

# ASK AN EXPERT SERIES

## BUILDING A STRONG HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROGRAM

Creating a human trafficking program, whether from the ground up or in addition to existing services, requires a multi-tiered approach. Internal organizational structure must be developed or enhanced alongside external service networks and partnerships. On May 19, 2021, three experts with [Covenant House Alaska](#), [Life Link/505-get-free](#), and [Mosaic Family Services](#) offered insight on this topic and answered participant questions during a [live Ask an Expert webinar](#).

The Ask an Expert Series is sponsored by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#). Following are the questions and abbreviated answers provided by the panel of experts during the discussion.

### **What community organizations and business should someone meet with when they first consider starting an anti-trafficking program?**

If you are thinking about dipping your toe in this water, just know that you cannot do this alone. It is important to find and learn from both local and national people. Then, understand your city. Know what services you have and who can help. Every unmet need for a trafficking survivor is a reason, or a potential opportunity, for a survivor to go back to a trafficker. Build a robust group of service providers and work with law enforcement to meet as many needs as possible. Find folks providing services for substance use and mental health, for medical and dental, and connect with local law enforcement. Ensure your program can address all basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing. Whether your program provides them or partners with other organizations to make sure these basic needs are met. Don't be afraid to [apply for federal dollars to support your anti-trafficking efforts](#). More than anything, build a team of comprehensive services around you.

Take OVC's free, online, self-paced training [Understanding Human Trafficking](#) to receive foundational learning on trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches to human trafficking.

### **Because there is no single profile of a trafficking victim, how can a program prepare to meet the needs of all victims of trafficking?**

Being able to truly connect with each survivor makes a tremendous impact. This requires learning and engaging in cultural humility, not making assumptions about the survivor you are working with or what is best for them. It is also important to think about what may prevent different populations of victims from connecting with your organization or seeking services. For example, Mosaic found language access is one of the biggest barriers for some of the most underserved and vulnerable populations to receive services or even know that help exists. It is really important for organizations to have a [language access plan](#). Mosaic's staff speaks over 25 different languages and provides outreach in multiple languages. If your organization is starting a human trafficking program, find language resources through paid interpreters or translators or build a group of volunteer interpreters. Partner with language and culturally specific organizations to assist your efforts. Use a [Sample Language Access Plan](#) as a starting point for developing one for your organization.

In addition, when [screening for potential trafficking victims](#), develop a response protocol for the diverse needs of victims and survivors. One organization cannot meet the needs of all trafficking survivors alone. It is important to know your community population. Know your own limits. Determine what can be done in-house versus what needs to be referred out to other organizations. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Identify organizations or community partners working with underserved populations and partner to share existing infrastructure and resources.

### **How is victim-centered, trauma-informed care used in anti-trafficking work?**

[Trauma-informed care](#) is acknowledging the environment from a survivor perspective and covers core principles of safety, trustworthiness, peer support and mutual self-help, collaboration and mutuality empowerment, voice, choice, and attention to cultural, historical and gender issues. Consider who is at the front desk; who will be the first person to talk to a victim of human trafficking; and what kind of initial paperwork is required. Be sensitive to their traumatic memories and experiences. Look at them as a survivor and what they need going forward. [Applying a trauma-informed approach](#) is thinking about the individual and offering services to meet survivor needs. A big piece of trauma-informed care is putting the client first and assisting them with removing barriers to services.

### **What language access resources are available for providing interpretation services?**

The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims is a one-stop-shop where victim service providers, culturally specific organizations, criminal justice professionals, and policymakers may get information and expert guidance to enhance their capacity to identify, reach, and serve all victims of crime, especially those from communities that often have less access to healing services and avenues to justice. A series of webinars and documents can be found at the [National Resource Center website](#) specifically addressing language access services. The [Interpretation Technical Assistance and Resource Center](#) offers language access, interpretation, and translation services. Lastly, [LanguageLine Solutions](#) offers professional interpreting services. These interpretation resources can assist programs with overcoming language barriers when working with a survivor of human trafficking.

### **A domestic violence service provider organization recently added a housing program for victims of human trafficking. Are there effective screening questions they can add to their intake to help identify victims of human trafficking earlier in their process?**

When you are thinking about adding screening questions, there are many answers because not one size fits all. Think through the screening tools and questions and the population you are working with for the purpose and goals for screening. Keep in mind some screening tools are designed for specific populations like sex trafficking of youth or sex trafficking of adults. Keep those things in mind when deciding which screening tools to use. The best practice is to use a screening tool that has been validated. Screen for both labor and sex trafficking. The tendency is to focus on sex trafficking. Keep in mind there are just as many if not more labor trafficking survivors out there. Screening and identifying those individuals is an opportunity to engage and provide holistic services and provide holistic services to address all the different victimization and needs. Lastly, make sure whoever does the screening has the appropriate training and understanding of the dynamics of human trafficking and elements of force, fraud, and coercion. When in doubt, always reach out for consultation or refer to a trafficking specific organization or national or local human trafficking hotline. (Editor's Note: OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC) offers a two-part webinar series on "Human Trafficking Screening Process and Best Practices" ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)) and a [Victim Service Provider Intake and Needs Assessment](#).)

**Have any of the screening tools, recommendations, or other material provided by OVC seen any significant revision because of the pandemic?**

There have not been any formal revisions to screening tools. What has changed is the format or the method in which to conduct screenings. With COVID-19, providing digital services by text, phone, and email is most common. The key is flexibility. Adjust the intake process as needed for each client. Be accommodating when it takes longer and realize it may not all happen in one setting or appointment.

**How do you work with system or law enforcement advocates? How do you balance roles and duties?**

System-based victim advocates, including advocates in law enforcement agencies and prosecutor's offices, serve a different role than community-based victim advocates. System-based advocates are employed by, and serve as a point of contact for, a specific criminal justice agency. Their primary role is to facilitate a victim's participation in the justice process. System-based advocates do not maintain confidentiality or privilege. Community-based advocates typically work for a non-profit organization. Their primary role is to provide crisis intervention and supportive services for victims and to promote victim safety, trauma recovery, and healing. Community-based advocates may also assist victims in navigating the criminal justice and/or civil legal systems, children and youth services, social services, etc., as needed. Community-based advocates work with victims regardless of whether they report a crime. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount for community-based advocates in order to preserve the safety, privacy, and trust of victims seeking services. Both roles are important. Balancing the respective roles and duties begins with recognizing the differences and similarities of these two roles.

Collaborating with law enforcement can take time; be patient with each other. Find out which law enforcement agencies are responsible for leading human trafficking investigations in your community, region, or state (e.g. your local law enforcement agency or prosecutor's office, regional or statewide human trafficking taskforce, state bureau of investigation or the [Attorney General's Office](#), the FBI or the U.S. [Department of Homeland Security](#)). Keep in mind the role of law enforcement is to build cases. Expect some conflict, and hopefully it is healthy conflict, which is going to create growth. By identifying federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies working on human trafficking cases and letting them know your program provide services to victims, you are building important relationships. Also, think about programs specifically geared towards supporting that collaboration such as a [human trafficking task forces](#). These multi-disciplinary teams focus on services and resources for victims and the investigation and prosecution responses to perpetrators of this crime.

**Is there a recommended model for case management?**

Look at the populations you are working with and customize. Acquire as much training and knowledge as possible about different types of approaches and methods for working with survivors, then customize and create a model that works for your particular population and community. A good starting point is [Seeking Safety](#), an evidence-based model for trauma and substance abuse and guide for case management, empowerment, coping mechanisms, substance abuse trauma, asking for help, personal safety, and much more.

**What resources exist for creating a support group for survivors?**

The National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center has an exploratory brief on [Peer Support Groups for Individuals Who Have Experienced Human Trafficking and Substance Use Disorder](#). This document includes principles of peer support, peer support group models, and considerations when exploring peer support groups. The National Center for Trauma-Informed Care provides a [Guidebook for Engaging Women in Trauma-Informed Peer Support](#) with content on fundamentals, cultural considerations, and moving into action. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) has a [two-page infographic](#) on peer support.

**Our program is working with minor girls in the custody of social services. We are not requiring the girls to participate in therapy but rather trauma education and training in the hopes that they will decide to participate on their own. Would this be a barrier in obtaining a first-time grant?**

No. Victim service providers have an opportunity to create systems and programs that help survivors. OVC supports a [voluntary services model](#) recognizing survivors are the experts on their own lives, and there is no requirement for any particular service or participation in order to access support. Seek to understand potential barriers or challenges to participation, identifying reasons why somebody is not engaging fully in a program. A number of different factors may be the cause like needing to be stabilized, having time to heal or feel comfortable. The services being offered may not match survivor needs; so, be flexible in offering services.

**Working in a brand-new position as an adult advocate getting the word out about my job has been difficult. What advice do you have for getting the word out about a new service provider?**

Knock on doors, make phone calls, build relationships, and understand your community. Find out who the big players are in the anti-trafficking field and introduce yourself. Relationships can open up doors.

There is such a shortage of services and such a need to help survivors of trafficking. Build upon existing infrastructure and [service networks](#) like coalitions and networks either locally or nationally. Look at related victim service providers and make those connections to get your name out that way; it is all about relationships.

**How have you used multi-disciplinary provider teams to meet the needs of youth survivors?**

Youth-focused multi-disciplinary teams consist of partner organizations and agencies and are a valuable tool for working together to support survivors of human trafficking. Together, representatives from local law enforcement, social services, child advocacy centers, youth-serving victim service providers, local schools and hospitals can discuss specific situations and identify collaborative solutions. During ongoing monthly coordination meetings multi-disciplinary teams review cases, share new human trafficking referrals, and discuss trends, challenges, and gaps in services. There may be state specific grant opportunities like the [Regional Navigator Program Grant in Maryland](#) to fund staff positions to support the needs of youth survivors and facilitate local multi-disciplinary teams.

**I work in residential care with human trafficking adolescent survivors and we have struggled to help youth 'buy into' treatment options in the beginning. This has resulted in frequent runaway behaviors within the first week of placement, before the youth is able to form meaningful connections in treatment. Any ideas or thoughts on how to help decrease this unsafe behavior at the beginning of the treatment process?**

Editor's Note: It is important to understand that some of the behaviors exhibited by survivors and perceived by others as unsafe may in fact be a normal reaction of the survivor to the trauma they have experienced. Also, some survivors are not ready to immediately engage in services and/or treatment options and their reaction is to run. One approach is to give the survivor a little bit of time before jumping into treatment.

Meet their basic needs first, which will help to create the foundation for a relationship. Do not force young people to do anything at the beginning. Focus on building the relationship. Covenant House Alaska does not expect anything from anybody for at least 30 days because neuroscience shows that a young person in crisis cannot physically have forward thought until they are stable for at least 30 days. If there is any way for you to slow down the process to focus on relationship building and get to the treatment when you get to the treatment, that may result in different outcomes. In addition, find ways to

have consistent access or follow up to allow survivors to engage when they are ready to engage. For example, a drop-in center, a hotline, or low barrier services. Education programs and services are easy low access services that do not even require intake and folks can come and go as they please. So, thinking about ways that you can engage in a consistent way that does not require a long term stay at the program is beneficial.

### **Are there any good resources to help prevent trafficking to present to teens?**

[The Youth Collaboratory](#) offers a [The Shining Light on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding](#). There is also a guide from the Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign titled [How to Talk to Youth About Human Trafficking](#) for individuals working with youth. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Human Trafficking Prevention](#) brief explores strategies to integrate human trafficking into runaway and homeless youth programs. Lastly, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students offers a [Human Trafficking Framework for Instructional Programming in Schools](#). There are also many guides, prevention curricula, and learning resources from nonprofit youth organizations available online.

### **How are the different groups using transportation to move or rescue survivors?**

[LifeLink](#) uses a ride sharing app. Case managers have accounts to use for clients when the police call and have a victim or to provide clients transportation to a service provider or a hotel. When the client needs to get out of the city, LifeLink can arrange a ride for them to the airport, bus, or to a safe house in a nearby city using the app. They can also arrange transportation for victims to the hospital, pharmacy, methadone clinics, etc., as these needs often present after hours when case managers are offsite.

### **How do you incorporate cultural competency in Native communities?**

Wherever you are in the U.S., you need to understand what happened to Native people in your area. How are they surviving or thriving? Then partner with appropriate organizations and hire a diverse staff. Connect with the community in your area through cultural events. Think about your space. For example, if the majority of your clients are from rural areas, a big, noisy gathering area can be really overwhelming. Also, understanding rhythms of time and speed of speech and whether to make eye contact or not—understanding people holistically. In addition, the National Resource Center on Reaching Victims offer resources on historical perspective of crime victimization in Indian Country including the [Winter Storytelling](#) and [The Impact of Violence](#).



**What are some best practices when sharing case information with other advocates/service providers?**

**How can we collaborate and ask for support and protect and respect people's privacy?**

Editor's note: Meaningful collaboration between human trafficking victim advocates and other allied partners can serve to enhance the overall response to victims. It is a best practice to establish clearly defined policies and protocols that govern confidentiality, privilege, privacy, and information sharing in accordance with federal and/or state law, and to ensure that all members of the collaborative understand their professional responsibilities, ethical obligations, and legal requirements regarding the sharing of case and/or client information.

Follow HIPPA guidelines. This can be complex because survivors come and go from a program. For coordination of care and safety for a survivor, it may be okay to reach out to another organization and share some types of information. Confidential information however cannot be shared without client permission even when with hospitals, psychiatric units, or law enforcement. Mosaic Family Services uses a case management software called Efforts to Outcomes to aggregate some data and better understand the issue. Having information sharing conversations up front with community partners to explain general provisions of confidentiality can be helpful.

The Confidentiality Institute offers several resources on maintaining confidentiality and privilege in crime victim services, particularly domestic violence and sexual assault services, but can also be applicable to serving victims of human trafficking.

**Can you apply to multiple grants?**

Yes, an applicant may apply for as many grants as they are eligible for in a given fiscal year. Read eligibility closely noting if a solicitation is limited to new applicants, current grantees, or requires an outline of new services, cost items, or a distinct geographic scope. If you meet the requirements, apply! Additionally, an applicant under one grant solicitation may be eligible to serve as a project partner or sub-recipient on an application submitted in response to another program solicitation.

Eligibility will vary by grant funding opportunity. Carefully review the eligibility section of each grant solicitation before starting the application process. Should an agency, organization or tribe receive federal funding under multiple awards, there is the potential for a duplication of funding. If needed,



there is an established process post-award for identifying, reporting on, and modifying a grant to eliminate any inappropriate duplication of funding.

**One of the issues we have had is proving areas of poverty, which has come out as a priority in many of the recent opportunities. But we know human, labor, and sex trafficking is happening in our communities. Any advice?**

It can be challenging to find data and information to prove areas of poverty, especially since the data is not all in one place and the poverty level requirements may vary based on funder and grant application. Look for and pull data from multiple sources such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas](#). This tool identifies [U.S. Census Tracts](#) where 50 percent of households have incomes below 60 percent of the Area Median Gross Income or have a poverty rate of 25 percent or more.

The Census Bureau [poverty data](#) page offers information and interactive tools from several household surveys and programs. Utilize local data provided by economic assessment, research, and reports published by city/county organizations, foundations, or other funders and interest groups. For example, the Communities Foundation of Texas published a [Dallas Economic Opportunity Assessment](#). Remember no one organization can address human trafficking on its own. Start developing partnerships with organizations and coalitions working with potentially vulnerable populations and reach out with a request for additional data/information.

**We are a newer agency providing direct services to human trafficking survivors. We are creating client policies and intake procedures, wanting to be trauma informed. In the spirit of not wanting to reinvent the wheel, where can we find good resources to pull from?**

The OVC [Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#) has information to guide developing policies and procedures. There are [trauma-informed care trainings](#) based on evidence-based treatment for substance abuse, trauma, and homelessness. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) offers a framework for becoming a trauma-informed organization. In addition, the [Crisis Prevention Institute](#) has some excellent resources on a person-centered approach. Being trauma-informed is about understanding the ways trauma acts as a barrier to treatment and services. Craft inclusive policies and procedures that screen people in as opposed to screening out. Many human trafficking survivors do not self-identify.

**Any guidance for working with children and family services and referrals?**

Develop mutually agreeable goals and objectives, understand one another's roles, mandates, perspectives, boundaries, and limitations. Determine how much collaboration is needed (e.g. consultation, project specific collaboration, or establishing/enhancing a human trafficking taskforce or multi-disciplinary team). Identify and engage with key individuals representing the state or local child and family services agency, developing a set of goals and specific objectives for the collaboration. Develop mutually agreed upon protocols for addressing referrals, information sharing, confidentiality, and other relevant aspects of the collaboration. Establish clearly written policies and procedures regarding partner relationships, expectations, and accountability. Finally, maintain open lines of communication and address issues when they arise.

*Additional Information*

Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at [contact@ovc-htcbc.org](mailto:contact@ovc-htcbc.org) or 1-844-682-0411.