will help you do [crosstalk 00:35:39]."

Eve: Right. And it's funny because with [inaudible 00:35:40] the home schoolers who are doing this, they'll probably be counting this lobbying as schoolwork. As they'll be like, "This is civics. This counts as-

Kieryn: Absolutely.

Eve: This is part of my high school credit. These hours are directly tied to school."

Kieryn: Are civic.

Eve: Yeah, directly tied to schoolwork. And you got stay at home moms, who are very passionate and they think that-

Kieryn: Have time.

Eve: Have time. You got kids who have time, and they're more free to volunteer. Again, it's a privilege thing. They don't have the other factors restricting-

Kieryn: They don't have to work three jobs.

Eve: No. So they're just throwing themselves into it. So when we see these bills come up, it's usually in reaction to some news case about abuse. You want to talk about Homeschooling's Invisible Children?

Kieryn: Yeah. So Homeschooling's Invisible Children is a database that the Coalition for Responsible Home Education runs where we just collect the stories of kids who are abused, or murdered, or otherwise have trauma because/or where homeschooling is a factor, where homeschooling enabled it, or hid it, or sometimes kids are pulled out of school because someone notices abuse and they're pulled out so they can be abused more, and then it's [crosstalk 00:37:17]-

Eve: Not get caught.

Kieryn: ... terrible. Yeah.

Eve: So we saw cases like the Hart family, and the Turpin family, we've heard our friend Josh in Virginia, he was featured in the Washington Post, who got himself out so he could go to a community college, Josh Powell. All of these cases of either educational neglect or abuse, it's hard to trace them and it's hard to document them, because again, most of them happen off the grid, and most of them don't get caught until there's a fatality involved. And we're just trying to document the numbers in an ad hoc way of how many kids are being abused that we know of because of homeschool laws that prevent mandatory reporters from running into these kids.

Kieryn: Yeah, we can't even collect data on how many people are homeschooling at this point. The amount that we can collect is very limited and varies by state. Wasn't there something in Virginia that came out a bit ago? Or they tried to have some kind of data?

Eve: So there's two ways of homeschooling in Virginia. One is you register with your local school board. You send them a letter with your intent, and then you submit annual testing. So you tell them how many kids, their ages, whatever, your curriculum plan. You don't have to get it approved, you just tell them what it is. And then, you submit annual test scores from some sort of standardized testing process. And a lot of the homeschool moms will get certified and administer them to their kids themselves and submit them, and they're pretty easy.

Eve: But the second way you can do it is you can file under religious exemption. And so, when we were lobbying in Virginia in, I guess it was 2014, it was based on this bill that we were trying to get through that would require religious exemption to end because all you have to do is say, "I'm homeschooling for religious reasons," and nobody ever

follows up with you, nobody tests the kids, nobody checks in. You can have more kids and never tell the state, and they might not have social security numbers or birth certificates because the parents might be [inaudible 00:39:55] citizens, or off the grid and do home births. So you get a lot of kids who are able to disappear.

Eve: And so, all we were trying to do is say, "We need to know who's being homeschooled, so that you can't disappear." And there was such a backlash and it didn't get anywhere. Even Josh Powell was kind of our poster child, and they brought in his sister to testify against him and say that his experiences weren't true, even though he had not been taught to read until very late, and was massively educationally neglected, and basically needed ... I can't remember if he actually got emancipated or was trying to get emancipated so he could go to community college to get remedial math and catch up to his peers. But either way, it became a he said, she said case because HSLDA brought in his sister to say that he was lying.

Kieryn: Because two people can't have different experiences, clearly.

Eve: Right. And so, when we get these ... homeschool parents will talk to us and they'll be like, "Are you against homeschooling?" And we'll be like, "No."

Kieryn: No.

Eve: Homeschooling could be done great. If you have a qualified educator or a parent who's really, really invested in their child, and working alongside them, and they have healthy power differentials happening in the homes so that the child doesn't feel like the relationship with the parent as an authority figure is merged with the relationship with the parent as a teacher, it could be-

Kieryn: Oh, that is so terrible.

Eve: ... it could be really good. There's a lot of flexibility, there's a lot of innovative ways you could teach, and I'm a big fan of Reggio Emilia style education. And so, I think that someone could homeschool using those methods and do a really great job. But most homeschool parents don't do that.

Kieryn: Right. Yeah, that's basically what I tell people too is I think it can be great. I think it can be a huge opportunity. I think it can be really helpful if a kid is having a really hard time in school to have an environment that's safe to learn in. But you have to understand the burden that you are taking on yourself, and you have to be prepared for that, and you have to be able to invest in your child's education. And if you can't, that's okay. That doesn't make you a failure. It's fine. Just do what works for your kid.

Eve: Right. You're not a bad parent.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: It's interesting to me that ... it's that people think that they could homeschool five different grades at the same time with limited resources, and limited outlets. And also, what if your kid has special needs, and you need extra help, and developmental delays or various learning disabilities in the classroom? You can't ... you sometimes don't know how to recognize that in your own kid. And how do you help that child unless you're trained for that? I mean, people go to school for years and years to become good at educating in those circumstances. And it's a really big thing to take on to school multiple kids at multiple age levels out of the home when they're also their own children.

Kieryn: And also the like ...

Eve: You have to be incredibly well emotionally adjusted to do it well.

Kieryn: Yeah. The parent-teacher [inaudible 00:43:44] same person thing is a really hard thing to overcome after you've been homeschooled and when you go to school. At least for me, it's really hard.

Eve: Yeah. Oh no. Yeah, it's really hard. Well, we're going to take another break, and then we're going to take a call from a friend of mine, who I knew when I was in Richmond being homeschooled, who was homeschooled for a part of his time. And we'll see what he has to say.

Eve: All right. Hi Caleb.

Caleb: Hey, how's it going?

Eve: Good. We liked your question, and we'd love to have you ask it on air and get a discussion going.

Caleb: Okay. Yeah, sure. So I listened to your first podcast, and at the end, I heard you're invitation for questions. So yeah, I had, I guess, probably boiled down two, and I'll start with first one if that's okay.

Eve: Go for it.

Caleb: So, I guess, my first question was do you believe that homeschooling should be banned altogether, or just more regulated by the government?

Kieryn: I don't think it should be banned. I think it should still be a thing. I think it should exist. I think people who homeschool should be held accountable. There should be a way for us to be able to make sure that no one is being beaten, or tortured, or their education completely shot. I want to maintain the freedom and the innovation of homeschooling, but not let people die in the process.

Eve: Yeah. I am really excited about the potential of homeschooling for child-centered learning for innovative education styles and methods. And there's a whole lot that can

be done with it. But if it's for the kid, it's probably going to be better than if it's for the adults religious ideology. So going at it on a case by case basis, going at it on a need basis as opposed to an absolute, "This is what we do for this blanket reason," is probably going to be a safer approach. And our policy recommendations that we make are always about how do we protect children? And if you don't want to give up freedom, the question I always ask is, well, what is a child's life worth to you? If this saves one homeschool kid's life, are you willing to submit annual records of this or that to your state so that one less kid will die?

Caleb: Okay. Okay. And so, I guess, that kind of segues into my next one, and that is how do you want to advocate for children's rights in the future? And I was trying to figure out if you would have to work with churches and existing homeschool organizations, or if you would be attempting to actually work against those organizations.

Kieryn: So no, I try to work with homeschool organizations. Less so with churches just because I don't go to church, so it's hard for me to work with churches. But, I feel like we can and we should be allies and fight together for this. And I'm in conversations with homeschool groups in California, actually, because I'm trying to start a movement here of coming together with homeschoolers who believe that homeschooling should be used as a child-centered educational option, homeschooling should be an educational method, not an identity. And work with them to preserve everything that's awesome about homeschooling, obviously, while also providing accountability for people who need it because everybody needs to have accountability. It's important.

Kieryn: But I don't try to work against them. A lot of people think that we are against them from the outset just because our approach is child-centered and not parental rights center. But I definitely think they're worth working with, and we should be working together, and it's very compatible. We just need to realize that there's common ground.

Eve: Yeah, I think that the thing to keep in mind is though because we're putting kids first, we have a lot of differing assumptions with a lot of these groups that are doing homeschooling for religious reasons. So if these groups are willing to get behind kids first homeschooling, then we're not going to have any conflicts. We don't ask for much in terms of policy reform.

Eve: Our three basic requests are that kids get two encounters with mandatory reporters annually through one with a doctor, and one with a qualified teacher to do some sort of standardized evaluation or testing. And then, three that states require a register for homeschool students so that you can't go off the grid and make your kid disappear.

Eve: So as long as those three things are happening, and those are pretty low level in terms of invasiveness, we have no beef with religious groups or churches. And it's usually on their end that they start having problems with our methods and our approach. So I'm happy to work with any of those groups. But really, because they go at it with parental rights and religious freedom first before the kids, they usually don't want to work with us.



Caleb: Okay. [crosstalk 00:49:55]-

Eve: So HSLDA is really involved in the funding and lobbying for Parental Rights Amendment, which in terms of rights language is kind of a dangerous thing to do because it creates an imbalance because there's no precedent for language for children's rights in state legislative declarations or on the state Constitutions. And the United States has not ratified the UN Rights of the Child Act. And so, there's nothing to counterbalance parental rights being put on the books in terms of protecting children. And so, because that leaves them so vulnerable, it's hard for us to work with groups like HSLDA. But other groups, I can't see any reason not to work with them.

Caleb: Okay. Yeah. It seems like maybe the only people I think that would affect the most are ... and I don't even know if this exist, are maybe parents who applied to or provided their notice of intent to provide home instruction due to religious exemption.

Eve: Yeah, so religious exemption is specific to Virginia. And so, when we look at religious exemption in Virginia, the policy recommendation that we've always made is you can do this, but you still have to renew it every year, and you still have to tell ... have your kids interact with the doctor for an annual physical. We're not asking for vaccines. We're just asking for a physical. So-

Kieryn: It's the bare minimum that parents do anyway in theory, or who should be doing anyway.

Eve: Right. So, quote unquote, good parents shouldn't have an objection to this. It's only parents who are trying to hide something that will object.

Caleb: Okay. Well, those are definitely some heavy topics. I can tell that you all have some interesting ... well, not just interesting, some pretty deep stories. Or at least, it's ... yeah. It's hard to put it into words just because you've both alluded to how it affected you growing up. So yeah, I was interested how you'd answer this questions and definitely keep listening, so.

Eve: Yeah. I mean, everybody has a different experience with homeschooling, and some are really positive and some are not. And it's right now that's pivotal because we're the first generation of homeschool alums, who've come into adulthood and can start advocating for what the future of homeschooling looks like. And so, it's time for there to be a shift in the conversation to make space for people like us or like you, to talk about what we want homeschooling to look like in the future, and what our experiences had meant to us and how that informs how we look at it going forward.

Caleb: Okay. Well-

Kieryn: Thanks for the question [crosstalk 00:53:07] I [crosstalk 00:53:07]-

Caleb: I appreciate you answering my questions. Yeah. Yeah, I appreciate you taking them and actually giving me the time to ask them. So appreciate it and I'll keep listening.

This transcript was exported on Jan 31, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Eve: All right. Take care.

Caleb: All right. Thanks. Bye.

Eve: Bye.

Caleb: Bye.

Kieryn: And for those of you, now, that we're here, wondering who this "we" business is all about because we kept saying "we" but not actually addressing who "we" was. The Coalition for Responsible Home Education is an organization that ... I'm one of the founding board members of, and the tech director, Hannah, works with us as a policy analyst, and we advocate for homeschool policy reform in very easy, as low impact as we can ways to make homeschooling safer for students, and that is our approach to it. And if you want to donate to it, you can do it at [responsiblehomeschooling.org/donate](https://responsiblehomeschooling.org/donate) and thanks for listening.