

*The following is a case study to be used as part of the SOAR Training for Health Care and Social Service Providers.
Read the information below, and your facilitator will guide you through discussion of this case.*

Final case study: Barbara

I grew up in a suburb in Northern Virginia. I was molested in my home for the first time by my father when I was 8 years old. I started running away from home to get away from the abuse – the first time was when I was 12 years old. The police were always catching me and bringing me back and my parents didn't seem to know what to do with me.

I spent time in a detention center, in reform schools, and in hospital centers for children with problems. My mother was in complete denial. I tried to tell her once what was happening but she couldn't believe me, or didn't want to. They put me into the Juvenile Justice System and into the Child Welfare Systems; eventually my parent's rights to me were taken away. I kept running away to Washington, DC. Before long people noticed me there, and one day a woman picked me up. I was around 13 years old. She took me back to her apartment and told me I could stay there with her. She began to groom me for prostitution. She told me the man in her apartment was her boyfriend, now I believe he was a trafficker.

One day when I was 13 or 14, they sold me to another pimp, named Moses. He was vicious, but smart, and had many women under his control. He sold me to anyone and everyone. He had a quota which was hard to make, and if I didn't make it he would take out a wire coat hanger and whip me mercilessly. I did whatever he wanted me to do for fear he would beat me again.

I walked the tracks around certain hotels. I was arrested many times but my pimp never bailed me out. He didn't want to spend the money. So I would just sit in jail until they let me out.

Around that time I also started using drugs that were given to me. At first I used them to numb the pain, but I quickly became addicted to heroin. With all the beatings, violence and abuse, I became tough, but somewhere inside me I was able to protect a small little place – a place that loves life, loves animals, and years later, when I was helped to leave “the life,” I told someone what happened to me – she couldn't believe it. She kept saying “You don't seem like all that happened to you.”

The Emergency Department was my doctor during the years I was on the street. Even though I was obviously a minor during the first years, no one asked me what had happened to me or what was wrong.

Ultimately, one caring and concerned person in the drug rehab center where I went for methadone saw I was sick and addicted and realized there was something more going on. She saw I needed help and she took the time to ask some questions and get me to tell my story. She was the one who found me the right set of services for what had happened to me. It wasn't until years later that I really understood that I was a trafficking victim.