

# ASK AN EXPERT SERIES

## SUPPORTING A HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR'S

## LONG-TERM WELL-BEING THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

One organization cannot meet all of the needs of a human trafficking victim. Establishing partnerships with local organizations is essential for both identifying potential victims and offering comprehensive services. On October 21, 2021, a panel of experts representing [Tapestri](#), [Futures Without Violence](#), and [Twelve 11 Partners](#) discussed ways to support a human trafficking survivor's long-term well-being through community partnerships 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. The panelist's responses to questions not addressed during the webinar are also below.

### **Would you please explain how partnerships can help in identifying potential victims of human trafficking, including among underserved communities?**

Many social service agencies may already be serving victims of human trafficking without identifying them in this way. Instead, these individuals are seen as survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or labor exploitation. [Training](#) is critical in this field so potential victims of human trafficking can be identified early on and their vulnerabilities addressed. When talking about an underserved population, many individuals may initially choose to go to community-based organizations and seek services from them. So, [partnering with those organizations](#), providing training on human trafficking, and working together can grow your ability to reach and help potential victims. Training, networking, participating in ongoing meetings, exchanging information, and partnering are all aspects of this work.

### **What are three concrete steps an organization can take to build a community of partner organizations offering victim-centered services?**

Partnership is key. The first practical thing an organization can do is start with is assessing your community, review your landscape, and see who is working around you. What agencies and organizations are already in your community? Many organizations complement one another. An agency may be doing something or may have a weakness in something another agency down the street does well. The second

thing is to host a human trafficking awareness event for potential partners. The third thing is to partner with survivors. There are amazing survivor leaders and overcomers of trafficking across the nation. Reach out to survivor leaders and ask, "What partnerships do you recommend that would be really great for my organization or my agency?"

### **Employment is critical for survivors as they transition out of crisis and work towards long-term wellbeing. How can organizations build partnerships to support these types of employment services?**

Start with resources supporting marginalized communities with education and career development from the Department of Labor. Specifically, programs support through the [Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) are designed to support individuals with multiple barriers to employment and education with vocational training, career coaching, and connections to employers. While there may be steps in the process difficult for survivors of human trafficking to navigate, the public workforce system is a great employment and education resource. [Identify local career centers and employers](#); reach out to them and formalize partnerships for referrals. Discuss how to make warm referrals, offer in-house trainings, or coordinate a job fair. The WIOA-funded programs can help with the limited capacity that many victim service agencies have when supporting survivors of human trafficking.

### **We know partnerships are essential to doing anti-trafficking work and that they take time to create, nurture, and sustain and maintain over time. How can partnership work be supported by your staff and your budget that you have for your organization?**

There are informal partnerships and formal partnerships. With formal partnerships, there are opportunities to support these relationships through [OVC human trafficking](#) funding. With these funding partnerships, subrecipients exist under a main applicant. These subrecipients can be medical service providers, mental health providers, legal clinics, employment-based programs, and community-based organizations. A single organization does not need to provide each and every service on its own when looking at federal funding opportunities. You can formalize these partnership agreements with a [memorandum of understanding](#). For resources and to request free assistance with establishing and formalizing partnerships, contact the [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#). Reach out to [OVC human trafficking grantees and taskforces](#). Remember to nurture relationships with ongoing meetings and continuous trainings to address staff turnover and maintain those partnerships and relationships over time.

### **How can an organization honor the survivor voice through service delivery?**

Work with survivor leaders and overcomers in meaningful partnerships. Not only invite survivors to *your* table but assist them in creating *their own* table. Promote individuals to leadership platforms, creating opportunities for survivor leaders to lead the initiatives and develop curriculum. Strong survivor leadership within anti-trafficking agencies is how you create those partnerships and do the work more successfully.

### **What was the name of the work force program?**

The legislation is the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act or WIOA. The Department of Labor funds the WIOA framework for local workforce development programs, local community colleges, and adult education. Identifying local WIOA resources connects you to money intended for local communities.

### **What are some tips for managing and maintaining partnerships over time?**

Offer continuous training – possibly quarterly -- on the topic of human trafficking, especially when partners historically have worked with other victim populations like survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault. Invite staff and volunteers at partner organizations to attend the human trafficking training. Another way to maintain partnerships is by being honest and having conversations. Priorities may change. For example, Tapestri works with resettlement organizations as part of an employment-based, match grant program for eligible international victims. This resettlement organization is expecting a large number of Afghan citizens to be coming into the country. Therefore, their capacity might be tasked with that priority. Having honest conversations and recognizing that in the next three months this organization will not have the capacity to take referrals from Tapestri creates understanding in the partnership. The partnership is not over. It is on pause until another conversation happens three months down the line. Understanding organization capacity is critical in maintaining partnerships over time. There is often high staff turnover in organizations. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) can be very helpful in making the meaningful partnership you started with an organization continue even when a key player is no longer a part of the organization.

### **How can I start to advocate on Human Trafficking?**

OVC has a free, introductory online training called "Understanding the Needs of Victims of Human Trafficking" which provides foundational knowledge on a trauma-informed response to human trafficking. Reach out to the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center for additional training and support. Another way to get involved is to look up human trafficking service providers and task forces in your state. Have conversations with them, ask to get training from them, and discuss how your organization can be a part of

the anti-trafficking work. If Tapestri were approached by somebody, we would say, "Great, we can use all the help that we can get. Here are our trainings and additional resources. If you need technical assistance, we are more than happy to provide that for you."

Find a mentor within the anti-trafficking field and within your state, if available. Mentors can offer feedback on ideas and share existing federal resources. Start with that basic knowledge and know anti-trafficking work is a lot of trial and error. Do no harm. We are all working with human beings and continuously learning about resources available to help them. Partnerships offer new pieces to the puzzle.

If your organization is working with other populations like domestic violence and sexual assault, the homeless, or those experiencing poverty, more than likely you are serving a community that may have experienced trafficking. In this space of anti-human trafficking, remember to use the holistic lens, a holistic view. Remember the root causes that often lead to human trafficking experiences. If you are already working in social justice, domestic violence, or other underserved populations, you are probably already an advocate for human trafficking survivors and victims. Do a survey of your community and figure out who is doing anti-trafficking work and you will be surprised on who you are already serving.

### **What other things can an organization do to formalize and document partnerships?**

Community mapping is a way to develop an in-depth understanding of what is around you. A community mapping exercise is where you create a database or list of the organizations you would like to work with in a community. Link those organizations to the most common barriers you are seeing in your work with survivors. For example, if a barrier is housing, what are the organizations in your community invested in that aspect? If it is clothing or something of that nature, what are the organizations associated with that area? Community mapping is another way to identify and document potential partnerships and connect those potential partner's services to survivor needs.

### **What is most important in protecting our Native American people from human trafficking and what tips do you have for educating tribal members?**

If you are interested in working with a tribal community, or any community, seek out individuals from that community and speak to them. Ask them what would work within their specific community. Seek out individuals that are experts or know that community and request funding to compensate those community experts. Request free assistance from OVC, through the [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#), if you

are not currently receiving OVC funding. The [OVC Training and Technical Assistance Team \(OVC TTAC\)](#) offers assistance to OVC grantees. There are experts and funds available to cover the work.

**I work at a violence prevention organization with a group called voices of strength and survival where survivors speak and do a Q&A. With January being National Slavery and Human Trafficking awareness month, what advice would you give on how to respectfully address this topic through this group?**

To engage survivor leaders, the first thing to do is acknowledge survivors as experts and consultants. If you are seeking a speaker or someone to highlight your agency or provide education for your agency in the month of January, advertise you are hiring or seeking a consultant. Avoid asking someone to just share their stories. Post the opportunity on regular job networks or in survivor networks. Many human trafficking survivor leaders are passionate not just about that month but about education, awareness, and sharing their experiences. Many individuals with lived experiences use it to educate others and bring awareness. When possible, pay survivor consultants. When you cannot find a survivor to speak at a forum or training, you can use the [OVC's Faces of Human Trafficking videos](#). These videos cover sex trafficking, labor trafficking, youth, and other topics. These short scenarios share survivor perspectives on needed services.

**What is the most effective way to help law enforcement and medical professionals be receptive to survivor leaders and their recommendations?**

Training is foundational. In Texas, there are human trafficking task forces and partnerships with law enforcement and medical professionals. Coalitions are also a helpful place to start. Introduce survivor leaders to these anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions and offer survivor developed training. If you already have partnerships with medical professionals or law enforcement, consider reevaluating the training curriculum. Are they survivor developed? Are they survivor informed? If so, when you present the material you can say it was developed by a survivor. Being very inclusive of survivor leadership can bring some additional understanding to a law enforcement and medical professional's perspective. All the pieces matter. This work cannot be done in silos. We need to join arms with each other.

**Do you have advice on how to ensure that your community partners maintain confidentiality when they are working with clients that we refer to them?**

Include confidentiality language in a [MOU](#). Reference state confidentiality laws and indicate the organization abides by the same rules. Remember domestic violence organizations, sexual assault programs, housing assistance, or other specific services, may have their own confidentiality rules or

funding requirements. Look at what information is necessary to make a referral for a specific service. Typically, it is not necessary to share an entire case scenario when making a referral. Develop a referral mechanism to safeguard confidential information, maintain case files, and only share “need-to-know” criteria with partner agencies. A “need-to-know” criteria is only sharing what is necessary to make a referral. Include confidentiality language in any type of agreement partners share together. Editor's Note: The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking offers an [e-learning course on privilege and confidentiality](#).

### **What are some resources for connecting survivors to training and education opportunities? How do you facilitate that with clients?**

Look at your [local adult education programs](#) offering English as a second language (ESL) classes, high school equivalency, or general educational development (GED) training and prep. They also have basic trainings like home health aide, certified nursing assistant (CNA), and medical assisting for the immediate training and employment. Locate [adult education programs](#) in your community and establish a relationship with whoever is in charge of that program or center. Make an introduction, explain the barriers your clients deal with without disclosing they are survivors to protect their identity. Ask them, “what would it take to develop a warm referral system, education program, or to bring the trainings in-house?” By initiating the conversation, you may be able to make the trainings more accessible.

### **What are ways to continue advocacy year-round in our personal lives?**

There are many ways to advocate. Ask yourself how do you want to advocate? What topics or communities are important to you? For example, career development, empowerment strategies, and creative expression are important to me (Carolyn Ouya with Futures Without Violence). One way to advocate year-round, is holding spaces for creative expression for survivors. That is not necessarily going to OVC and asking for funding or raising all this money. Finding ways to make those spaces for creative expression work is advocacy to me. Once you determine what is important to you and how you want to show up, then it will be easier to figure out how to make it year-round. Figure out what you like to do. What are your natural skill sets? How can you use those natural skill sets to combat something like human trafficking? This creates a space for you to do what you love and prevents burnout. If you like the arts, that is something you can offer. If you like policy and legislation, that is something you can do on a local, state, and federal level. Figure out what you like to do using your natural skill sets. Education is advocacy. Every time we educate somebody on all the available resources, survivors of human trafficking receive increased access to those resources and those services. Get involved by sharing information, taking training, and seeking education.

Education really does go a long way. Lastly, ask what is needed. Many times, in these advocacy spaces, what we are skilled at is not what is needed at that point in time. Ask what is needed with your local agencies doing this work year-round to understand if you have the capacity to help fulfill that need.

### **What barriers may prevent military programs from partnering with civilian organizations?**

If it is a matter of training, there should not be anything preventing a partnership. If you are looking at conducting investigations, each agency has their own priorities, chain of command, and expectations. Identify those specific agency limitations and set expectations for the partnership. Identify the victim advocates for a military unit or base and start a conversation with them on working together. There is also a growing network of teams dedicated to military sexual assault and trauma. It is not a direct link to human trafficking; however, it can be an intersectional experience. Research the local military sexual trauma team and reach out to talk, listen, and gather information. From there determine what limitations are present for a partnership.

### **What is the solution to emergency housing for exiting survivors? How can we form partnerships in this area that do not involve hotel vouchers? What do you think about Tiny Houses for this purpose?**

There is currently a national housing crisis. Tapestri is having to utilize domestic violence shelters. In the past, Tapestri has also used hotel vouchers. OVC has a funding opportunity specific to housing. Partner with your [local continuum of care](#) and organizations working on homelessness and housing. [The Freedom Network](#) is a technical assistance provider for OVC offering housing resources and support such as [how to build partnerships with landlords](#). How to work through if [somebody has a criminal record](#). Start with those partnerships now. Also, if you know of apartment complexes or shelters that you can partner with, ask them to provide their policies and bounce your ideas off of them. They are a tremendous resource.

### **What advice would you have for a trauma informed agency to become more trauma informed about human trafficking, especially with being on the border of a state that is a "hotspot" for human trafficking?**

OVC has online training on ["Building Trauma-Informed Organizations."](#) [Project Trust has many resources](#) on trauma-informed care and also offers technical assistance on the topic. OVC's ["Understanding Human Trafficking"](#) online training provides foundational knowledge on implementing trauma-informed approaches to victim identification and outreach. Editor's Note: Understanding the [Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) is an essential framework for working with victims of any crime.

**I have heard a “human trafficking victim is not what we think,” what does that mean?**

That can mean different things. From one perspective, many use that phrase to debunk the misconception that trafficking victims have the same profile or experiences. Sometimes this is reflected in sensationalized imagery or narratives related to human trafficking. Another perspective is force, fraud, or coercion can be challenging to identify, especially from the outside.

**Can you provide some examples of how to make sure that the partner agency has an awareness about the impact of trauma that trafficking survivors often experience? We often worry about how our clients are treated if/when we refer them to a particular agency.**

Part of being trauma informed is holding each other accountable. Working within coalitions and anti-trafficking task forces to make sure there is a standard for your organization, community, and for your state. Every agency is going to be a little bit different, but the standards continue to be reviewed, assessed, and re-evaluated to hold each other accountable. Make sure your agency is trauma informed and culturally competent. Partner with agencies, create mentorships, and self-evaluate your own agency. When it comes to trauma informed and mental health services, look at your local mental health infrastructure. Partner with local National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) or Mental Health America to provide critical trainings like mental health first aid or question, persuade, and refer (QPR) suicide intervention. These steps help create a more robust trauma informed policy and structure. Editor's Note: Futures Without Violence offers a fact sheet on how trauma impacts education, training, and employment sharing ways to integrate trauma-informed practices into service delivery.

**How can our domestic violence organization best support survivors of human trafficking who are also showing signs of psychiatric distress?**

Organizations working with survivors of trauma need to ensure therapeutic services are available to survivors. Make referrals for counseling and mental health services providers with appropriate licensing and extensive experience in dealing with trauma. Your organization may already have strong partnerships to facilitate mental health services, but the particular conditions experienced by specific clients may mean you want to expand your partnerships to better meet these needs. The reality is, there is no cookie cutter model to support all victims as mental health and the impact of trauma are very individualized. The best we can do is work together.



**How would we get more medical professionals on board with the Crime Victims Compensation funds available to victims of crime?**

Most states have a designated Crime Victims Compensation manager providing training on accessing funds. To locate the Crime Victims Compensation manager in your state, visit the [National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards](#). Service providers play a vital role in assisting the survivor in applying for these benefits. Certain injuries resulting from the trafficking situation may require involvement of multiple medical professionals and a certain level of coordination to assist with this process. Medical professionals may not have a police report or law enforcement endorsement which is often a requirement for the Crime Victims Compensation application.

**What is the best way to protect my children and grandkids from human trafficking?**

Regardless of the form of exploitation, most children are abused by individuals they know. There is a process called grooming where a trafficker will work hard to build trust and connection with those they intend to traffic. One protective factor is education about healthy relationships. Constant communication about self-worth, what are safe connections, warning signs of abuse, and helping youth form a healthy support system and community can be very beneficial. That way they are already aware of warning signs of abuse and have people they are comfortable going to for advice and support.

*Additional Information*

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