Survivors of Trafficking Empowerment Program

Amy Hester, STEP Supervisor
Who is RST?

Founded in 1978, Refugee Services of Texas (RST) is a social-service agency dedicated to providing assistance to refugees, displaced populations, and survivors of human trafficking and violent crimes.
● Refugee Services of Texas (RST) Survivors of Trafficking Empowerment Program was established to assist survivors of trafficking, and other violent crimes throughout their transition to stable and independent lives.

● RST STEP prioritizes a survivor-centered approach that ensures safety, confidentiality, and the well-being of survivors and victims, while recognizing symptoms of trauma and coping mechanisms manifesting in the victim’s life and interactions with service providers.

● RST has 30+ languages represented by staff who provide sensitive, confidential and relevant languages as well as culturally competent case management services.
STEP Statewide

Central Texas counties served:
- Comal
- Hays
- Travis
- Williamson
- Bell
- McLennan (foreign nationals)

Amarillo
Lubbock
Fort Worth & Dallas
Houston
Rio Grande Valley
Austin
Case Study

Jane’s Story
Foreign-Born Survivor of Labor and Sex Trafficking
Common Myths of Human Trafficking
What is Human Trafficking?
3 Elements

**FRAUD =**
Debt bondage, deceitful labor recruitment

**FORCE =**
Violence / threat of violence

**COERCION =**
Emotional manipulation, threat of law enforcement / immigration, threats against family
Human Trafficking in Texas Today

- **Approximately 79,000** minors and youth are victims of sex trafficking in Texas.
- **Approximately 234,000** workers are victims of labor trafficking.
- There are currently **313,000** victims of human trafficking in Texas.
- Traffickers exploit **$600 million** from victims of labor trafficking in Texas.
- Minor and youth sex trafficking costs the state of Texas **$6.6 billion**.
Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors

Traffickers often exploit vulnerabilities as a recruitment tactic. Those at risk can have any of the following backgrounds/experiences:

- Food Insecurity
- Homelessness/Housing Insecurity
- Isolation
- Domestic/Family Violence
- Child Abuse/Neglect
- Unemployment
- Poverty
- Victim Criminalization

Refugees/Immigrants can have additional risk factors:

- No documents
- Language barrier
- Lack of knowledge of rights (employment & immigration)
- Lack of understanding of culture or systems of new country
- Lack of community
- Few resources
Indications in Victims aka Red Flags

- Lack of knowledge of a given community/whereabouts
- Not in control (personal documents)
- Rarely or never alone
- Few to no personal possessions
- Does not speak
- Injuries (Multiple, old & new)
- Signs of Malnourishment
- Branding

- Calls boyfriend “Daddy”
- Minors with items such as two telephones or expensive purses
- No healthcare
- Claims of “just visiting” / in transit
- Inconsistent story
- Behavior changes when law enforcement mentioned
- Repeated, untreated STI’s
- Demeanor may be fearful, anxious, or submissive
Understanding the Mindset

- Victims are coming from a place of being controlled.
  - No freedoms, no independency, fear of defying their abuser.
- Victims often form “trauma bonds” with perpetrators.
  - This can be the biggest obstacle in their recovery and LE identification.
  - One of the primary reasons that victims don’t “walk away” or seek help on their own.
- Trauma can cause fragmented story lines of their victimization.
Barriers to Victim Self-Identification/Review

**Threats of loved ones or co-workers**
- Personal ID or documents Withheld
- Confinement
- Language barriers
- Debt bondage
- Isolation
- False promises
- Fear of Arrest or Deportation

**Distrust of Authority**
- Loyalty of trafficker
- Hopelessness
- Misinformation
- Fear of retaliation
Reporting Human Trafficking

I have seen red flags of human trafficking, but now what?

• Contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) to make a report
  – Call: **1.888.373.7888** OR Text: “BeFree” **233733**
  – Anonymous reporting available

• Make a referral to any of our RST STEP locations
  – Email: **HTReferrals@rstx.org** and request a referral form
  – Complete form and return
  – Site specific case manager will contact you to discuss case

• Connect Survivor to Department of Labor
  – Information about Workers Rights
  – **Wage and Hour Division**
  – Filing for a Wage Claim
PROTECTIONS FOR IMMIGRANT VICTIMS

**T VISA**
- For victims of trafficking
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Up to four years of temporary nonimmigrant status
  2. Work authorization
  3. Federal social services benefits
  4. Ability to apply for permanent status

**VAWA**
- For victims of Domestic Violence married to US citizens or permanent residents
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Protection from removal
  2. Work authorization
  3. Ability to apply for permanent status
  4. Permanent Resident Status for US citizen or lawful permanent resident

**ASYLUM**
- For victims of persecution
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Asylee status
  2. Work authorization
  3. Federal social services benefits

**SIJS**
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status
- For child victims
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Asylee status
  2. Work authorization
  3. Federal social services benefits

**U VISA**
- For victims of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Felonious Assault, Trafficking, Other Serious Crimes
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Up to four years of temporary nonimmigrant status
  2. Work authorization

**CONTINUED PRESENCE**
- For victims of trafficking
- If approved, benefit provided:
  1. Protection from removal
  2. Work authorization
  3. Ability to apply for permanent status

**CONSIDERATIONS**
- Must be in the US on account of the trafficking
- Law enforcement certification is encouraged but not required

**CONSIDERATIONS**
- Qualifying crime must be in the US or have violated US law
- Must have law enforcement certification

**CONSIDERATIONS**
- Victims of a severe form of human trafficking and who may be potential witnesses, or filed a complaint
- Law enforcement support is required

For victim support call 1-888-373-7888 or text INFO or HELP to BeFree (237733)
STEP Services

We assist victims from the point of identification through the process of stabilizing and victim assistance services.

**Point of Contact**
When Victim is identified, LE, Hotline or Community Calls, LE Operations or e-mail JPOs

**Stabilize**
Food, medical, clothes, relocation, basic needs, house visit, CPS report (if needed), court accompaniment, visit in detention center, shelter

**Goal-Setting**
School enrollment, Therapy/Counseling, Housing, Education, Legal, Safety, Justice, Crime Compensation

**Engagement**

**Empowerment**
Continued support, connection to community members, employment, long term housing, survivor community
Case Study

Jane’s Story
Foreign-Born LT & ST Survivor
Additional Resources

Love146: End Child Trafficking and Exploitation (prevention education, survivor care)

Polaris Project (Human Trafficking Response, Data, Research & Policy)

Allies Against Slavery (based in Austin - Community Awareness and Partnerships, Research, Data and Technology)

National Human Trafficking Hotline (Response and Resources/Trainings)

Dept. of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) - Faces of Human Trafficking (OVC is one of STEP’s funders, lots of educational resources)
Questions?

Amy Hester
STEP Supervisor
512.981.6765 - ahester@rstx.org

rstx.org

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