



TALKING CIRCLE: Starting a Conversation About Human Trafficking in Tribal Communities

QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

Education and awareness are vital to preventing and intervening in human trafficking. Starting the initial discussion about human trafficking can be challenging but is pivotal in supporting victims. During a virtual Talking Circle on September 22, 2021 titled, [“Starting a Human Trafficking Conversation in a Tribal Community”](#) panelists from the [Alaska Native Justice Center](#), [American Indians Against Abuse](#), and the [Tribal Law and Policy Institute \(TLPI\)](#) focused on how tribes can begin a human trafficking awareness conversation within their community. The Talking Circle webinar series is hosted by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#).

This document is not intended to be comprehensive resource on the topic. It is a summary of the live questions and abbreviated answers provided by the panel of experts and offers panelist responses to submitted questions that were not able to be answered live. Editor’s notes are included in a few areas to provide additional information not stated by the panelists.

How does a tribal program get started in addressing human trafficking?

Tribal programs can get information for their human trafficking programs from trainings like this webinar. They can also talk with family and friends. Partnering with local agencies and stakeholders are also key. Network with everybody you can around the topics of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

When providing human trafficking resources in Indian Country, what things are important to consider? Also, do you know of any specific resources for American Indians and Alaska Natives?

As Indian people, we never had words for human trafficking in our tribal languages because, I believe, there was not such a thing as sexual exploitation or trafficking prior to colonization. Because of the long history of cultural oppression and historic trauma, this has contributed to the culture of silence seen in a lot of tribal communities today. It is really difficult to talk about this among all different age groups. We need to talk about this; we need to look after one another, which is a part of our cultural traditions. We need to spread awareness so that we can increase vigilance in our communities by



using all different forms of media. From social media to print materials like newsletters, tribal newsletters, posters, and fact sheets. Also, perhaps tribal radio stations. We need to be educating teachers, school resource officers, people who respond to domestic violence and so forth. And we cannot just hand out information, we have to talk, we have to visit about this problem in all aspects of our community so that we can create a climate where people feel comfortable about talking about such things, because there is this kind of shroud of secrecy around it.

The material needs to be culturally appropriate and developed by tribal communities themselves, especially with input from survivors. The materials should take into account geography, population, jurisdictional challenges, and the language. Not all people are bilingual. The resources really have to be tribal specific. The website www.tribaltrafficking.org is filled with resources including links to a report on prostitution and trafficking of Native women here in Minnesota, it's called the [Garden of Truth](#) report. There is also a [curriculum for advocates to train other advocates](#) on human trafficking; it has foundational information for anyone on trafficking.

It is impossible to do this work alone. So, who in the community, what partners specifically, need to be included in a conversation about human trafficking?

You are absolutely correct. There is no way for one entity, one agency, or one person to tackle the issue. Survivor voices are going to be the most important to utilize and integrate into our practices, our services, our models. Really anybody can be involved in the effort as long as they have a good comprehension of what human trafficking is and the importance of believing survivors.

A lot of trauma-informed care goes into survivor-led programming. This includes program policy intervention, product design, implementation, or evaluation. Each aspect should be done with intentional partnership, collaboration, and input from survivors to ensure the program and product accurately represents their needs, interests, and perceptions.

Professional agencies should also be included in these partnerships, possibly a task force or multidisciplinary team. Include law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and organizations offering support and funding to help human trafficking survivors. This may be housing, clothing, security, and shelters. Victim advocates can help guide and offer resources throughout the process. Each partner needs to operate in a [trauma-informed way](#), effectively communicating to encourage survivors who are helping work on cases and building programs that will benefit the community.



Is there a way that non-Native folks can be involved/uplift the voices of survivors within these communities?

There are a number of ways. Come together and collaborate because you may have resources your local tribal community does not. You may have information and tools that can help the tribal community. Culturally appropriate information can be provided to your programs as well. Create [partnerships](#) whether they are formalized or just being able to have coffee and talk about what's happening and what you're seeing in the surrounding area of the tribal jurisdiction.

What is the difference in advocacy and human trafficking advocacy?

A lot of advocacy and service is going to overlap. The main goal is to offer support, offering resources and not telling people what to do. Create a place where people are open to making their own choices with all the provided resources and tools. We cannot tell somebody what the best path of their healing will be. Human trafficking is more complex when it comes to working with survivors or victims. Even terminology, such as using the word survivor or victim, can be complex. We do not dictate whether we refer to them as a survivor or a victim. It is a very long, and not linear, process to get out of the human trafficking life and mentality. The process when you go from being or identifying as a victim into a survivor that can take years.

Human trafficking advocacy is more intensive; it is a very complex issue requiring more wraparound services. Sometimes, with so many agencies involved, advocates can work to make it easier and more manageable for survivors; it can be so overwhelming. Another difference between human trafficking and advocacy is the longer-term services. Survivors of human trafficking may take a while to go through the different stages of progressing out of the trafficking lifestyle. This can include potentially going back to their trafficker and the amount of time it takes for them to identify that they were trafficked.

How does trauma-informed care differ specifically for Native survivors?

Our trauma is in our genes; we carry a lot of the trauma our ancestors experienced. Healing for us is healing our people, healing our ancestors, our societies that we come from, our clans that we come from. There is not just individual healing; we are looking at collective healing when we participate in a ceremony. Consider what healing care is appropriate to that tribe. This could be smudging, sage, or other kinds of medicine. It may also be access and referrals to appropriate spiritual leaders or spiritual people in the community.



How easy is it to start an anti-sex trafficking program from the ground up?

It is not any more difficult than it is to start up any other kind of advocacy program. As Indian people, we are really resilient. We know how to utilize resources and are really creative and innovative. We know how to get people together. That is what it takes; reach out for support with your Tribal leadership, with Elders, with service providers. Half of it is convincing and educating the community that human trafficking is a real problem. There are still a lot of myths around this problem like it only happens in big cities or it only happens on the borders. Dispelling some of the myths and creating awareness about the need in your community is a good step in starting any kind of program.

It is similar to how domestic violence and sexual assault programs started; people didn't believe there was a problem. And there are still communities that think that way and say we only had two cases last year. Those are reported cases or cases that have been disclosed, and yet there could be so many more. The more awareness and the more community readiness, the better. It takes talking to one another, getting support for a program, and then identifying the resources to start a program.

What is a big don't when talking to the tribes about human trafficking? What are the big do's?

Do's – Provide a safe space to talk about human trafficking. Be honest about the issue. Keep the door open for good, honest communication. Be honest in terminology and words. Provide factual information with difficult words associated with human trafficking. Offer education to explain what the media or TV has shown us on what human trafficking is versus what it really is. Offer facts.

Don'ts – Do not appear like you have all the answers. Do not close the door at any point. Do not use dark imagery or fear tactics when producing flyers or social media posts to get an emotional reaction.

What are some culturally appropriate ways to evaluate a tribal human trafficking program?

Because the work in tribal communities can be so different, it can look different than what is done in mainstream or in urban areas. A lot of the programs have some sort of cultural sensitivity and cultural aspects that can assist with a survivor and a victim and their process of healing. Tribal programs will differ from Tribe to Tribe and Nation to Nation and program to program. A lot of times, tribes will have options of spiritual leaders with whom people can go and talk. Ceremonies may assist a person with their healing process. The healing process can start a person's resiliency to deal with the issues they want to overcome. Look for and pay people familiar with Tribal programs to evaluate programs based on the uniqueness of each tribe and their locations.



How, or to what extent, can men and/or male advocates assist with victims and survivors? I have heard on more than a couple occasions that it might not always be a good idea for men to work with female victims and survivors.

It definitely is a sticky situation. Oftentimes, not every single time, men are the ones who are trafficking. If you are coming from having a male trafficker, it can be extremely hard for you to want to connect and have that relationship with another man. It can be very counterproductive. Though having men on the team is not a bad thing. Having some gender-based training on this can be helpful.

Understand a survivor may not want to work with a male and respect the request. Recognize it has nothing to do with the man, personally, it can be a preconceived bias. It is completely fair for people to feel that way. So, never invalidate or negate the survivor's choice.

Is there a screening tool for advocacy or is it more direct? Meaning does the advocate and the victim/survivor know what the advocate is helping them with?

The Alaska Native Justice Center uses a human trafficking screening tool with its clients; the tool does not ask clients if they have been trafficked. Screening tools for advocacy when working with trafficking survivors are not extremely direct. You do not want to tell someone they have been trafficked. That is up to them to come to terms with when they are ready. Often times, individuals do not self-identify as a trafficking victim/survivor. Advocates do not want to force trauma or labels on them. Transparency and honest communication is vital to building trust with a trafficking victim/survivor. If you feel a client has been trafficked, go over the screening tool without being abrasive about it. Make sure not to force an answer if they are not comfortable talking about it.

Editor's Note: OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center 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](#). To request free assistance with identifying a screening tool, contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411.

When doing outreach- what would be appropriate to put on a flyer?

Confidentiality is really big. Including a confidentiality or privacy disclaimer on your flyer will help folks know their information will not be spread around the community.

Editor's Note: Project TRUST's [Human Trafficking Outreach Toolkit](#) assists advocates with "awareness building, fundraising, client connection, and partner collaboration" and offers sample language for an



outreach flyer. To request free assistance with creating outreach materials, contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411.

Would it be appropriate to bring an offering/gift to an initial tribal meeting? If so, what would that be?

When meeting with a Tribal government, beginning the meeting in ceremony is appropriate. Follow the protocols of the local Tribe you are serving or those you want to contact. Perhaps find a local point of contact within that Tribe to learn a little bit more about the community and their protocols and customs. If you bring in Elders to learn and become ambassadors of the issue, providing them with an offering is a good way to honor them.

As Haida Nation from Northern British Columbia we have strong ties to Alaska. How would we work together if we feel a missing person or trafficked person was taken across the border?

Working together is extremely important if you feel a trafficked person was taken across the border. Start with reaching out to the [local FBI in Alaska](#) or the [Alaska State Police](#). If you are unsure who to contact, call the Alaska Native Justice Center at (907) 793-3550 or email anjcinfo@anjc.net to discuss the situation and determine available resources.

Does the disconnect between tribal sovereignty and state/federal jurisdictions exasperate the lack of attention to this issue or even priority?

Jurisdiction can be a challenge to navigate. However, even though it is complex, it is still important to find solutions together. In many areas, multi-jurisdictional teams are working together to address human trafficking and find solutions for navigating these complex jurisdictional challenges.

What are best practices for a non-tribal organization (non-profit) that has a capacity building grant for approaching local tribes with the intention of working alongside tribal communities to help serve potential victim/survivors of trafficking in their respective community?

Remember each tribal community has their own unique needs and culture. Many aspects of healing in a tribal community are based on these individual cultural practices. Be mindful of these traditions and work within the tribal communities existing cultural beliefs to build trust and personal relationships. This partnership can help identify new solutions to better meet the needs of that tribal community.

How do tribal communities combat the complacency in community when it comes to perpetrators?

Prevention and education are huge. If the community does not know what the problem is, how to identify it, or the actions to take to combat the issue, then nothing will or can be done. Often



communities are very unaware of the trafficking risk and may be misguided on who predators can be which can lead to a weak area that allows perpetrators to continuously offend. This is not the fault of anyone; you cannot know what you do not know. Education, prevention, and outreach are key to anti-trafficking work. The [Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act](#) (SORNA) is a good resource for tribes to monitor sex offenders. Another way to monitor perpetrators beyond probation and parole is through the moccasin telegraph where information may be shared within the community.

To follow up with my question with advocacy, is it harder to get resources within Indian Country for native victims/survivors?

It has been historically harder for Native survivors to obtain access to resources that work towards healing and justice. Mainstream programs have always had better access to resources to provide these services. Thankfully, things have been slowly increasing for tribal programs being able to gain tribal specific funding like [Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside funding](#) or increased funding for marginalized communities in recent years. Hopefully, things will continue to grow where tribal programs can fully serve survivors. There is still a need for increased funding to be able to reach more survivors.

Do you have any resources available regarding trafficking in tribal communities?

Yes, there are resources. [TLPI offers publications](#) addressing law and policy issues on sex trafficking as it impacts Native people and Indian Country. Some of these include a [Sex Trafficking in Indian Country: Victim/Survivor Resource Book](#), [Fact Sheet](#), and Sex Trafficking in Indian Country: Advocacy Curriculum. The curriculum includes an [Instructor Guide](#), [Participant Workbook](#), and [PowerPoint](#). OVC has a video titled "[Federal Responses to Sex Trafficking in Alaska](#)" which is part of a video series titled "[A Healing Journey for Alaska Natives](#)." SOAR from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has an [online human trafficking training for Indigenous communities](#).

Editor's Note: Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411 to request free assistance with navigating existing resources or creating your own resources for your tribal community.

What are gaps you are currently seeing in resources available for specifically addressing trafficking and sexual violence in tribal communities?

Training is always needed on this issue and always evolving. Always look for continuous opportunities to take ongoing training on this topic. Tribal communities can access online training through [SOAR](#). OVC's [Understanding Human Trafficking Training](#) offers foundational learning on trauma-informed and



victim-centered approaches to human trafficking. It is free, online, and self-paced. Reach out to [human trafficking task forces and OVC human trafficking grantees](#) and talk about the anti-trafficking work being done in your area.

How can an existing domestic violence program (or tribal advocacy program) expand to serve victims of human trafficking?

Here are some ways to get started—

1. Become educated and trained to serve human trafficking victims and survivors.
2. Foster networking among [human trafficking service providers](#) around the state and nationwide.
3. Provide advocacy supports and include cultural aspects for promoting healing.
4. Address human trafficking codes within your community.

In your experience, have you found Tribal leaders supportive and open to having a conversation about human trafficking in their community?

Tribal leader levels of support differ from individual to individual. If a community strongly voices that human trafficking needs to be addressed, tribal leaders are more likely to listen. The conversations about human trafficking need to happen and have been happening in some tribal communities but more education for tribal leaders is a need.

Is funding available for nonprofit organizations providing victims services?

Yes. There is funding available for anti-trafficking work. This funding may be available through a tribal enterprise or organization. Programs can also look for funding through fundraising, foundations, and federal funding opportunities. Federally recognized tribes can also apply for [Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside](#) funding as a Tribal Nation or through a tribal designee or consortia consisting of two or more federally recognized tribes. [Subscribe to receive News From OVC](#) for updates on new funding opportunities and other OVC announcements. Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411 to request assistance with pursuing funding to support your organization's anti-trafficking work.

It is important to collaborate and support tribal communities and organizations. What are ways to start this relationship?

Reach out to tribal communities to see where they are with serving human trafficking clients; find out what are the gaps in services and talk about how you can work together to help fill those areas. Also



listen to the tribal communities on the impact trafficking has on them and include victims and survivors in these conversations.

What kind of advocacy work can be done to increase awareness and support among law enforcement, media, and news agencies to address human trafficking as it impacts tribal communities?

Advocacy starts with bringing people together to discuss the issue. Explore establishing or being part of an existing multi-disciplinary team on human trafficking. These teams work together closely and bring different perspectives to all aspects of the issue including prevention, response, and recovery.

Consider inviting [tribal grassroots organizations](#) and [Tribal coalitions](#) to share their perspectives and support anti-trafficking work. Multi-disciplinary teams can also help those tribal communities gather needed resources to support a survivor of human trafficking.

Additional Information

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