



Freedom Network USA

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

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## ABOUT US

**Freedom Network USA** is a coalition of advocates working to ensure that all survivors of human trafficking have access to justice, safety, and opportunity. Our members work on the ground supporting survivors from coast to coast. We create meaningful change through our advocacy and training efforts that directly touch the lives of those affected. We educate law enforcement, providers, and governments how to meet all of the needs of trafficking survivors, and to prevent the crime from impacting others.

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## NOTE

Thank you to the fearless leaders who have dedicated their lives to eradicating human trafficking and supporting the dreams of all survivors. Many shared their professional perspectives and experiences to inform this paper.

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# INTRODUCTION

Movements that are survivor-led are more effective. While little is known about the impact of survivor leadership in the anti-trafficking movement, research has documented successful outcomes in a wide variety of social justice movements. The anti-trafficking field should have a vested interest in developing the capacity of those with lived-experience. This ensures that anti-trafficking policies are inclusive, services are accessible to all, and survivors have the tools and resources to remain free of exploitation.

Increasingly, the anti-trafficking field is focusing on the development and support of strong survivor leaders. Fueled by efforts of survivor advocates, new opportunities have emerged for their equal, and ethical, inclusion in the movement. While this attention has spurred the development of new programs and curricula, there are still gaps that must be addressed for the survivor leaders to reach their goals in the movement. This paper will explore current leadership development opportunities for survivor advocates in the anti-trafficking field, identify gaps, and make recommendations for future consideration.

To inform this paper, intensive interviews were conducted with those running or participating in survivor leadership initiatives. Each interview was guided by a flexible survey that was designed and conducted by the author. Great care was taken to include a variety of perspectives and approaches; however, interviews were not done with every survivor leadership program in the United States. Additional independent research was done to inform this paper. FNUSA would like to thank all those who contributed, and Humanity United for providing the funding to make this paper possible.

**For clarity for the reader, the following terms have been defined for the purpose of this paper.**

- **Survivor** - Anyone who has experienced any form of human trafficking
- **Survivor movement** - The collection of survivor advocates working in all capacities to address issues related to human trafficking.
- **Survivor advocate** - A survivor who is working on issues related to human trafficking or other crimes.
- **Survivor leader** - A survivor who holds a leadership position within their field or shows leadership to their peers and colleagues. Survivor leaders work in many different fields, including human trafficking.

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# THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING MOVEMENT & SURVIVORS

The modern human trafficking movement emerged in United States in the 1990's. During this time advocates and attorneys were serving crime victims and bringing cases under the anti-peonage laws of the late 19th century. Several high profile cases mobilized activists who eventually caught the attention of lawmakers and led to the passage of the **Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000**. The human trafficking movement continues to be led primarily by nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders, often leaving the voices of those impacted in the shadows.

Survivors of human trafficking have made significant progress in elevating their message and fighting for an equal voice in the movement. Survivor advocates have joined oversight committees, task forces, nonprofit boards, and service providing organizations (as both line staff and organizational founders and leaders) and a host of other platforms to lend their voices on everything from service provision to policy change. Perhaps the most notable being the creation of the **United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking** under the Obama Administration in 2015. This created a formal mechanism for survivor advocates to make recommendations to inform anti-trafficking work and policy efforts at the federal level.

Today survivor advocates engage in anti-trafficking work in a variety of ways. A small number of self-identified survivors are directly employed at anti-trafficking organizations. They serve as attorneys, social workers, program managers, training and outreach directors, leadership staff and in other professional capacities. However, hiring survivors is not a widespread practice and survivors continue to document the lack of full-time employment opportunities available.

Most survivor advocates find entry into the movement as independent consultants. For years, survivors have demanded financial compensation for their expertise. Their advocacy has created countless contracts with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and law enforcement to deliver a limited menu of services. This work primarily falls in three categories: awareness and outreach, program evaluation, and advocacy work. Here you will find several examples of how survivor advocates engage in that work.

## Awareness and Outreach

- Partnering in national awareness campaigns with government agencies, nonprofits, corporations, or law enforcement
- Conducting outreach through training and other speaking engagements
- Working with media outlets to tell their story or draw attention to the issue

## Program Development

- Partnering with local and regional programs to provide feedback on service provision and internal policy
- Act on various types of advisory committees to provide feedback on specific initiatives.
- Work with state and federal training and technical assistance organizations to inform service provision in programs

## Advocacy

- Engaging in direct advocacy through lobby days and meetings with decision-makers
- Identifying policy priorities within networks and organizing meetings, comments, and call-in campaigns to influence decision-makers
- Provide feedback to service providers, government agencies, and others on effective survivor engagement and implementing survivor-led initiatives
- Appointed positions as advisors to local, state, and federal government agencies

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# THE CURRENT STATE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

**Note:** While extensive outreach with existing survivor leadership programs and research informs this paper, this overview cannot include all existing leadership development programs available in the United States.

Several organizations and individuals have developed survivor leadership programs and curriculums. These programs vary in structure, target audience, accessibility and overall training approach. While many have experienced some level of success, most initiatives still report barriers to accomplishing their objectives.

## Survivor Networks

The drivers of the survivor movement are networks. As the conveners, networks are the natural place to cultivate leadership and collaboration. Perhaps the most well-known is the **National Survivor Network (NSN)**, a survivor leadership program of the **Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST)**. Their structure allows for a blended approach, including mentorship and structured programming. Members have access to training opportunities that, while limited, are unmatched. Leaders from the NSN are strongly connected to experts in the movement and are able to access speaking engagements and learning opportunities. Members may participate in, or lead, small working groups as a way to plug into national efforts and gain professional experience. Together, individual survivor advocates in these programs have successfully leveraged limited funding and resources to be offered a seat at the table.

Another notable initiative is the **Survivor Alliance**. Founded in 2017, the organization is completely survivor-led and is working to develop leadership and capacity for consultants internationally. Like NSN, the model includes one-on-one mentorship and formal training curricula. While still in its infancy, executive staff intend to provide a robust list of professional development opportunities for survivors including **Consulting 101**, **Understanding the Human Trafficking Movement**, **Working with the Media**, and **Anti-Trafficking Research**. Although many of these are not fully developed as of this publication, the curriculum could arm survivor advocates with essential tools needed to meet their goals.

## Federal Government Efforts

Several federal government agencies have made financial commitments to support survivor leadership. Many government agencies have established advisory boards or committees to inform specific projects or initiatives. Additionally, both the **Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC)** and the **Office on Trafficking in Persons' National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC)** contract with survivor advocates to deliver training across the United States. Like other professional consultants, survivor advocates are able to define their particular expertise and obtain contracts to deliver requested trainings on those topics across the US.

**The Human Trafficking Leadership Academy (HTLA)**, an exciting new initiative from the Office on Trafficking in Persons, was piloted in 2017. Twelve participants, six survivors and six service providers, from the San Francisco area were selected to participate. The four-month curriculum was developed in partnership with **Coro**, a non-profit that specializes in leadership and collaboration. Participants were provided leadership skills training and then asked to practice those skills while working together on a specific task. Topics included group dynamics and facilitation, how to move a group through collective decision-making, and developing a professional elevator pitch. Participants of the pilot reported positive learning outcomes. The program has continued to its next regional location and new cohort.

## **Individual Survivor Efforts**

Several survivors have started their own organizations and leadership initiatives. Most of these programs operate on a very small scale offering episodic training to small groups, mentorship, or regional programs. However, there are outliers that have broken the mold. Rebecca Bender's work is a great example. **Elevate** is an online training program of the **Rebecca Bender Initiative (RBI)**. The curriculum includes 10 web-based trainings with supporting materials all available to survivors free of cost. The program includes access to a career coach and an online community. It is an excellent opportunity for survivors looking to make the first step as a professional advocate. The program supports Rebecca Bender's consulting work and provides training opportunities to other survivors.

## **Supporting Access to Education**

There are very few initiatives that support leadership through access to education. The **Sun-Gate Foundation**, as an example, is a survivor-led organization that grants scholarships to survivors to cover educational expenses. Survivors can apply for funding for traditional, vocational and certification programs. While funding is extremely limited, survivors cited additional funding for higher education as a huge gap in realizing their professional and personal goals.

## **Worker-Driven Organizing**

While not typically labeled as leadership development programs, much of the grassroots organizing happening in specific labor sectors is creating learning and leadership opportunities for survivors. Organizations like the **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)** and **National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)** are driven by the workers employed in those sectors, many of whom have been victims of exploitation. Participation in campaigns and rallies provide opportunities to workers to engage in advocating for their own rights and protections for themselves and those in their sector. Grassroots organizing has proven to improve working conditions and hold corporations and sectors to meet ethical standards.

## **Job-Training Efforts**

Some empowerment or job-training programs targeting survivors of human trafficking have components of leadership woven throughout. A fantastic example of this is **Mentari**- a survivor-led organization in New York City. The program takes applicants through a culinary job training program that places each individual in a job upon completion. Restaurants across New York City have partnered with Mentari to place participants into direct employment. The program includes a heavy dose of emotional support and professional development that act as leadership development opportunities.

## **Local and Regional Efforts**

Across the country, advocates and survivors are starting their own survivor groups. These are typically comprised of former clients or individuals referred by partner organizations. Most programs provide both emotional support and ad-hoc training opportunities during a recurring monthly or quarterly gathering. While enrollment in most of these programs is very small and consistent, others have a larger and more transient base. While these programs have a more localized impact, often focused on the individual survivors, their work collectively plays a vital role in connecting survivors to anti-trafficking networks and providing support in the early stages of their professional development.

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# GAPS IN SUPPORT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

## Limited Opportunities to Develop Tools and Skills

For most professionals, technical skills are introduced in college. However, higher education is out of reach for many survivors for a variety of reasons including previous criminal histories, poverty, limited English proficiency, interrupted educations, and past trauma. For those who cannot access traditional secondary or higher education, leadership development programs must integrate some of this skill-building to support their success.

The largest gap in survivor leadership development is a lack of professional skill-building. Survivor advocates are already engaged in anti-trafficking work - speaking for public campaigns, conducting program reviews or coordinating policy actions. However, few programs focus on the technical training needed to ensure success in that work. Existing programs have a strong focus on developing skills for outreach and public awareness work, including public speaking and developing a message. However, less training is available on topics like technical writing, successful evaluation techniques, building a campaign, or effective use of policy tactics.

Specifically, regarding policy, very few programs are equipped to cultivate policy champions. Many of the programs mentioned in this paper have presented at least one policy training. However, many are introductory themes around language and the basic functions of government. Organizations like CIW and NDWA provide some experience and practical application in their grassroots policy efforts. However, survivors need much more targeted training in order to successfully advocate for policy change. This must include both skills-based training and leadership development training.

## Focus is on Building Speakers

Larger organizations who offer standardized curriculums tend to focus on skill development for outreach and training. Popular topics offered across organizations include public speaking, developing an individual message or expertise, and navigating media. While these are essential for those engaging in outreach work, programs are missing the opportunity to increase the capacity of those interested in other parts of the movement. Survivors have broad expertise to offer which should not be limited to their trafficking story. Unfortunately, the anti-trafficking movement has, at times, tokenized survivors by only focusing on their trauma story. Survivor advocates have made significant progress on this issue, but leadership development programs have not expanded their curriculum to other types of work.

## One-on-One Mentorship

Many existing programs focus on a one-on-one mentorship model. Survivor advocates with more experience are paired with emerging leaders with similar professional interests. While there are well-documented benefits to personalized support and training, this structure is difficult to evaluate and does not lead to broad impact. Many of the most well-respected and effective leadership development programs still heavily rely on the individual expertise of their members. For example, the NSN has the largest pool of survivor leadership expertise in the country. They have leveraged this through mentorship with some success. However, this emphasis on mentorship has left little capacity to develop and present more structured trainings. This limits the scope of what a survivor can gain to the individual knowledge of their mentor. These mentorship models may not be able to meet the full needs of growing advocates.

## **Capacity**

There are more comprehensive curriculums in development or already available. However, many of these struggle with scarce resources, including financial and human resources. This results in programs that are operational but unable to take risks and innovate for greater impact. All programs interviewed for this paper cited a lack of funding.

## **Accessibility**

While there are agencies spearheading ambitious and innovative programs that are available to survivor advocates, some are grossly inaccessible. OTIP's HTLA (discussed above) is available to only six survivors for each regional cohort. To date, only two cohorts have been able to access the program in two specific regions. The small size and geographic focus results in a program that is out of reach for most.

Other trainings are targeted to a narrow subsection of survivors based on their human trafficking experience. **GEMS' Survivor Leadership Institute**, for example, provides several training opportunities and a safe place to connect with other survivors for support and networking. The program is robust and very well-regarded by many human trafficking advocates. However, it excludes many from participating because it is limited to women and girls who were trafficked in commercial sex. While, this does not negatively reflect on the quality of training, but can exclude important human trafficking perspectives.

Additionally, some programs are inaccessible at a fundamental level. For example, many programs are web-based or are only available in English. These can be barriers that need to be considered to ensure that leadership opportunities are available to a diverse set of survivors.

## **Evaluation**

Finally, many of the current programs and training opportunities do not include an evaluation component. This is true for individual feedback and traditional programmatic evaluations. This could be due to the lack of resources to invest in this area of program management or concerns that critical feedback could harm emerging confidence. Nonetheless, many programs do not have a formal mechanism to provide feedback to either the trainees or the trainers, which can be a missed learning opportunity. Additionally, there is not a mechanism to share this data with other leadership development programs. This makes it very difficult to cultivate best practices.

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## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### **Confronting the Divide**

#### **Desire to Build in Clinical Support**

Survivors of human trafficking may need additional support while engaging in anti-trafficking work. Even the most seasoned leaders can be triggered unexpectedly or experience vicarious trauma in their work. Many survivor leadership program staff reported a lack of funding for clinical services for survivor-trainees.

Survivor advocates involved in leadership cultivation cite an ethical and moral divide among survivors on the sex trade and approaches to address sex trafficking. Like the broader anti-trafficking movement, social and political differences regarding prostitution hinder progress and collaboration. Some survivor leadership program leaders expressed interest in a public discourse around sex work and end-demand tactics as a way to break down these walls.

### **Professional Development Outside of the Movement**

Many of the leadership development programs discussed focus solely on skill-development in the anti-trafficking movement. However, there is an obvious need to support training in other labor sectors. Given the vast experiences of trafficked persons, their professional goals are equally diverse. **AnnieCannons** is a promising example using this model. AnnieCannons delivers coding boot camps to survivors of human trafficking and integrates additional supports to address barriers to participation (e.g. childcare and transportation). While developing employable skills, survivors can build confidence and independence in a supportive environment.

### **Bridging Survivor- and Advocate-led Efforts**

Survivor leaders have spent the better part of a decade fighting for recognition and involvement in the movement. It comes as no surprise that they are skeptical of other stakeholders in the anti-trafficking space. Many have expressed negative experiences at some point with a non-profit organization, law enforcement official, or government agency representative. Unfortunately, there are some anti-trafficking professionals that have not acted in an ethical manner when interacting with survivors. These experiences create distrust that limits collaboration and stifles innovation.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The field has made headway in integrating survivor advocates as equal partners in the anti-trafficking movement. Much of that work has been led by survivor leaders who have made significant contributions through mentorship, training, and advocacy efforts. Despite this, there is much more work to be done to support the development of strong survivor voices in anti-trafficking work and in their individual lives.

### More Funding in Targeted Areas

Additional funding is needed to support technical training and curriculum development, specifically in areas outside of public awareness and outreach. Since survivors are already contracting as policy advocates, skill-development in this area of anti-trafficking work should be a primary focus. Focus on policy support could provide a unique opportunity for large impact. Survivor leaders will continue to be tokenized figures unless they have the space to develop strong professional skill-sets.

### Survivor Leadership Programs Should be Inclusive of all Trafficking Experiences

While specialization in a population can lead to better outcomes for that specific sub-set, it can lead to exclusion of certain experiences. Survivors of all forms of trafficking should have equal opportunity to develop new skills and contribute to the work. Programs should seek to be inclusive, especially of underserved groups, such as males, labor trafficking survivors, and foreign-born survivors.

### Programs Must Explore Partnerships with Leadership Professionals

Survivor leadership programs should seek partnerships with agencies and professionals who have knowledge in the field of leadership development. These transferable skills can help survivors articulate their messages clearly and build strong collaborations. Additionally, these skills will serve them in other facets of their lives.

### Program Evaluation

Evaluation must be a key component to all programs, both on an individual and programmatic level. Survivor leaders interviewed for this paper had a strong appetite for constructive feedback on their work. This is especially true in programs that rely heavily on a mentorship model. Because very little research is available on leadership cultivation with this population, it is essential that programs incorporate evaluation into their work. Those results should be shared with others in the field to allow best practices to emerge.

### Support Capacity for Mentorship Models

While mentorship models can be helpful, these must be coupled with a strong infrastructure to guide the mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors must have access to professional development resources to support the growth of mentees and programs must have the proper resources to guide the relationship.

### Increase Access to Higher Education

Financial resources must be made available for both traditional education programs and non-traditional certifications, vocational programs, and apprenticeships. These programs allow survivors to develop specialized skill-sets in a field of their choosing.

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