

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.

Case study: Jesse

I grew up in Colorado. I was born a male but always identified as a female. My mom allowed me to express myself any way I wanted, so I wore dresses and played with dolls, but she still referred to me as a boy. My mom was an addict, mostly to cocaine. I don't even know the name of my father. I was never taken away from my mom even though we were in and out of homelessness, sometimes living in shelters and sometimes with a man she called a boyfriend. I often saw her being sexually exploited by these men.

As I started maturing physically, people started using sexual innuendos around me. I was being groomed to think that selling my body for sex was normal and expected. I wasn't getting my basic needs met, so I started selling myself for sex as a 12-year-old.

At some point, I started working on becoming a woman by taking hormones. Like many transgender people on the streets, I didn't seek treatment through a doctor, but got hormones off of the street. The initial hormone pills were provided by a bar owner. Once you start hormone therapy you can't stop. At around 15, I ended up being trafficked by the bar owner. Most people assumed I was working for the bar and could come and go like a normal employee. However, I couldn't leave and everything I made at the bar went towards the debt to pay for my hormones, which had incredibly high interest rates that made it impossible to pay off.

At some point I left the bar and was sold to several other traffickers. I sometimes felt like the traffickers were my boyfriends and often didn't try to get away. I was eventually forced into a dangerous trafficking situation in NYC that was eventually forced to shut down, leaving me and the other LGBTQ kids homeless. While homeless, I was introduced to my first trusted advocate who helped me realize I had been trafficked and helped me contact an anti-trafficking organization. They tried to find me a place to go for help but could only find me a shelter for homeless men, since there aren't many that cater to LGBTQ, or male victims of abuse. I was apprehensive about going to the shelter but was willing to try it because my advocate wanted me to find a better way to live. I ended up leaving after two weeks and going back to my old life.

I eventually learned I was HIV positive and developed AIDS. Since I had been using the wrong dosage of hormones for such a long time my body started breaking down. I went to clinics regularly for AIDS treatment and no one ever asked me questions about my sexual history or my hormone usage.

Note: Jesse died at 26 years of age, one year after she was diagnosed with AIDS. Her heart finally gave out.