



Exploring the Intersections between Human Trafficking and MMIP

TALKING CIRCLE QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

During a virtual Talking Circle on September 8, 2022, titled “[Exploring the Intersections between Human Trafficking and Missing or Murdered Indigenous People \(MMIP\)](#)” Nicole Matthews with the [Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition](#), Lynette Grey Bull with [Not Our Native Daughters](#), Carolyn DeFord with [Puyallup Tribe of Indians](#) and moderator Lenny Hayes with [Tate Topa Consulting](#) shared their insights and answered participant questions on the topic.

This document reflects the perspectives of the panelists and not necessarily views held by the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center or the U.S. Department of Justice. It is not intended to be a comprehensive resource on the topic. It offers panelist written responses to participant questions that were not answered live during the webinar due to time limitations. Editor’s notes are included in a few areas to provide additional information not stated by the panelists.

Watch the [recording of the live moderated discussion](#) for more panelist insights on this topic.

What can communities do to build awareness of MMIP and human trafficking?

Know your community, build community, and do community organizing. Participate in marches and rallies. Share fliers and posters of individuals missing in your local area. Connect with local media, Tribal newspapers, community newsletters, television, and radio stations. Work with system providers (e.g., law enforcement, prosecution, homeless shelters). Look for those community agencies connecting with victims of human trafficking or those who are missing. Homeless shelters are big partners in this work because homelessness makes an individual more vulnerable to human trafficking. There is an opportunity to train homeless shelter staff on human trafficking indicators and what they can do in this space.

How can one get into working in MMIP and Indigenous human trafficking careers?

It is not easy work. It is very rewarding but hard mentally, spiritually, and physically. Here are some things that have worked for myself and people I (Carolyn) know. First, pray on it and then follow the doors that open for you. If you have been affected by the issue, or are a survivor, share your story, provide testimony, and join community events, vigils, and talking circles. For some folks, advocacy is very organic, and done without realizing. Often, we put ourselves in spaces to support others with similar circumstances and experiences.

Education is another way to get into MMIP work. Learn about the issue, make connections, and identify where you can offer your skills. I (Carolyn) started as an administrative assistant with lived experience. I found trainings and courses to educate myself as much as possible. Using what I learned, I created materials to share with our Tribal community, Tribal council, and on social media. Community, survivors, and MMIP families started contacting me just to talk, inquire about resources, ask for assistance for themselves or friend, and seek training, information, and support.

Assess services, needs/gaps, and information available to your community. Once the needs and gaps are recognized, you can target your services, training, and efforts. Use conversations and awareness efforts to educate on the indicators and how domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking are connected. People will start recognizing indicators and seeing it in their everyday activities, then they will start talking about it.

Network with stakeholders and other organizations who provide services at the intersections to see if they can help with resources or outreach. For example, will the local business office allow outreach signage in their public restrooms or on their lobby reader boards? Can you build a relationship with a local hotel to train their staff? Can you email them materials and missing posters to send to all the hotels in their networks? Email them relevant news articles or resources about the issues in their field as they become available.

Lastly, do the job you want to do. Volunteer, be an ally, amplify survivor voices, share information, and talk, talk, and talk about it. Whatever your employment or job, see if there is a role for advocacy and awareness in your place of work. No matter what that is; there is something for everyone to do to raise awareness. Share the knowledge you bring to new places. There is a lot of trust building

that needs to happen as you do this work and it takes time to build relationships.

What advice can you give on how to engage Tribes in the development of policy around trafficking, especially with those Tribes who believe, it's not really happening?

In 2017, Navajo Nation was the second Tribe in the nation to implement a human trafficking legislation for their Tribe. They did it in the Tribal codes, courts, and law enforcement. This was a two-year process. It started by meeting with Tribal council. Working with the sexual assault advisory committee, we (Lynette) shared cases with them to share how individuals were being coerced into trafficking in the Tribal community and nearby towns.

The first step is approaching council and working with them to draft human trafficking legislation for the Tribe. This process takes time and dedication. Tribal council has many issues they are working on so ongoing conversations about MMIP and the intersections between human trafficking helps create action. In my (Lynette's) experience, this is a conversation Tribal Councils are willing to have.

Can you please share ways non-Tribal members working with Tribal survivors or communities can be culturally sensitive and build bridges of collaboration?

Education on the issue is key. [Understand the issue of MMIP](#) and human trafficking so when you encounter victims, they do not have to educate you. Know the [cultural resources](#) in your community and build relationships with those programs. Ask survivors where they would like to go for their healing. If you are reaching out to community individuals to offer cultural healing, vet those individuals to make sure they are places where survivors will be safe.

Know the difference between being culturally sensitive and cultural appropriations. Sometimes culturally sensitive can actually be appropriating culture, and that is not helpful for survivors. Seek out [cultural sensitivity training](#) so you know the differences. Always listen to survivors and follow their lead in what services they seek. Don't put people in a box where all survivors need this type of service. We are all different. Not all Native people will want the same thing.

How can traditional cultural practices be shared in certain urban settings where people come from various different Tribal backgrounds or multiple Tribal affiliations? Especially if someone doesn't feel a strong knowledge of or connection to their traditional practices.

There are many different beliefs, cultures, and Tribal customs. Be open minded about your own perception of traditional practices. There is no cookie-cutter way to bring culture into urban spaces. Learn Tribal cultural practices and historical trauma affecting the community you serve. No community escaped the trauma of boarding schools, prohibition of religious freedom, loss of language, etc. Your client may not even realize they are carrying historical trauma or need to heal.

You can create a culturally sensitive environment. Consult with local Tribes so you are not appropriating any practices or culture. Simply purchasing décor from a Tribal artist, or medicines from a Tribal business is a good start. You can hang pictures of Indigenous people on the wall, offer people smudge as they come in and out, offer medicine bundles of sage, cedar, tobacco, sweet grass, lavender, or have reading materials for them to reflect on. If you host training events, invite Indigenous presenters from Native programs. Host social events or support groups to incorporate a traditional craft or teachings like medicine wheel teachings, dream catchers, or ribbon skirts, etc.

Provide folks who have been disconnected opportunities to learn and connect. Sometimes we may not realize we are missing something until it is presented to us and when it is, it can have a powerful impact and wake that ancestral spirit up. Survivors may have been stigmatized, shamed, isolated, had their spirits broken and might not feel worthy to go into those sacred spaces and take these things up because of what has happened.

Additionally, folks who have been removed from their cultural identity and traditions may be frightened to engage in culture or embarrassed if they don't know their traditional beliefs and practices. Don't assume that since they are Indigenous they know how to smudge or sweat, etc. Due to the history of forced removal from their traditional lands, and the attempted erasure of Tribal culture, identity, and teachings over multiple generations, many Native people may not be sure of, or feel connected to, a specific Tribal culture or ancestral teachings.

What signs we can see in the individual that is currently in HT situation?

There may be a number of different signs. Homeless is a big vulnerability. There could also be drug addiction. Oftentimes traffickers use drugs and alcohol to keep someone dependent on them. It may seem like domestic violence; however, in reality it may be human trafficking.

Significant others can be traffickers. Listen to what is happening. Ask questions about how they are

getting their money. There may often be high levels of violence and control. They may have a traumatic brain issue. There could be custody issues with their kids. There often is fear of seeking support because the trafficker may find out. In some cases, there may even be branding victims.

Often times, in the extreme cases, it will be very difficult to even access the victims. In these cases, when the individual is able to escape a trafficker, how you listen, take care, and work with that person is vital to their safety. No matter the case, listen to the individual. It is not up to us to decide for them. There may be safety issues behind the decisions the survivor may make. Listen to their needs. Always listen.

What are steps to report and search for a loved one who is involved in trafficking, or suspected of being in the company of a trafficker, and has gone missing?

This list is not comprehensive, but it is a start.

- Start a journal and document everything. Who, what, where, when, and why. This helps keep facts, dates, phone numbers, case numbers, and he said/she said clear. Sometimes a comment or information might seem unsubstantiated until more information comes in.
- Document in the journal names, descriptions, contact info, and any details around people who were last seen with them.
- Speak with law enforcement to file a report and gather information.
- Report the concern that they are being trafficked and any indicators.
- What type of trafficking situation it is will determine how you search. Pimp control, familial trafficking, labor trafficking, gang control, or survival sex.
- Report to the Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 (TTY: 711), text 233733, or live chat at [humantraffickinghotline.org](https://www.humantraffickinghotline.org).
- Gather as much information about the person as possible such as pictures of tattoos or other identifying factors, clothing sizes, jewelry.
- Report to the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](https://www.namc.org/), if they are a minor, and to NamUS, the [National Missing and Unidentified Persons System](https://www.nam.us/).

- Depending on your state you can request an endangered person's alert.
- Check local hospitals, urgent care clinics, hotels, and coroner.
- Check local jail rosters. Include various types of spelling and aliases.
- Call local tow companies and impound lots.
- Start a journal to write everything down including times, dates, and details like who, what, and where. Something may not seem significant until much later so having it written helps us reflect and reevaluate old information with new.
- Make and distribute a missing person's poster with all important information including case number and contact information. Best practice: do not include family personal contact information on the poster.
- Request law enforcement involve media outlets and call/email them yourself as well.
- Write a short statement providing pertinent information the search and disappearance as well as who to contact with information. Designate a trusted family representative or spokesperson to answer inquiries and do media outreach.
- Research their social media for any red flags. Have they made any new friends or is someone showing extra interest and paying special attention to them?
- Contact local victim services organizations for resources; ask them to share posters.
- Write a two or three sentence statement about the situation so you have it ready for media or public updates if people ask.
- Designate a spokesperson/family representative; someone who can help with this process and is able to work in this trauma and crisis situation.
- Talk with everyone who may know something about where they may be or been the last ones to have seen them.
- Reach out and share posters service providers in the area of human trafficking, domestic violence/sexual assault, homeless shelters.
- Cover as much ground as possible with poster distribution, and with everyone who has contact with the public; public transit, Ubers, hotels, convenience stores, get it to the

mangers of those places in your area as a starting point.

- Host a vigil or awareness event.
- Organize a community search effort. There are roles for everyone including online outreach, call local tow companies, email hotels, convenience stores, casinos, pawn shops, smoke shops, diners, etc.
- Repeat contact and outreach as information is updated.

Editor's note: The Department of Justice offers [resources for responding to MMIP](#), including a [guide for families of missing adult persons](#).

I work for a domestic violence/sexual assault center. We have outreach and sheltering services. Because of safety during COVID we found that moving away from traditional communal sheltering options was helpful. We will continue to use safe houses, hotels, transitional housing, etc. We have not had many from the Indigenous community enter. I was wondering are there some things as an agency that would be important for us to consider as we continue to review and establish sheltering options and outreach counseling/case management services?

Consider if there are any places in town or in the area where a client may not be safe. If clients need to be in temporary or transitional housing, work with the clients to get their preferences. Some of these spaces may be sources of trauma for clients, putting them in a situation where they may not feel safe. Putting the client and survivor first and asking them where they would like to stay. Are you asking clients if they have any Indigenous heritage? Often this information is not collected so it may not be recognized in current clients. This can be any known Indigenous heritage; it does not mean they have to be an enrolled member of a Tribe.

For an organization just starting advocacy for human trafficking, what is the most important thing to know/have for starting?

Know how to identify human trafficking and have a procedure to respond in place. Organizational responses may be different if you identify someone and if an individual discloses to you. Many clients may never identify as a victim of human trafficking. Evaluate the potential risks and respond to those risks so support can be tailored to each individual client. All employees should have

trauma informed care and trafficking identification training.

Develop flow charts of how staff can respond to human trafficking. Are they disclosing (yes/no)? Do they need medical care (yes/no)? Are they seeking shelter (yes/no)? Have you notified other advocacy programs (yes/no)? The flow chart can flow as you are learning and have a foundation that is a living document that is always changing as community services evolve, new employees are trained, the laws change, and knowledge grows.

Have a list of resources and develop relationships with those people working in those programs so you know who is doing what in the community. Make sure to updated it often and maintain those relationships. When someone is in crisis and needs a response, these resources are so valuable to have ready and can be used as an outreach and communication channel in the community.

What is one thing you would tell law enforcement officers when investigating these cases?

Involve a victim advocate with experience in working in this area. Every state has a law enforcement training facility. Advocate for training on human trafficking, child sex trafficking, MMIP cases are required law enforcement trainings. Without training, law enforcement is not able to identify human trafficking. Once they know the signs of human trafficking, they are more aware of these signs in their work. Provide case studies, scenarios, and help them open their perspective to this issue. Implement a victim perspective in any law enforcement training so they have a trauma-informed perspective. This exploitation often starts as a child or teen; this is helpful information to give law enforcement working with individuals in the sex industry and escort service.

Is there training available about human trafficking for the casino (both Tribal and non-Tribal casinos) industry?

Yes, absolutely. Trainings for Tribal communities are also valuable for those communities located near a casino. These trainings have helped build partnerships within these communities and create stronger networks for building these bridges.

Editor's note: Contact the [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](https://www.ovc-htcbc.org) at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411 to request human trafficking training for casino staff.

How does the advancement of technology affect human trafficking on reservations? And what signs would we be able to look out for?

Traffickers can use technology to advertise victims of human trafficking and find victims through [online enticement](#). Technology can also be used by traffickers to track people, so they know where they are at all times. Human trafficking can happen on all apps even those that may look like they are used for something else. Messaging technology can be hidden in those apps. There can also be coded language used on technology to traffic victims. Report [potential child sex trafficking](#) to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) [CyberTipline](#) or call 1-800-THE-LOST.

How has your education program with the casino assisted in arresting perpetrators?

The Tribal and casino hospitality training educates everyone in the casino. Training casino staff helps them be more aware of the signs of human trafficking and better able to report and respond to these situations' organization wide. Without education, many of these cases go unnoticed and are never reported to law enforcement for arrest and prosecution.

Have there been any attempts to consult communities, Tribal Nations, or victims/survivors as to what success should look like for police interventions with victim engagement? If so, has this vision of success been shared with law enforcement?

More is continuing to be done in this area through state MMIP taskforces which include advocates, survivors, law enforcement, and prosecution. Nationally, there is a [MMIP taskforce](#) bringing these systems together to talk about what MMIP looks like and what victims need in their healing. In all of the discussions, recognizing each individual is unique and their experiences vary. There is more we can do across all these systems to become more victim-centered and trauma-informed in our work. Offering training and listening to victims is critical in system works so individuals are not re-traumatized. Lastly, we must continue to work on eradicating the racism that lives in our systems.

How do you think systems can be decolonized to be more accessible to Tribal communities?

Have a Tribal liaison. Start there. What do your meeting spaces look like for those visiting? Do clients sit across from you? Do you sit alongside someone? Look at how systems are accessed? Does the environment convey a perceived sense of authority? How can you create a more balanced space? What changes can convey balance and equality? Every breath of life is sacred. How can we bring

that balance into spaces? One example, I (Carolyn) experienced is learning about a courthouse with a clothing closet. Clients can choose to change their clothes and equalize the power dynamic because of what they might be wearing before going into court. Be mindful of different experiences and actively think about how to create that balance with those who enter your spaces.

When victims are having to deal with the courts, is there anything the courts can train their employees on how to be more culturally aware and sensitive to in working with American Indian Court patrons?

Look for individuals in the courts already advocating for victims. Take training and education on the topic and communicate about it often. If you aren't sure who might be doing this work, contact the court and ask them. Training, communication, and education are key. The [Tribal Law and Policy Institute](#) has many educational resources, and many state attorney general offices have a Tribal liaison who also may be able to support with training and education.

Please talk about prosecution of the crimes. Part of healing is seeing justice.

Justice is keeping victims safe and holding offenders accountable for these crimes. Ask victims what they see as justice. They may not have the same ideas about justice that we see as justice. There is a need for society to change and build new norms where there are no more excuses for using human beings in this way. Shifting our systems where victimization and these crimes are no longer acceptable. Most often the buyers are hidden, and there is little discussion around those who are selling these sex acts.

Editor's note: The [Department of Justice](#) anti-trafficking efforts include investigations, prosecutions, services for victims, trainings, enforcement, and outreach initiatives. Responding to a crime as complex and devastating as human trafficking is neither simple nor straightforward.

What about the prosecution of non-Tribal members that commit these crimes?

Under the [reauthorized Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#), there are special jurisdictions for Tribes being able to prosecute non-Native perpetrators of sexual assault, child abuse, and sex trafficking. There are a few Tribes (approximately 10 percent of the 574 federally recognized Tribes) exercising special jurisdictions in these cases. This shift in legislation is giving Tribes the tools to

issue jurisdiction across any gender-based violence areas. Supporting Tribes in upholding Tribal sovereignty so they can enforce law and protect their Tribes from offenders. Many Tribes are working on new codes aligned to this VAWA legislation.

Can you discuss when the perpetrator was not held accountable, wasn't arrested, what would be the steps to prosecute.

Unfortunately, I [Lynette] have not seen a very high prosecution rate in human trafficking. There is still a long way to go in terms of human trafficking and advocating for this issue within the court system. It is often hard to gather evidence in these human trafficking cases, and it can be really difficult when it comes to survivor testimony to get a prosecution. These cases can be complicated. Education is always the first step.

What are your thoughts with having to verify to federal funders that you are serving human trafficked persons? Some require verification.

Use a screening tool. Depending on how a client answers that questions, we can determine if they meet your organizations criteria of human trafficking. By having those conversations and asking those questions, you can indicate if an individual meets the criteria for experiencing human trafficking or is high risk. Having to have any legal proof is a barrier to services. There are many reasons why someone may not choose to press charges and go to court because of what they have experienced. Screening tools can be very helpful in identifying and responding to human trafficking in your clients. These are conversational to meet survivors where they want to go in their care.

Editor's note: The [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#) can assist your program with adapting existing human trafficking screening tools to your environment.

Can you please elaborate on the use of the "two-spirit population"? What does it mean and where is this term used (globally or nationally)?

Two-Spirit is a direct translation of the Ojibwe term, Niizh manidoowag, Two-Spirited or Two-Spirit, is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. Male Two-Spirits were considered a "third gender," and female Two-Spirits were considered a "fourth gender." The term "Two-Spirit" emerged in 1990 at the third annual inter-

Tribal Native American/First Nations Gay/Lesbian conference in Winnipeg, Canada. The term Two-Spirit was created for Native American individuals who wanted to take a step back from the mainstream language of LGBTQIA+ and connect specifically to culture and spirituality. It was also a way to claim their Native identity and their roles in community. The term Two-Spirit is a universal term used across Indigenous communities. Remember, the term “Two-Spirit” is a concept that was created by Native people and should only be used by Native people who identify. Also, remember some Indigenous communities may not use or identify with the word Two-Spirit because of their own unique cultural beliefs embracing Two-Spirit or Native LGBTQIA+ relatives. Before colonization, Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQIA+ people were looked up to as “Spiritual Beings” because of the role they played in community. They were considered healers or medicine persons, parents of orphaned children, conveyors of oral traditions and songs (Yuki), foretellers of the future (Winnebago, Oglala Lakota), name-givers of children or adults (Oglala Lakota, Tohono O'odham), nurses during war expeditions, potters (Zuni, Navajo, Tohono O'odham), matchmakers (Cheyenne, Omaha, Oglala Lakota), makers of feather regalia for dances (Maidu), and special role players in the Sun Dance (Crow, Hidatsa, Oglala Lakota). Today, they are looked upon as “sexual beings,” and frowned upon. Ask someone who is Native, and who you think identifies, “How do you identify?”

Additional Information

Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411.