

Collaboration to Increase Access to Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Domestic and Sexual Violence

A Resource for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocacy
Programs Supporting Survivors of Human Trafficking

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This resource is part of a project on: [Building Collaborative Responses to Trafficked Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault](#) (Collaborative Responses Project). The information in this toolkit is part of training and resources created by Futures Without Violence (FUTURES) through the [Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Trafficking](#), Training and Technical Assistance Project and the Collaborative Responses Project.



1. Introduction: Intersection of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking

Domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking (DV, SA, and HT) are intersecting issues for many survivors. Like domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA), trafficking is about power and control and exploitation of people. A person may have layers of trauma that extend beyond their experiences with DV, SA, and trafficking (HT). Survivors of human trafficking need support with their healing journey and economic empowerment. Research shows that access to safe employment and education options reduce vulnerability to abusive relationships and risk of exploitation, and increase economic self-sufficiency and quality of life for survivors. Advocates play an important role by offering support and connecting to services. This toolkit contains advocacy considerations, collaboration strategies, and resources to support HT survivors' self-sufficiency.

Resources:

- [The Intersection of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking](#)
- [Report: Intersections of Human Trafficking, Domestic Violence, and Sexual Assault](#)
- [Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence](#)
- [Human Trafficking and Sexual Assault](#)



2. Employment and Economic Empowerment Needs

For many survivors of human trafficking, limited employment opportunities or the impact of economic insecurity is interconnected to the victimization that they experienced. Interrupted education or a lack of formal work experience leaves survivors without a useful resume or references that impede them from accessing sustainable employment opportunities. Meaningful job placement supports the safety, stability, empowerment, and well-being of survivors.

Survivors of human trafficking often need:

- **Employment connections**, skills development and stable job(s) with steady income generation options for self-sufficiency.
- **Financial help**, to cover pre-existing debts, support family, rent, and legal resources.
- **Educational opportunities**, including: enrollment in school, academic and career counseling, training, certification, English-language classes, and mentoring.

Resources:

- [Brief: Human Trafficking and Access to Employment \(NHTTAC\)](#)
- [Education and Job Training Placement \(OVC E-Guide\)](#)
- [Whole Family Approaches to Employment Opportunities and Economic Assets, HT Leadership Academy Recommendations](#)
- [Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\), supported employment for people with serious mental illness](#)



3. The Importance of Collaboration

As a service organization, if you work with trafficking survivors, you know that it's impossible for one agency to support all the needs of a survivor. Survivors of human trafficking face many obstacles to find and sustain employment opportunities, including past trauma, unstable housing, limited education, transportation, disabilities (sometimes due to the violence experienced), legal issues, language access, criminal record, and safety concerns. Meeting the many needs of survivors can be done best through strategic collaboration with service providers and economic empowerment programs. Survivors need to make their own choices; yet, they may also need help with identifying resources, referrals, and follow-up support.

DV, SA, and HT services providers should collaborate with workforce development agencies to support economic self-sufficiency and security. Each has specific expertise and tools to help empower survivors. DV, SA, and HT organizations do this by promoting safety and healing of survivors. Workforce development programs do this through access to education and employment opportunities. However, workforce development programs often lack a trauma-informed lens. Cross-sector partnerships can help DV, SA, and HT agencies improve strategies and expand trauma-informed knowledge to workforce development programs to help survivors navigate the workforce system and gain needed knowledge and skills to obtain and secure employment.

Collaborating with the workforce system and employers requires strategic engagement:

- Identify champions within workforce development programs, people familiar with DV, SA, and HT, and those interested in supporting survivors of HT, but who will go beyond tokenizing the issue.
- Show the value and benefit to workforce development programs and employers in building partnerships with DV, SA, and HT to support survivors with employment opportunities.
- Emphasize the impact of trauma, the strengths that survivors have to confront it, and the advantage of incorporating trauma-informed practices.

Resource:

- [Partnerships and Pathways to Economic Opportunity for Survivors of Trafficking: A Guide](#)
- [Collaboration Strategies to Help Survivors of Human Trafficking Overcome Barriers to Economic Mobility](#)



4. Trauma Impact to Seek and Hold Employment

It's important to understand how trauma challenges a survivor's ability to access and maintain employment opportunities. This can help programs adapt services to be more accessible, safe, and supportive. In cases of human trafficking, trauma is rooted in the work experience and exploitation of survivors.

Common trauma responses due to the impact of violence manifest emotionally, physically, and psychologically, as described below.

Trauma Impact and Symptoms		
Physical	Mental	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical injuries • Poor nutrition • Infectious diseases • Reproductive health • Dental or oral problems • Respiratory illness • Diabetes • Substance use disorder • Gastrointestinal disorders • Chronic back, hearing, or cardiovascular problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety and/or depression • Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) • Antisocial behavior • Low self-esteem • Emotional detachment • Mood disorders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty concentrating and making decisions • Flashbacks • Hypervigilance • Decreased working memory

(Baldwin 2011, Mazeda 2010, Zimmerman 2011, WHO 2012, Caliber Associates 2007)

Physical, mental, and emotional trauma can impact a person's ability to access and sustain education and employment opportunities that are available for them. Additionally, responses to trauma are often wrongly interpreted by employers or job training program staff as a lack of ability or desire to succeed. It is essential to understand that certain behaviors of survivors are a response to trauma. At the same time, trauma survivors are resilient, creative problem solvers, and have the strength to persevere, even in the face of enormous challenges. Although providing mental health services may not be your job, it is important to get trained on trauma and how it manifests itself, in order to connect survivors to needed support. Below are a few strategies and considerations to support survivors.

Support Strategies and Trauma-Informed Considerations

Outcomes for survivors can be improved by centering prevention and trauma-informed support strategies, including:

a. Crisis Management Stabilization and Health Care Support

- Provide crisis and stabilization support first, including safe housing, connection to basic needs, and appropriate legal assistance, if requested.
- Support health care access for survivors to help improve their health, healing, and safety by addressing chronic health consequences of violence.
- Promote shared trauma-informed support practices that focus and highlight the strengths of survivors.
- Connect survivors to trauma-informed mental health counseling and resources.
- Help identify possible triggers in the workplace. Offer strategies, such as grounding techniques, to help address trauma responses that may come up in work environments.
- Support cultural beliefs, values and practices of survivors, in relation to mental, physical and emotional healing. Promote access and connection to services that can respond to individual needs within a cultural context.
- Keep in mind that survivors may not need or want traditional mental health intervention at first or ever; it is important to stay flexible and keep the door open whenever a survivor is ready for mental health assistance.

b. Structures and Supportive Space

- Review and assess organizational structures, services, and systems, to ensure that practices are trauma-informed and based on an empowerment-based model, including the delivery of information, engagement with survivors, and support strategies.
- Identify and remove potentially unsafe policies and procedures that may be harmful to survivors with traumatic experiences.

- Provide accessibility accommodations for survivors with disabilities, who may have been trafficked or developed disabilities from abuse.

Support and collaborate to organize training on violence and trauma-informed practices for identification of trauma symptoms and support strategies.

c. Partnerships

- Facilitate access to mental and health care support. Build relationships with community mental health providers and community health centers to support survivors with bi-directional referrals.
- Establish relationships with mental health counselors who understand gender-based violence and the intersectional needs of survivors.
- Develop relationships with employers before referring survivors, to ensure that the location is safe and welcoming.
- Promote physically safe and accessible spaces and trauma-informed accommodations that support the success of survivors in the workplace through collaborative strategies.
- Integrate an understanding of trauma and barriers faced by survivors into collaborative partnerships. Promote the availability of advocacy support during a possible crisis.

Resources:

- [Trauma Responsiveness in an Integrated Workforce Service Delivery System \(FUTURES\)](#)
- [Trauma-informed Practice in the Field: Recommendations for Human Trafficking Service Providers \(Project TRUST\)](#)
- [National Fund for Workforce Solutions A Trauma-Informed Approach to Workforce: An Introductory Guide for Employers and Workforce Development Organizations](#)
- [National Center for Farmworker Health, Mental Health Resource Hub](#)



5. Workforce Development Programs

There is a diversity of workforce and economic empowerment programs that can support survivors with employment opportunities in local communities. The workforce development system also includes **career and technical education, career readiness training, and adult education programs**. These also include certain non-profit community-based programs, union apprenticeship programs, public libraries receiving funding from the Department of Labor, and education and training providers. Additionally, a national network of American Job Centers, (career and employment centers) offer adult education and employment services. These programs tend to be free or subsidized with funding from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), an essential collaboration for education and employment opportunities.

WIOA is a program that was created by the U.S. Department of Labor, intended to help workers – particularly adults and youth with significant barriers to employment, such as limited education or work experience, criminal records, or disabilities – get into quality occupations and careers. Survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault face many of these barriers and intersectional vulnerabilities that qualify them for these programs and job opportunities. The programs are also open to foreign national survivors of human trafficking with T-visas or Certification Letters from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

This guide “Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking Through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): A Primer” includes education and training opportunities available through WIOA programs and how survivors can access these services. The WIOA program supports organizations that partner with employers and encourage activities that promote basic skill development within the workplace.

Survivor service organizations can locate [local WIOA services](#) to build a meaningful relationship with these systems and connect survivors to these training and employment programs.

Additionally, many education and training programs have adapted to an online virtual format, offering new opportunities that also make them more accessible for rural communities. It's important to consider and assess which programs meet the needs of survivors and support their skill development. This guide includes basic questions to consider when evaluating online training courses: [Helping Survivors Navigate Online Education and Training Opportunities](#).

Entrepreneurship and independent work are other alternative income generation opportunities for survivors. This includes freelancing, building a business, or joining a partnership with others as part of a cooperative. Survivors can benefit from these opportunities, especially when there is a barrier to obtaining formal employment due to a criminal record, or delayed immigration documents. There are [resources](#) and programs that can support survivors with capacity building and tools to succeed with independent work, including setting goals, compensation, obtaining any necessary permits, and finances.

Resources:

- [Supporting the Education & Employment Needs of Survivors with Criminal Record \(FUTURES\)](#)
- [Resources for Entrepreneurs](#)

When exploring workforce development programs, learn about what they offer that can help survivors, including:

- The program structure, completion timeline and flexibility.
- Services offered, such as job counseling, childcare on site, resume help, mental health services, and any financial support.
- Assistance with connection to peer learning and mentorship opportunities with people from similar backgrounds.
- Eligibility requirements and enrollment process. Clarify if the program requires certain citizenship status or if they accept individuals with U or T visas or Certification Letters from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
- Educational background requirements, degrees, or certifications that must be completed prior to enrollment.
- Any cost to enroll in the program.

- Any limitations or restrictions for individuals with prior arrests or criminal records.
- Support offered after completion of the program.
- If the program recognizes the presence of trauma among participants and has procedures to provide support.

Resources:

Sites to find local workforce development training options:

- [Career One Stop](#), career exploration training and jobs
- [WIOA-Eligible Training Program Finder](#), education and training opportunities
- [Adult Basic Education and ESOL Program Finder](#)
- [Apprenticeship Program Finder](#)
- [Workforce GPS](#), resources and technical assistance tools for workforce professionals and educators
- [Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking Through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\): A Primer](#)
- [Helping Survivors Navigate Online Education and Training Opportunities \(10-point guide\)](#)



6. Economic Empowerment Strategies to Support Survivors

Economic empowerment support services can be led by DV, SA and HT programs or in collaboration with an employment or community-based organization and in partnership with survivors.

Collaborative strategies to assist survivors in navigating their economic empowerment journey:

- Provide financial literacy that is culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and healing-centered.
- Offer career services that focus on the individual survivor, validate experience, and allow them to chart and control their own path. Consider skills, capacity, and also accommodations needed by survivors with disabilities.
- Refer to programs with potential job opportunities, in-demand occupations, provide a living wage, and prevent vulnerability to future exploitation.
- Ensure access to wrap-around services during training or internships, including childcare and transportation.
- Connect with programs that offer incentives for participation, including compensation and scholarship opportunities.
- Facilitate mentorship and networking opportunities that expose survivors to success stories and support from individuals with similar identities.
- Encourage connection to social bonds that create a sense of belonging and support healing, including friends and family.
- Support the self-efficacy and determination of survivors. This builds their capacity to make choices for themselves, and a sense of well-being and self-esteem. This can be strengthened through strategies to uplift their self-esteem.

- Collaborate with legal service providers to provide education and any necessary support related to employment rights, sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation, in order to prevent future abuse and address legal needs.
- Explore strategies to support the employment needs of survivors with criminal records, including programs that accept people with criminal records and legal services to help with expungement.

Resources:

- [Community Asset Mapping Tool](#)
- [Five Tiers of Economic Empowerment \(FUTURES\)](#)
- [Path to Freedom: How Twelve organizations are driving economic empowerment for survivor entrepreneurship](#), (Restore)
- [Supporting the Employment Needs of Survivors with Criminal Records](#)
- [Economic Empowerment Needs Assessment](#)



7. Identifying Possible Partners, Mapping Employment Resources

Community mapping of employment and training programs can help identify and coordinate support for survivors within organizations, inter-agency, and across systems. It makes a big difference for survivors to receive a warm referral to someone or a program with whom you have built trust.

As part of the resource mapping process, it is helpful to develop a team of internal and external partners to identify services and resources for survivors. Assess what support could be provided by each partner and what support needs to be a referral. Gather feedback from survivors to assess needs related to self-sufficiency. Determine resources, overlaps, gaps, and opportunities for growth of services.

Community asset mapping can help assess existing resources, strengths, and capacities. This strategy includes mapping three types of community assets:

- **Individuals:** including community leaders and individuals with expertise in workforce development. These can support with skills, experience, time, and passion to support survivors and join your collaborative efforts.
- **Associations:** places where community gather, including unions, faith groups, culturally specific programs, and trade organizations. These are helpful for referral and to build your network to support survivors.
- **Organizations:** including colleges, job training programs, libraries, and victim/survivor service agencies. These organizations can help people obtain jobs, provide services, resources, staffing, and program leadership.

Additionally, identify and create a list of organizations or locations that are offering WIOA services. Learn about what is the eligibility for these programs, so that you can identify whether the survivors that you work with are eligible for them. Recognize any barriers in referrals and services and inform survivors.

Considerations for identifying partners to support survivors with employment opportunities:

- Identify the workforce support survivors need in your community.
- Recognize the obstacles to education, training, and employment that survivors face.
- Distinguish who provides workforce support to specific community members, including: youth, adults, foreign born, people with disabilities, and transgender and non-binary people.
- Identify individuals, associations or interest groups, and organizations.
- Develop or update a resource list with information on points of contact, types of services, community they serve, and any other notes.
- Collaborate together to improve services, referral process, and partnerships to support survivors.
- Promote the creation of innovative education and job opportunities. This should include internships that can lead to employment, apprenticeships, job shadowing; work study, self-employment, and cooperatives.

Consider the practices below and assess what is offered internally, externally, current collaborations, and gaps or opportunities to build new partnerships for referrals and improve services. Also think about programs outside of your community to address gaps, including programs that are not in your community that you can connect with virtually.

Resource Mapping Assessment

Economic Empowerment Practices	We offer these services	Offered by community	Gaps
Financial Literacy			
Trauma-informed readiness, stress management			
Culturally accessible resources, multiple languages			
Financial counseling, access to bank accounts, credit building			
Digital literacy			
Other:			
Employment Services			
Career exploration and counseling			
Job and vocational training			
Experience building, internships, leadership opportunities			
Skill building, basic job readiness			
Entrepreneurship, micro-enterprise program			
Cooperative program			
Employment retention, quality job opportunity and sustainability			
Other:			
Asset Building			
Match saving programs			
Micro-loans			
Flexible funding			
Other:			
Other:			
Crisis response advocacy			
Medical services referral			
Mental health			
Legal services			

Resources:

- [Community Asset Map](#): Tool to identify community resources and potential partnerships
- [Community Asset Mapping](#): Overview resource
- [Community Resource Mapping Toolkit to Support Survivors Through Collaboration](#)



8. Considerations for Successful Collaboration

Supporting survivors through collaboration needs to be strategic and thoughtful. It's helpful to schedule in-person or virtual meetings with potential partner agencies so you can see first-hand where you will make referrals to and the quality of services provided. Ask about the different types of services they offer, explain your role in supporting survivors, and discuss referral protocols that will address any confidentiality concerns.

Reach out to businesses in the community to inform them about your services and the possible collaboration in connecting survivors with employment opportunities. Ask them about their current and future workforce needs. Additionally, identify individuals within specific businesses that are interested in providing employment support for survivors and also those that can address resource gaps. Consider: key individuals, representatives with decision making authority or influence, deans at colleges, counselors, business owners, employers, people that can teach skills voluntarily, faith-based groups, teachers, and possible mentors. Each individual can have a different role in supporting the economic empowerment of survivors.

Resources to support with outreach to business and workforce programs:

- [Workforce Development Board Finder](#)
- [National Association of Workforce Boards Labor Market Data & Trends](#)
- [Empowerment and Employment of Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Business Guide](#)

Strategies to Strengthen Collaborations:

- Cross-train staff on each other's services and visit one another's physical space, if possible. Start working on small projects. Workforce development programs and businesses can benefit from training on human trafficking awareness, needs of survivors and advocacy, civil remedies, and available resources to support survivors.
- Identify a single point of contact within each agency to ensure coordination of services and positive referrals.
- Clarify and define roles and responsibilities. Establish clear expectations about engagement and support for survivors. Include procedures and policies that support survivors with their trauma experience.
- Formalize your partnership. Create protocols for making and receiving referrals. Put together a memorandum of understanding, clarifying roles and confidentiality limitations when exchanging information.
- Create processes to track efficacy and impact for survivors utilizing services.
- Invite workforce development programs to be part of the local or regional anti-human trafficking coalition or task force.

Resources:

- [Partnerships and Pathways to Economic Opportunity for Survivors of Trafficking: A Guide](#)
- [Ten Action Steps: Building and Sustaining Collaborations to Support Trafficking Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, A Toolkit for Advocacy Programs.](#)
- [Collaborating to Help Trafficking Survivors: Emerging Issues and Practice Pointers](#)
- [Centering Racial Equity in Collaboration Self Survey.](#) (*Caminar Latino, FUTURES*)
- [Transformational Collaboration: Considerations to Apply a Racial Equity Lens.](#) (Vera, Caminar Latino)



9. Examples of Economic Empowerment Programs and Collaborations

Safelight is an agency serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Henderson County, North Carolina. They have an internship and job training program to support survivors. These include onsite paid opportunities for survivors in their Dandelion Café, resale store, and Sewing our World Together program, as well as job training, and educational support. Interns work with their job coach to design a clear path to further employment or educational opportunities that will create self-sufficiency. Safelight collaborates with workforce development programs including Community Action Opportunities, Lifeworks Coaching, and Goodwill Foundation. They also collaborate with the local community college, social services, and health care services.

South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking (SBCEHT) provides services in Santa Clara County and San Benito County, California. The SBCEHT mission is to ensure the protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders, and the prevention of human trafficking through effective coordinated partnerships. SBCEHT has made collaboration with workforce development programs to support survivors as one of their priorities. Community Solutions, a SBCEHT member, and FUTURES collaborated to provide training to service providers on economic empowerment for survivors, including the creation of a curriculum on self-sufficiency. Additionally, SBCEHT focused their annual 2022 conference on *“Cultivating Self Sufficiency in the Anti-Trafficking Movement.”* The conference highlights how partnerships can be scaled for collective impact, which is a primary focus of the Coalition. The conference included workshops on economic sustainability framework, cultivating entrepreneurship, cultivating financial independence, workforce development programs, and removing barriers. They also had workshops for survivors of human trafficking on finding a career path, resume building and interviewing skills, financial management, and know your rights in the workplace.

The **Texas Workforce Commission** has been part of the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force for over 12 years. They organize human trafficking awareness trainings for the state's Local Workforce Developments Boards, including in areas that serve significant migrant and seasonal farm workers. The Texas Workforce Commission distributed a letter on [Human Trafficking and the Role of the Local Workforce Development Boards](#). It provides information, guidance, and resources on human trafficking and on the Boards' role in identifying and assisting for human trafficking survivors.

Resources:

- [Pathway to Freedom: How Twelve Organizations are Driving Economic Empowerment through Survivor Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Programs for Increasing Access to Employment Environmental Scan Outline and Brief](#)



10. Concluding Points

Collaboration to support survivors means that you are not alone in your work. Partnerships with employment services programs can support survivors' access to employment and education opportunities. Trauma-informed strategies and connection to resources can empower survivors and build their strengths. Your work to support survivors with economic empowerment builds their resilience and self-sufficiency. Financial independence is key to preventing future victimization and can positively contribute to a survivor's self-esteem. There are tools to help with your advocacy and collaborations listed in this toolkit.

The [Building Collaborative Responses Project](#) provides resources, training and technical assistance to advocates, multidisciplinary teams, and others, as they build collaborative responses to trafficked survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Learn more about how we can support you: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/human-trafficking/>. Contact us: Learning@futureswithoutviolence.org.

The [Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Trafficking \(PEOST\) Training and Technical Assistance Project](#) provides assistance, training, and resources to support partnerships between advocacy services and the workforce development system.

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