



# What are Service Access Challenges for Survivors of Human Trafficking?

A preliminary summary of survivor focus group discussions and interviews

Polaris's National Survivor Study: Updated Dec. 2021

## What Experts Said:

Survivors perceive the need to be in crisis to be eligible for services and resources. Although they had many immediate needs upon leaving their trafficking situation, survivors report **no support for long-term needs** such as mental health care, stable housing, and economic support.

*"It's almost like you graduate, you're out in the world and you're on your own. ... The help only goes for a year. After a year, you're basically on your own. There is no follow-up. I understand maybe there's a lot other survivors that need help - but I feel there is no long-term [support]."*

Some survivors are unable to receive services because of **immigration status** and report the **fear of being deported** as a barrier to accessing services.

*"A lot of times, we need to wait [for visas to be approved]. I waited almost year and a half to know. I didn't qualify for services. I was in limbo. You are not able to work. I think that that's something that needs to change. If someone files for a type of visa, allow them to work because if you don't work, it's like, 'How long can I survive without breaking the law?' I'm putting myself in more danger."*



Participants report that services and shelters for survivors who identify as boys and men are largely unavailable in their area. In addition, resources available to address needs related to sexual violence **do not or cannot provide services to boys and men.**

*"Recognize that what you're doing for women and girls, you need to do for men and boys as well. ... I've found in referring other male survivors to local agencies here, the answer that we got was, 'We don't work with males.' That's a wall we need to get knocked down."*

If services are available for survivors, they are **not always trauma-informed or appropriate.**

*"Even the things that were helpful caused harm along the way. Stuff that was helpful, because there was a lack of any other possible options... help always hurts. "*

*"The first challenge out of my trafficking situation was shelter, and especially for me because I am a transgender, I was put into a male shelter where *I wasn't feeling comfortable*. I ended up leaving the shelter and going into homelessness. *You're out from one situation but you're put in another situation which is bad in a different way.*"*

Survivors encounter **language barriers** when trying to find services and when receiving services or resources. They also experience communication challenges when interacting with **translators who are not trauma-informed.**

*"I think a lot of times, translators are not trauma-informed, *they say things that are out of context*. That happened to me a lot of times. In the beginning, I was using a translator because I was ashamed of my English, and I had to say, 'No, I'm not saying that.'"*



**Lack of identification or documentation** due to their trafficking experience keeps survivors from being able to enroll in services and access resources.

*"I do work for an organization and we rescue girls. One of the biggest things is they have no ID. You can't even help them with medical needs or getting them situated with housing needs or anything because the first thing they ask for is an ID."*

*"It seems really simple but make sure they have access to their Social Security number. Their birth certificate. A government ID. When I got out, I didn't know what a Social Security number was."*

**Safe and reliable transportation** to services and/or employment is a challenge for survivors in rural areas, for those who do not have identification / a driver's license, and for those with vehicle-related convictions such as DUIs.

*"Once I got into my twenties and moved out of the area, everything changed and it gets much more difficult to go places and do anything if you're financially struggling, especially. Transportation can be a very big issue. That's a major concern."*

*"No one taught me how to drive. When you don't have access to those things, whoever comes along to help you is usually going to be a man or another trafficker. People just assume like, "Oh, I lined you up with a job." You have to think, how are they going to get to the job? Can they even drive? Do they know how to take a bus? Do they have their paperwork?"*



**Criminal records** are a common barrier for survivors when accessing most services and resources.

*"Another would be making sure that the survivor's criminal record is clear, because when you have that going against you, **that can stop you in your tracks from achieving anything.**"*

*"With this program I'm part of, if you're a victim and you have a record, **they don't give you the program because you have something on your record. Even if you were the victim.** I feel that it's very important that they overlook your record when it comes to you being the victim."*

*"**There's so many needs that you can't get when you have a criminal record.** It makes it more difficult to get your employment, it makes it more difficult to get housing, it makes it more difficult to get services. It affects everything."*



# What is the National Survivor Study?

The National Survivor Study (NSS) is a scientifically rigorous project that puts the lived experiences of survivors at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement to provide insight into Polaris's strategies, policies, and evaluation frameworks. In full partnership with survivors, the NSS also aims to inform the anti-trafficking movement more broadly by filling key evidence gaps that exist in the field.

## Current Activities

- Holding focus group discussions with people traditionally excluded from research on human trafficking
  - e.g., survivors living in rural areas, Native American / Native Alaskan survivors, Black / African American survivors, Latinx / Hispanic survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors, immigrant survivors, male survivors, gender-diverse survivors, and Asian American & Pacific Islander survivors
- Conducting interviews with other professionals and lived-experience experts from the anti-trafficking field

## Next Steps

- Summarize key findings from focus groups and interviews
- Apply survivor feedback into survey questions
- Conduct an online survey with survivors across the United States

## Contributing Experts

CocoEva Soleil LuzGuerrero Alcazar, Stephanie Anderson, Michael George Andrade Jr., Amy Lynn Andrews, Wade Arvizu, Chris Ash, Aims Babich, T.C. Justine Baker, Chris Bates, Hannah Blair, Vanessa Bouché, Ph.D., Katherine Bright, MA, Dr. Tristan Call, Nykki Canete, MSW, ISWAA, Marlene Carson, Michael Chen, Cindy, Angie Conn, Molly Cruz, Harold D'Souza, Cristian Eduardo, Hazel Fasthorse, Tawana Fattah, Wang Fen, La Toya Gix, Dr. Nissi Hamilton, Eric A. Harris, BSW, Sara Inglett, Beth Jacobs, Gwendolyn Jones, Allyson Kitts, Izeda Lachica, Robin Levasseur, Ashley Maha'a, Megan Malone, Marley, Erin Marsh, MJ, Betsy Nolan, NSL, Raquel Piscopo, Lara Powers, John Price, Holly Rivera, Lily Rivera, Jamie Rosseland, Namrita S. Singh, Ph.D., MSc, Karen Snyder, Christine Stark, CJ Strong, Dr. Chelsea Taylor, Nakia Vestal, Prizila Vidal, Dr. Kyle Vincent, Ph.D., Lauren Vollinger, Charity Watters, Sean M. Wheeler, Dr. Gregory Williams, Sara Woldehanna, Sarah Zalonis