Putting Human Trafficking Survivors at the Center of Faith- and Community-Based Efforts to Promote Economic Mobility

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) believes it is important to put people at the center of all efforts that contribute to economic mobility. Programs that promote economic mobility include housing assistance, social services for survivors of trafficking, behavioral and physical health care, employment assistance, and much more. Below are some ways faith- and community-based organizations that help survivors overcome barriers to economic mobility can ensure their efforts are survivor-centered. The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

Ensure Housing and Services Are Trauma-Informed

Create a safe environment for survivors to access benefits and services. For example, if a survivor fears violence in their housing unit because a former trafficker has discovered its location, consider working with housing organizations, advocates, and law enforcement to temporarily relocate them to emergency shelter or another location that makes them feel safe. Develop a long-term plan to relocate the survivor to safe and stable housing.

Offer support that considers survivors’ past trauma, including the impact of shame and stigmatization on program engagement. Acknowledge this trauma and work to prevent re-traumatization or re-victimization. It may take some time for survivors to feel safe accessing resources. Organizations can build trust over time by respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality, offering help in meeting survivors’ goals, celebrating survivors’ successes, and maintaining open lines of communication.

Engage Leaders with Lived Experience

Include trafficking survivors in developing self-sufficiency policy and programs, including program design, oversight, and evaluation. Incorporating the input of survivors helps ensure programs are trauma-informed and culturally responsive and helps survivors meaningfully access and use assistance to achieve economic mobility.
Let Survivors Identify Needs and Priorities

Tailor assistance to the individual, self-identified needs, barriers, and goals of the survivor, including immediate needs and long-term priorities for achieving economic mobility. Help survivors understand that eligibility for federal resources may vary.

Some survivors may need assistance accessing or navigating economic mobility supports, including, but not limited to:

- Employment assistance and job training
- Housing (emergency shelter or emergency housing, transitional housing, and/or rental assistance)
- Financial planning, credit repair, and counseling
- Mental health services
- Substance use treatment
- Physical health care
- Legal services
- Educational resources
- Child care
- Transportation
- Life skills
- Family reunification

A survivor identifies a lack of child care and transportation as the primary barrier preventing them from being able to go to work this month. They would like to move to a neighborhood closer to their family. Your organization may choose to focus first on connecting them to child care and transportation, and then on helping them with a housing search. Focusing on the former respects the survivor’s priorities and may help them avoid homelessness. Your staff or volunteers can help survivors understand the potential resources available to help them overcome economic mobility barriers and prioritize their top needs.

Empower Survivors

Enable trafficking survivors to make their own choices about the best path for them to achieve economic mobility, including the types of housing they access, the social services they use, and the level of assistance and engagement they choose to pursue. Ensure emergency shelter, short-term housing, transitional housing, and other services are voluntary and easy to find, access, and navigate so that burdensome processes do not limit the survivor’s ability to achieve self-sufficiency. Not every survivor will need or want to use all of the assistance your agency and community partners offer.

Strengthen Survivors’ Social and Community Networks

Your organization’s partnerships and relationships may help survivors access other community-based resources. Survivors may also be able to access new and existing social capital networks by building relationships with your organization’s staff as well as with peers in the community. Faith- and community-based partners can be especially helpful in connecting survivors and other vulnerable populations to social support.
Emphasize Economic Mobility, Public Awareness, and Prevention

Organizational strategies to raise community awareness and focus on overall economic mobility can help intervene and prevent trafficking and homelessness.

Public awareness campaigns and sharing information about trafficking can help community members identify the signs of trafficking. Educating survivors and those at risk of experiencing trafficking about healthy connections and relationships may help them leave or avoid exploitative situations. Consider partnerships with other faith- and community-based organizations working in different fields (e.g., domestic and dating violence, child abuse and neglect, runaway and homeless youth, mental health and substance use treatment, and health care) or participate in other initiatives to promote self-sufficiency and economic mobility among community members.

Trafficking prevention efforts may prevent survivors from returning to, or staying in, a trafficking situation and reduce the harm caused by these experiences when they do occur. Prevention efforts can also serve as a route to economic mobility for survivors by breaking the cycle of trafficking and economic instability.

Key Terms and Definitions

What is Human Trafficking?

Federal law defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as both:

**Sex Trafficking:** The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.

Where a minor is induced to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is force, fraud, or coercion.

**Labor Trafficking:** The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

What is Economic Mobility?

**Economic Mobility** is a survivor’s ability to improve their income and economic stability.

Efforts to promote economic mobility may include addressing barriers related to housing, employment, trauma, physical or behavioral health, and other challenges that can prevent individuals from moving toward self-sufficiency and out of poverty.
Key Terms

Survivors of human trafficking (or individuals with lived experience) are individuals who are experiencing, or have experienced, human trafficking. The term “victim” has legal implications. “Survivor” is used by many in the services field to recognize the strength it takes to work toward healing in the aftermath of a traumatic experience.

Trauma-Informed Approaches understand and recognize the symptoms of trauma and the coping strategies that develop to survive adversity, and integrate that knowledge into an organization’s policies and practices. Access more information on trauma-informed approaches in homeless services.

Housing Instability refers to experiences of homelessness, frequent moves, evictions, or other housing-related issues that prevent survivors from remaining in one housing situation for an extended period of time.