

Our Next Chapter

*Focusing the Fight
Against Human Trafficking*

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR AND CEO

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the role you have played in supporting Polaris and the broader movement to end human trafficking. Your partnership has made it possible to continue centering survivor voices, generating actionable insight through data and intelligence, and supporting partners across the field for nearly 25 years.

For 18 of those years, we put this approach into practice by operating the National Human Trafficking Hotline. That work strengthened the identification of potential victims and trafficking situations, improved referral pathways, and generated insights that shape national strategy. We carry that legacy forward as a core part of our work.

This next chapter is not a departure from our mission; it is a continuation of it. From Polaris's founding, our role has been to listen to survivors in order to identify gaps in the anti-trafficking ecosystem and work across sectors to close them using a data-driven approach.

When those gaps are addressed, systems begin to align. Access to resources becomes more consistent, more coordinated, and less dependent on chance. That alignment creates the conditions for survivors to move beyond crisis toward stability, independence, and leadership.

Today, Polaris reflects the evolution we set in motion more than two decades ago: An organization founded by allies with a vision of what was possible is now led by a survivor. That milestone is not merely symbolic. It reflects the direction and progress of the field and the future we are working to build.

Still too often, a survivor's ability to reach stability, independence, and leadership is determined by chance. Polaris is working to change that, aligning systems so that access to resources and opportunity becomes consistent, not contingent.

We invite you to continue building that future with us.

With gratitude,



Megan Lundstrom
CEO



Liz Kiehner
*Chairperson,
Board of Directors*

A New Chapter of Polaris

While our programs have changed over the years, Polaris has always worked to center survivors, support partners, and strengthen the field.

Survivor leadership remains core to this commitment. In addition to taking the CEO role in 2025, Megan Lundstrom transitioned the Resilience Fund's Advisory Council of survivor-led organizations into a Polaris-wide Advisory Council, taking another step toward structurally centering lived experience and expertise in the organization and in the anti-trafficking movement.

Led by survivors, we have identified three foundational aspirations that have stood the test of time from Polaris's founding through our operation of the Hotline and into this new chapter. These aspirations are shaping our current programs and activities:



Survivor Care & Outreach

Setting the standard for survivor-centered, trauma-informed care while strengthening the safety net and systems around survivors



Data & Intelligence

Using data to inform program and policy improvements and drive innovation at Polaris and across the anti-trafficking field



Partnership Building

Identifying, aligning, and strengthening relationships and collaboration among stakeholders inside and outside the traditional anti-trafficking field

THE STATE OF THE FIELD

Polaris's new chapter comes at a critical juncture in the anti-trafficking movement. In 2025, we marked the 25th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which represented the beginning of a national effort to prevent trafficking, protect survivors, and pursue justice.

Since then, there have been many successes. But there are still too many siloed efforts, persistent needs, and limited resources. In 2025:



Polaris provided an average of **1,200+ referrals to services each month**, compared to 900 in 2024 and 700 in 2023.



Our **service provider database shrank** for the first time, with more partners closing than were added.



According to a recent pulse survey, **48% of anti-trafficking stakeholders suffered a loss of funding in 2025**, and 41% have to rebudget based on expecting a funding loss in 2026.



Only 65% of NGOs and service providers are very certain they will survive 2026.

In this landscape, Polaris's support for survivors, partners, and the entire anti-trafficking field is more needed than ever.



Survivor Care & Outreach

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Polaris has always listened to survivors about what they need — and we have always worked to meet those needs in collaboration with our partners.

In our early days, a survivor told us they needed a single number to call for help, no matter where they were or where a trafficker moved them. We took that insight seriously and worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to design and launch the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** in 2007. What began as a response to a clearly identified gap grew into a national infrastructure for survivor support, which Polaris built, scaled, and continuously strengthened for nearly two decades in partnership with survivors, service providers, law enforcement, and government.

Through 2025, the Hotline was our largest, longest-running program, assisting thousands of survivors every year and coordinating access to services through a network of more than 3,000 contacts across the country. Over time, it became both a critical access point for support and a source of insight that informed broader response efforts.

In September 2025, HHS selected a new operator for the Hotline, and Polaris supported a transition of the Hotline's core communication channels. At the same time, Polaris continues to steward the relationships, data, and operational expertise developed through this work. We are applying these assets to strengthen survivor support, expand access to resources, and inform systems-level strategies moving forward.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline was 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 \$6 million annually, with 92% funded by ACF/HHS and \$0.5 million and 8% funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors 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>.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025

Polaris piloted a **trauma-informed, AI-driven chatbot named "Ruth"** to chat with people visiting the Hotline website and share information about trafficking. Ruth handled 11,418 chats, with 80% user satisfaction. This year, we are launching Ruth on Polaris's website to respond to continuing inquiries from survivors and stakeholders.

We continued to engage companies to **donate hotel stays, flights, and rideshares for survivors**. Over the last five years, we have arranged nearly 1,370 nights (over 3.75 years) in hotels for 300+ survivors, 1,325+ flights for 770+ survivors, and 340 rideshare trips for nearly 120 survivors.

Polaris educated service providers, task forces, consular networks, government agencies, corporate partners, and other stakeholders about human trafficking and the Hotline. Nearly 73,000 people have taken our free **Human Trafficking 101 online training** since launch in 2021, with 2,000+ taking the Spanish version since 2023.

JANUARY 1 -
DECEMBER 8, 2025

ALL-TIME:
2007-2025



substantive contacts

15,840 calls
4,888 texts
3,815 webforms
2,211 emails
2,037 chats

488,496

*substantive contacts directly
from victims and survivors*



8,437

94,520

trafficking situations identified



12,265

123,256

referrals provided



11,579

127,829

Polaris Resilience Fund

In 2025, Polaris completed the inaugural cohort's 18 months of cash disbursements, with a final evaluation showing:



Cash primarily covered **essential survival needs**, like food, utilities, transportation, insurance, health, and housing-related costs.

Some college education

67% at entry

92% at exit

Many participants **advanced their education** during the program.

Reliance on exploitative work

60% at entry

23% at exit

Reliance on **exploitative work decreased for many**, but vulnerability persists.

Polaris also worked with the **University of Notre Dame's Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities** to design a randomized controlled trial of future Resilience Fund cohorts to evaluate the program's impact on economic mobility, mental health, and resilience. We are now exploring potential new funding partnerships to continue the Resilience Fund for more survivors, while gathering evidence on effective direct cash programs.

Connecting Survivors to Compensation

In July 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a remission process to compensate survivors of sex trafficking whose abuse was facilitated through Backpage.com or CityXGuide. Polaris held a community forum for Resilience Fund participants and the survivor community, connecting them with the Backpage Survivor Remission Network led by a Polaris partner. Together, we helped more than 850 survivors submit their remission forms and documents by the March 2026 deadline!

Nonechka

Since launching in 2020, Nonechka has reached nearly 13,000 agricultural workers in the U.S. and Mexico, sharing information about rights and resources while gathering feedback about recruitment and working conditions. In 2025:



6,000+
workers received
90,000+
messages



80%

of workers better understood
their rights in the workplace



70%

of workers identified resources
in case they needed help



8,200+
people
benefited from
outreach and
education

Data & Intelligence



Shaped by survivor expertise and our direct service experience, Polaris's Data & Intelligence efforts continue to strengthen the anti-trafficking ecosystem and drive activation and response across the field. Here are a few highlights from the past year:

Ensuring Survivor-Centered Data Governance

Polaris developed a data governance policy that centers the safety, autonomy, and needs of survivors; reflects our core values; and establishes clear standards for how data is collected, stored, and used. This policy enables responsible data sharing and long-term impact across the field and is especially important for preserving and stewarding the legacy of the Hotline. And we hope it will inform our partners and fieldwide practices down the road.

Generating Research and Intelligence

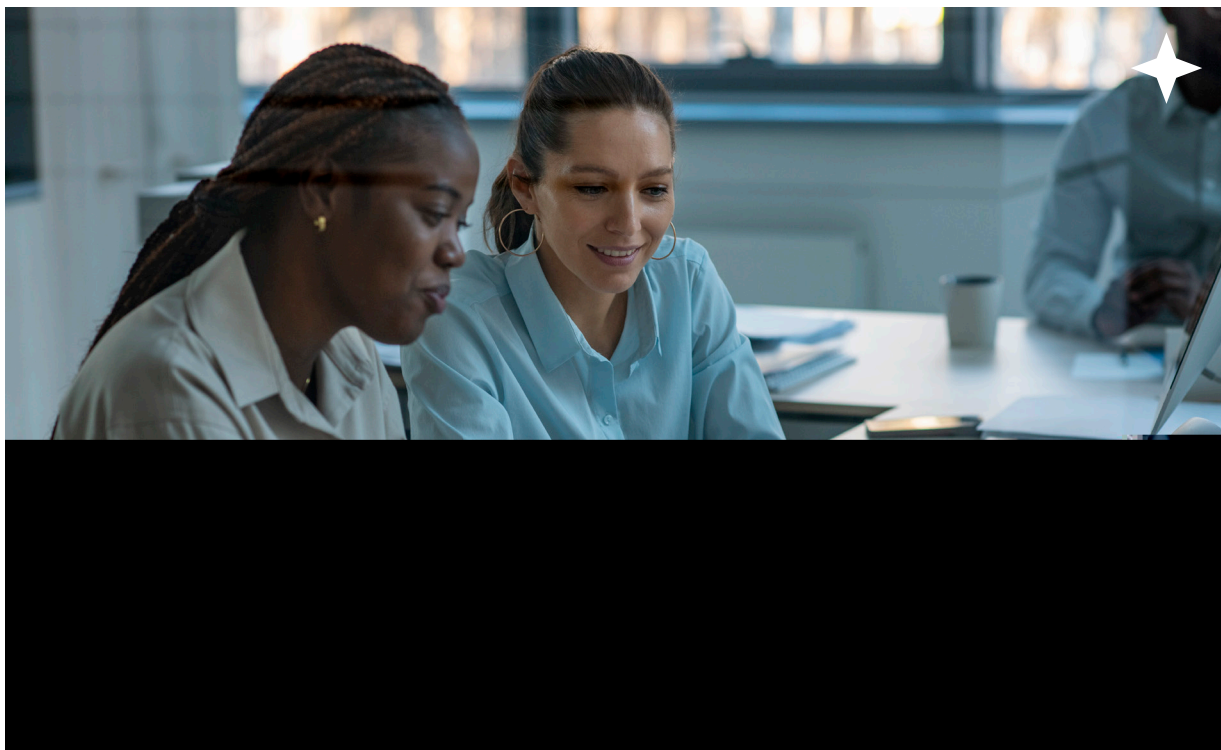
Polaris continues to produce insights that build the evidence base for action across the anti-trafficking field. In 2025, our team:

- Published an article analyzing National Survivor Study data about survivors who are parents in *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice & Program*.
- Developed several briefs on labor trafficking, including [“No Vacancy: Closing the Door on Labor Trafficking in the Hospitality Industry”](#) and [a series about agricultural workers](#) drawing on Nonechka and Hotline data.
- Identified 534 people, businesses, addresses, and usernames suspected of trafficking, sharing open-source information packages with financial institution partners.



“When you take away traffickers’ assets, you also take away their ability to earn more money by exploiting other people.”

READ MORE AT [Following the Money, Shutting Down Exploitation](#)



Testing AI-Powered Policy Levers

Polaris is developing a human-guided, evidence-based decision-support tool designed to help policymakers and practitioners answer a core question: What actions are most likely to reduce vulnerability to trafficking?

The tool draws on trusted, curated datasets, including county-level public data, peer-reviewed research, and Polaris's historical Hotline data, and combines them with expert and survivor-informed insight to analyze how factors like poverty or employment shape trafficking risk.

Rather than predicting trafficking, the tool evaluates how changes in specific conditions may influence risk. One early finding from the tool is that **child poverty consistently emerges as the strongest directional predictor of trafficking risk across U.S. counties**, backing up what survivors, frontline practitioners, and other experts have observed for decades.

Given this result, **Polaris analyzed a real-world policy scenario**: In 2025, New Mexico introduced a universal childcare policy projected to save families an average of \$12,000 per child annually. When asked about this policy's impact on trafficking, the tool estimated an increase in median household income and consequent reductions in child poverty and trafficking risk. This is just one example of how anti-poverty policy can be an anti-trafficking strategy.

This approach does not generate definitive predictions. Instead, it provides policymakers with evidence-based insights and decision options, helping them understand how policy choices may influence underlying conditions and where intervention may be most effective.

Policy Progress

Survivors of human trafficking now have a pathway to clear federal criminal records tied to their exploitation. The passage of the **Trafficking Survivors Relief Act (TSRA)** represents the culmination of nine years of advocacy by survivors, allies, and partners — and the first step toward broader criminal records relief.

Polaris will continue walking with survivors through TSRA implementation, working to ensure they can fully benefit from this historic legislation.

TSRA TIMELINE

- **July 2025:**
Reintroduced in the House of Representatives and Senate
- **December 2025:**
Passes both the House and Senate
- **January 2026:**
Signed into law

Why Criminal Record Relief Matters

As part of the National Survivor Study, a research partnership with survivors, Polaris conducted online and phone surveys with 457 sex and labor trafficking survivors. The study found that for a majority of survivors, their criminal record created barriers to gainful employment, finding safe housing, continuing their education, and child custody.



69%

reported that it prevented them from getting or keeping a job



59%

reported their record affected their ability to get good, safe housing



63%

reported their record affected their ability to receive education, training, or a professional license



35%

of those with a criminal record who also had children reported that their record affected their custody of their children.

Advocacy in Action

In December, Polaris CEO Megan Lundstrom participated in two Congressional hearings about using technology to counter human trafficking and addressing trafficking at mass gatherings like the World Cup. Check out an excerpt from one of her testimonies below:



“Traffickers sell the most vulnerable parts of us to line their own pockets. If we use data in ways that ignore consent — if we share it, store it, analyze it, or profit from it without guardrails — we mirror that same dynamic. If we treat those rows of data — survivor stories — as a commodity, we are no better than the traffickers who scripted that story in the first place.”

Polaris's Corporate Partners

Corporate partners play a critical role in advancing Polaris's mission. Beyond financial and in-kind support, they partner with Polaris to strengthen their own anti-trafficking practices, taking an active role in identifying and addressing risks within their operations, ensuring victims are safely connected to support, and aligning business practices with efforts to prevent exploitation and improve outcomes for survivors.

This year, we want to acknowledge a special partnership. For ten years, **Southwest Airlines** has supported Polaris through donations of cash and flight vouchers that enable survivors to exit trafficking situations, return home, enter supportive programs, testify in court, pursue professional development opportunities, and so much more.



Provided
2,086
flight vouchers
for survivors



Responded to the
pandemic by giving
33% more
vouchers in 2020



Engaged their customers in
donating through Points for
a Purpose, providing nearly
2.5 million points
since 2021

"Southwest operates on the guiding principles of loving People and living responsibly. We call it our Southwest Heart. Supporting Polaris and their fight to end Human Trafficking is an extension of our commitment: being a good caregiver of the Customers and communities we serve, every single day."

- Kelly Knox, Senior Corporate Responsibility Advisor, Southwest Airlines



"Polaris is proud to steward millions of Southwest Airlines points and thousands of vouchers that have helped survivors, their loved ones, and their advocates. These resources have had an enormous positive impact that extends well beyond travel."

Our partnership with Southwest Airlines reflects a shared commitment to engage survivors and impacted communities so that, together, we can prevent exploitation from happening in the first place. We are looking forward to the next decade!"

- Luisa Cordoba, Director of Corporate Partnerships, Polaris

Appreciation for Our Allies

Polaris is incredibly grateful to all of our corporate partners for their investment in our mission and their efforts to stop human trafficking in their sectors.

VEGA

\$250,000 - \$499,000



CAPELLA

\$100,000 - \$249,999



ANTARES

\$50,000 - \$99,999



AHARA

\$10,000 - \$24,999

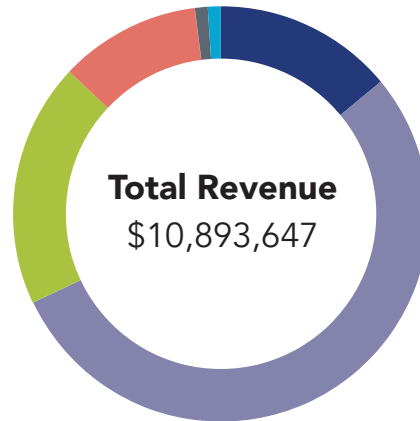


Financial Summary – 2025

As of October 6, 2026

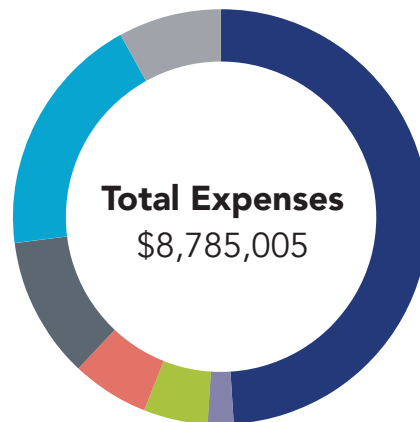
REVENUE

Corporate Donations (14%)	\$1,549,090
Government Grants (55%)	\$6,018,128
Individual Donations (19%)	\$2,048,502
Private Foundations (11%)	\$1,234,603
Other Income (<1%)	\$28,182
Investment Income (<1%)	\$15,142



EXPENSES

Trafficking Hotline (49%)	\$4,349,637
Advocacy/ Communications (2%)	\$220,665
Financial Intelligence Unit (5%)	\$407,264
Workers' Rights (6%)	\$501,477
Other Programs (11%)	\$951,813
Management and General (19%)	\$1,686,321
Fundraising (8%)	\$668,628



Change in Net Assets \$2,329,615

ENDING NET ASSETS \$2,188,964

Note: These are not yet final audited numbers. Our audited financials are in progress and will be published soon. Past audited financials are available at <https://polarisproject.org/financial-information>.

POLARIS MISSION

**To end sex and labor
trafficking and support
victims and survivors on
their journeys toward
freedom**

POLARIS LEADERSHIP

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Luisa Cordoba, *Director of Corporate Partnerships*
Shannon Elliott, *Head of Data Science & Analytics*
Diana Fimbres, *Associate Director of Workers' Rights*
Margo Kelly, *Director of Foundation Relations*
Monica Krebs, *Director of Operations*
Betsy Nolan, *Head of Research, Evaluation, and Data Governance*

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