

Forward to Freedom

A Year-End Update from Polaris

DECEMBER 2022

 **Polaris** Freedom happens now.





Dear Friend,

Polaris has reached many milestones in 2022. In February, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our mission to end sex and labor trafficking. This December marks 15 years of operating the National Human Trafficking Hotline, which has responded to more than 340,000 contacts and helped over 30,000 victims and survivors connect to the resources they need. And during these years, Polaris has evolved into a survivor-centered, justice- and equity-driven, and technology-enabled leader in the anti-trafficking movement, spearheading changes to the systems that enable the crime in the first place.

Thank you for making this transformation possible. You have supported victims and survivors across the country and around the world as they take steps toward reclaiming their freedom. And your generosity has empowered our organization to revolutionize our own practices and programs, learning from and partnering with survivors as the true experts of the movement. As we wrap up a busy year, we hope you enjoy this look back at what you have helped Polaris accomplish in 2022.

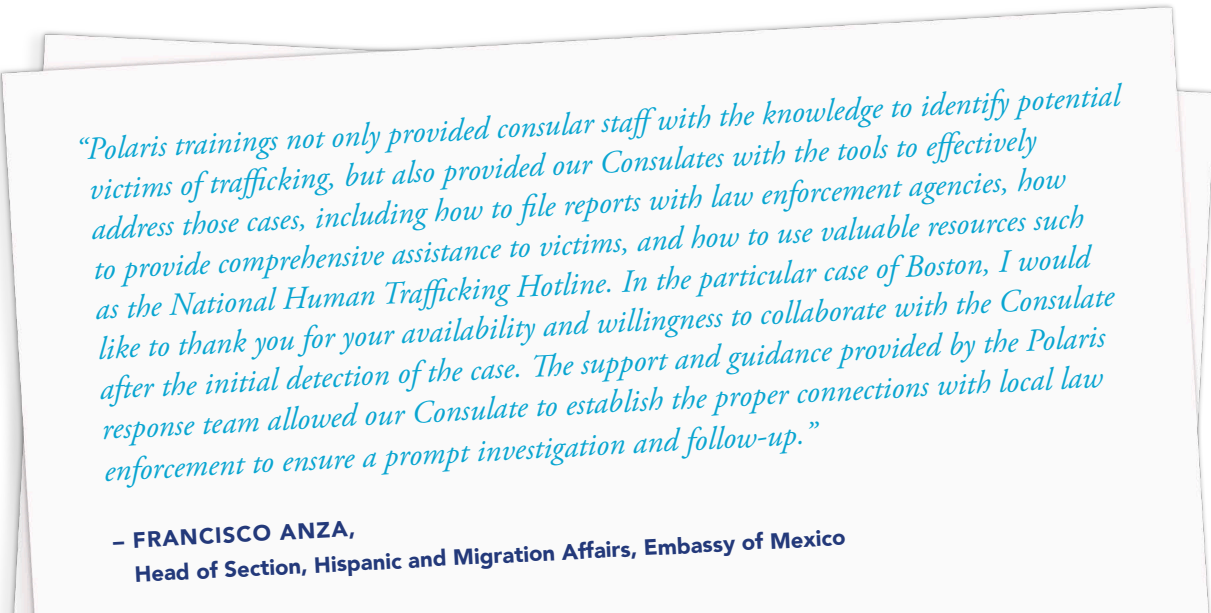
With gratitude,



Responding to Immediate Needs

Polaris’s response via the Trafficking Hotline has gotten a boost from the Strategic Initiative on Labor Trafficking, which has trained over 270 Mexican consular officers across the U.S. in the last year and 3,700+ individuals to date. Trusted by the community, these staff work in settings ranging from offices to mobile consulates and can help identify potential cases and spread the word about the Trafficking Hotline.

This year, Polaris saw just how effective this collaborative ecosystem has grown. For example, after training the Boston consulate’s staff, Polaris helped them to identify and follow up on a potential trafficking case involving more than 30 workers in Connecticut. Check out this thank-you note!



“Polaris trainings not only provided consular staff with the knowledge to identify potential victims of trafficking, but also provided our Consulates with the tools to effectively address those cases, including how to file reports with law enforcement agencies, how to provide comprehensive assistance to victims, and how to use valuable resources such as the National Human Trafficking Hotline. In the particular case of Boston, I would like to thank you for your availability and willingness to collaborate with the Consulate after the initial detection of the case. The support and guidance provided by the Polaris response team allowed our Consulate to establish the proper connections with local law enforcement to ensure a prompt investigation and follow-up.”

– FRANCISCO ANZA,
Head of Section, Hispanic and Migration Affairs, Embassy of Mexico

BEHIND THE SCENES: MODERNIZING THE TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

For 15 years, the Trafficking Hotline has never gone down — meaning that technological improvements have been made gradually as Hotline Advocates continue responding 24/7. This year, your support and partnerships with the Department of Health and Human Services and tech companies are enabling Polaris to revamp how the Trafficking Hotline works, using modern technology, streamlining the staff experience, and ultimately improving service for those who contact us.



TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2022



Received
55,815
substantive contacts

Provided
9,554
referrals to victims and survivors

Reported
2,689
tips to law enforcement.

(Statistics are preliminary estimates and subject to change in the data cleaning process.)

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$4.5 million with 78% funded by ACF/HHS and \$1.3 and 22% funded by non-government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, Administrative and National Policy Requirements: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/administrative-and-national-policy-requirements#chapter-8>.

A FOCUS ON FINANCE

Through the Strategic Initiative on Financial Systems, your gifts have enabled Polaris to support survivors in rebuilding their financial stability this year.

As a co-founder of FAST, Polaris shares its expertise and data-driven insights through the international **Survivor Inclusion Initiative**, which works with financial institutions and survivor support organizations to promote financial access for survivors. We are excited to see tangible progress in 2022: Participant Scotiabank launched a new website for its Financial Access Program, explaining how they work to accommodate the needs of trafficking survivors. We hope other financial institutions will follow suit!

Polaris also created several resources to assist survivors taking advantage of the new **Debt Bondage Repair Act**, which enables them to block damaging information related to their trafficking experience from their credit reports. But the process remains challenging, so Polaris will keep advocating and raising awareness to ensure credit reporting agencies center survivors and comply with the new act.

Survivors Drive the Data

In 2022, Polaris completed the first-of-its-kind **National Survivor Study (NSS)**. A total of **457 survivors** participated in the final survey, making the NSS the largest known survey of survivors in the U.S.

Even more important, however, is that the NSS has been conducted in full partnership with survivors as research staff and consultants at every stage. Their involvement hasn't ended with data collection but remains critical as Polaris makes sense of the results and prepares to share full findings in 2023.

As one survivor consultant put it, **"I have a voice, and my voice is actually pretty powerful. I would love to stay in the process."**

As just one example of this ongoing partnership, the NSS team shared preliminary analysis at the **Survivor Financial Access Roundtable**, co-hosted by Polaris and Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST). Three survivors shared relevant NSS findings on access to financial services and context from their own experiences with around 50 attendees from big banks, service providers, and other organizations.



L-R: Survivor Financial Access Roundtable participants Ashley M., My Truth Is Now; Betsy Nolan, Polaris; Megan Lundstrom, The Avery Center; Dr. Leona Vaughn, FAST Initiative; Lara Powers, Humanity United; Sara Crowe, Polaris; Janina Pescinski, FAST Initiative; Sara Woldehanna, Polaris; Jen Jinks, Polaris



Local Engagement to International Impact

Thanks to your partnership, Polaris has taken great strides across the geographic spectrum, from working at the grassroots level to influence state, federal, and even international policy.



Expanding the Safety Net

At the local level, Polaris has grown its Safety Net Expansion Initiative to nine cities, working with survivor leaders, service providers, and other stakeholders to strengthen social safety nets and prevent trafficking before it happens. In San Diego, one of the initiative's first cities, Polaris helped partners identify the need for safer spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals to reduce trafficking vulnerability. This year, we developed tailored resources to help local stakeholders pursue this priority, publishing a local policy and environment scan, a San Diego LGBTQ+ safer spaces report, and an action guide outlining next steps.



Connecting Migrant Workers

Polaris continues to scale Nonechka, a unique, mobile-phone-based platform that allows farmworkers to learn their rights and share their experiences without fear of retaliation from their employers. It also enables Polaris to collect information that can be used to advocate for better protections and empower workers to advocate on their own behalf.

To date, Polaris has engaged over 2,700 workers in eight Mexican states through Nonechka. Building on that success, this year, we have developed partnerships with local organizations in the top 10 U.S. states hosting migrant workers, expanding Nonechka access while continuing Mexico-based work in sending states. This growth is enabling even more workers to share their experiences and inform Polaris and partner advocacy, while also getting resources to help prevent exploitation.



Grading the States on Criminal Record Reforms

Back in 2019, Polaris released a report grading all 50 states and the District of Columbia on their criminal record relief statutes, which are critical to helping survivors move on after exploitation. In 2022, Polaris updated this report, marking encouraging progress with new laws and changes in several states — but also highlighting more work to be done. With three states and the federal government still without pathways to criminal records relief for survivors, Polaris is releasing the new report for targeted advocacy efforts heading into the new year.

A WIN FOR WORKERS

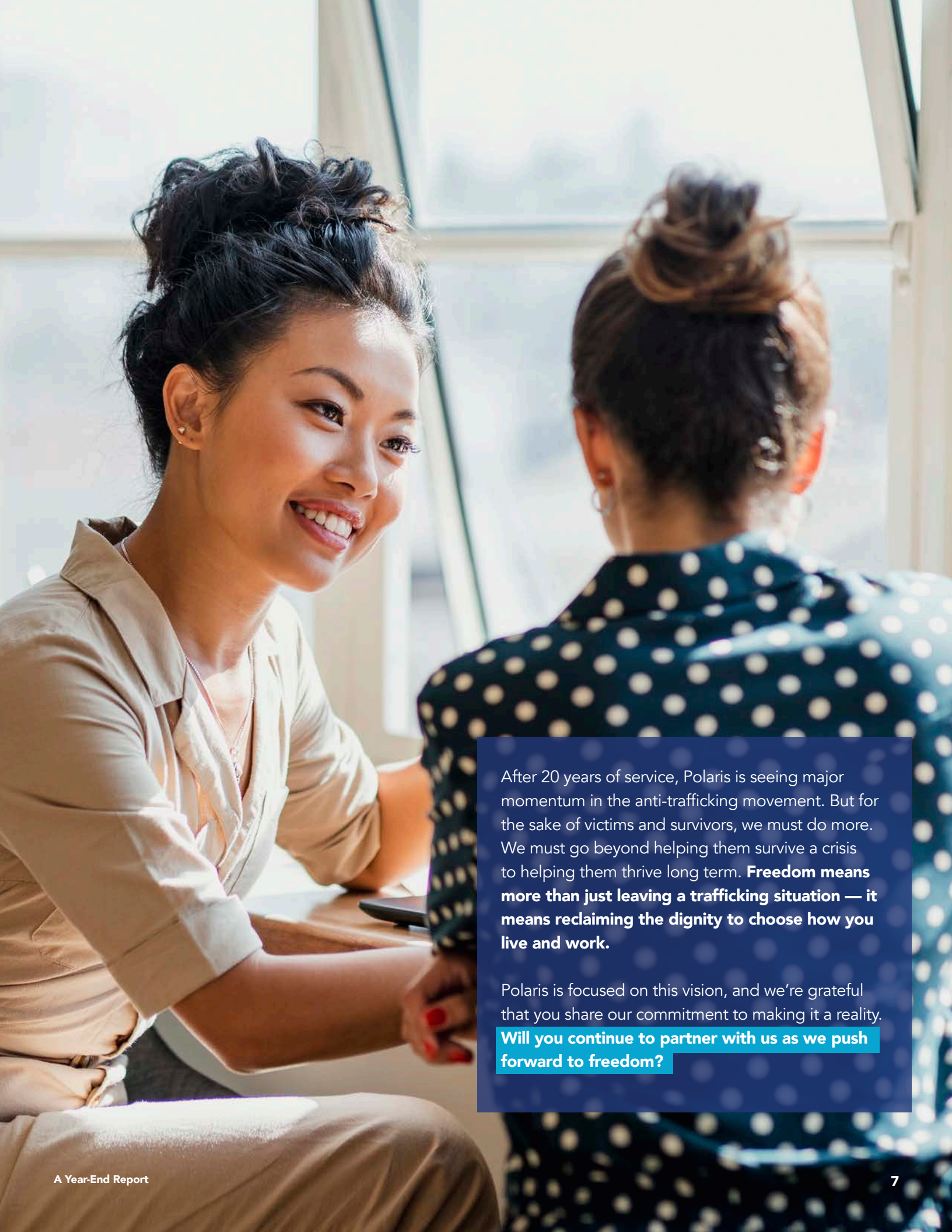
Given the cross-border reality of the agricultural industry, Polaris knows how important it is to advocate for vulnerable workers in the U.S. and in Mexico. We have spent several years analyzing data and policies, sharing action-focused resources, and building relationships with policymakers in both countries. This year marked a major policy win: Mexico recently joined the 59 countries that have adopted the International Labour Organization's Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention, 1930. Polaris's data-driven research and engagement with the Mexican Senate played a role in their commitment to protect workers and prevent forced labor!



A Sneak Peek *at* 2023

Your generosity has helped Polaris make great progress in 2022. But we're far from finished. With your renewed investment, we can pursue the following priorities in the year ahead:

- ➔ **Centering survivors as the leaders and experts** in the fight against trafficking, engaging them as partners across the organization — from program design and advocacy campaigns to data research and policy recommendations.
- ➔ **Strengthening frontline response** by upgrading and resourcing the Trafficking Hotline and building strong relationships with service providers and law enforcement, ensuring that those who contact us can get help through terms, timing, and methods that work best for them.
- ➔ **Leveraging our evolving data, research, and intelligence capacity** by:
 - Analyzing Trafficking Hotline and other data to produce reports and resources for the anti-trafficking field;
 - Releasing full NSS results in collaboration with survivors; and
 - Partnering with financial institutions, labor enforcement agencies, and other industries to seed trafficking investigations.
- ➔ **Conducting high-impact advocacy campaigns** focused on:
 - Reducing prostitution-related arrests of potential trafficking victims in major American cities and 14 states where children are still being arrested; and
 - Improving or enacting federal- and state-level policy on criminal record relief; and
 - Making statutory or regulatory changes to the H-2 visa program to protect workers.



After 20 years of service, Polaris is seeing major momentum in the anti-trafficking movement. But for the sake of victims and survivors, we must do more. We must go beyond helping them survive a crisis to helping them thrive long term. **Freedom means more than just leaving a trafficking situation — it means reclaiming the dignity to choose how you live and work.**

Polaris is focused on this vision, and we're grateful that you share our commitment to making it a reality. **Will you continue to partner with us as we push forward to freedom?**

★
Polaris Freedom
happens
now.



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