



Freedom Network USA

# Threads of Transformation:

## Moving and Growing Together

2020  
Impact  
Report

**Freedom Network USA is a national alliance of experienced advocates working with survivors of all forms of human trafficking to ensure that trafficked persons have access to justice, safety, and opportunity.**



# About Freedom Network USA

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**Freedom Network USA is the nation's largest coalition working to ensure that trafficked persons have access to justice, safety, and opportunity.**

Our network includes survivors, legal and social service providers, researchers, and expert consultants. Our perspective is derived from the geographic scope and diverse expertise our members bring from working with human trafficking survivors in all forms of labor.





In pace with the rest of the world, 2020 reshaped the nature of our work dramatically. What we prioritized, how we worked, what tools we used, and our expectations of each other were upended. We watched as the communities that are made vulnerable to human trafficking were left to bear the brunt of the ongoing health crisis. Essential workers — who are disproportionately people of color — showed up in the fields, factories, restaurants, and hospitals in unsafe and often crowded conditions; and yet they continued to care for our homes, our elders, and our children with little protection and suffered illness and death in staggering numbers. Immigrants and workers in underground economies, including sex workers, lost their incomes and were then excluded from pandemic relief funds, leaving them with few resources to meet their basic needs. FNUSA worked to realign our efforts to meet those demands.

Like many others, our staff pivoted to remote work and had to navigate competing priorities in our own homes. All the while families lost loved ones and couldn't gather to grieve or celebrate milestones. In response, FNUSA gave our staff more flexibility to take care of themselves and their families with expanded leave and remote work. We invested in new tools to train the field and brought people together to wrestle with new challenges. We also demanded more of ourselves and our community in the quest for racial justice.

Despite everything, 2020 was a year of growth and opportunity for FNUSA. We met the needs of survivors in ways that made sense to them and fit into their lives. Our staff grew two-fold as we welcomed 14 new members into the network. We launched new initiatives and changed the ways we implemented established projects. We leaned on each other and discovered both our individual and collective resilience. And while there is still much ahead, we are better equipped to fight for what we believe in. For that, we are forever grateful to this amazing community.

# 2020: A Year of Uncertainty and Resilience, Movement and Growth

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# Filling the Gaps

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When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, families and individuals across the world faced new challenges. This was certainly true for human trafficking survivors, who were already struggling with the financial, emotional, and legal devastation of trafficking. The federal response through the CARES Act left out many survivors, including undocumented immigrants and those working in

the sex trade. FNUSA knew that without immediate support trafficking survivors would be quickly pushed from precarious survival to homelessness. Survivors who had recently escaped their trafficking situation were unable to access support from closed government offices. Those who had rebuilt their lives were suddenly in real danger of losing the stability they worked so hard to create.

**In response, FNUSA launched the Survivor Relief Fund to lift some of their financial strain during the pandemic. Through our membership, we issued cash payments totaling over \$55,000! That was \$55,000 worth of food, rent, transportation, internet access for virtual learning, and more.**

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**Thank you for giving me this fund, you are the only person that contacted me to offer me help during this pandemic.** Other people or organizations contact me just to ask permission if they can use my story for fundraising purposes. I used the fund to fix my car that was vandalized while it was parked on the street.

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When COVID hit, I lost my job and was caught in the backlog of unemployment applications. I was struggling, again, until I received a grant from the Survivor Relief Fund. With that money, I could buy food and pay my rent. **Now I don't have to remember what it was like to be starved — I can cook my food the way I want!**

# A Policy Reversed

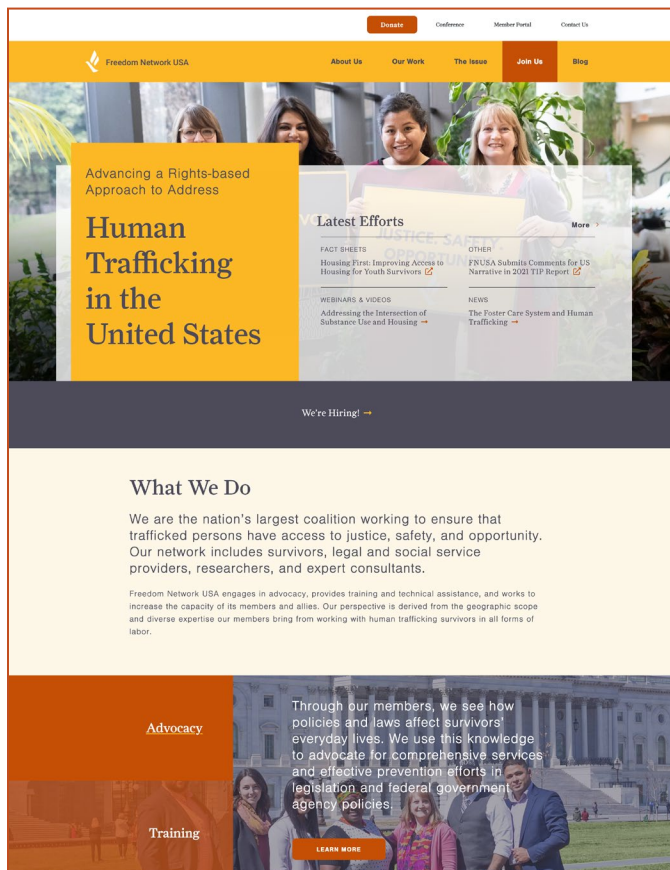
Even in the face of the health crisis, Freedom Network USA continued to speak up – and speak out – against continuing attacks from the Trump Administration. The Administration’s record on everything from immigration to reproductive health access negatively impacted survivors across the US. For the first time ever, FNUSA recommended that the US be downgraded in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Every year the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons at the US State Department releases the report, which is used as the primary tool to engage foreign

governments on the issue of human trafficking. The report ranks countries on a three-tier scale based on their efforts to support survivors and eradicate human trafficking. The US has always given itself a Tier 1 rating (the highest). Survivors and advocates know that protections for survivors were so drastically eroded as to be almost unavailable for immigrants and limited for US Citizens.

**After two years of advocacy, the Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime reversed a harmful policy that reduced access to post-conviction relief for survivors of human trafficking.** Survivors are now permitted to use OVC funds to pay an attorney to help them clear convictions they obtained as a result of their trafficking situation. This was a huge win in an effort to push back against a system that continues to criminalize survivors.

## A Bold New Look

Freedom Network USA proudly launched a **new website** in early 2020. This new site now makes it easier to access **FNUSA’s policy work through a searchable library** and integrate new resources for the Survivor Reentry Project (SRP). **Advocates and survivors can request assistance for criminal record relief and can search for each state’s laws.** The new platform allows FNUSA and its members to seamlessly sound the alarm on harmful policies, access training and technical assistance, and document our overall impact in the field.





# Housing Project

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The FNTI Housing Training and Technical Assistance Project wrapped up its third year of addressing the intersection of housing and human trafficking. In February 2020, the project held a Housing Summit in New Orleans, LA that brought together anti-trafficking programs and community partners to address local challenges and opportunities to house survivors of trafficking. The Housing Summit was well-received and the community identified areas of action to increase collaboration and access to housing. The remaining Housing Summits that were planned for the year had to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**In response to the drastic impact of COVID-19, the Housing Project hosted a seven-part webinar series on the emerging housing needs of survivors.** Topics ranged from how to utilize hotels to house survivors to understanding eviction moratoriums. The project also released a fact sheet on the housing needs and opportunities for survivors in light of the ongoing health crisis. These resources and more can be found on [our resource library](#).

In 2020, the Housing Project began supporting the development of voluntary, person-centered, and trauma-informed policy and procedures for all Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) funded human trafficking housing programs. Through this new effort, FNTI works closely with anti-trafficking programs to ensure that their housing policies and procedures empower survivors of all ages, gender identities, and nationalities.

## Training and Technical Assistance

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FNUSA continues to grow its training arm, the Freedom Network Training Institute (FNTI), to reach more professionals working with human trafficking survivors. As the anti-trafficking field continues to expand and serve survivors of trafficking, the need for training and technical assistance increases as well. With the addition of new staff and capacity, **FNTI trained thousands of professionals in 2020 through virtual trainings** that were both responsive and dynamic. This included transitioning our March 2020 conference into a virtual event in just one week.

FNTI pivoted quickly to convene peer support calls and develop resources that helped providers navigate the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. In addition to responding to the training needs prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the FNTI team placed a special emphasis on ensuring that all training activities and materials are continuously centered on racial diversity and inclusion.

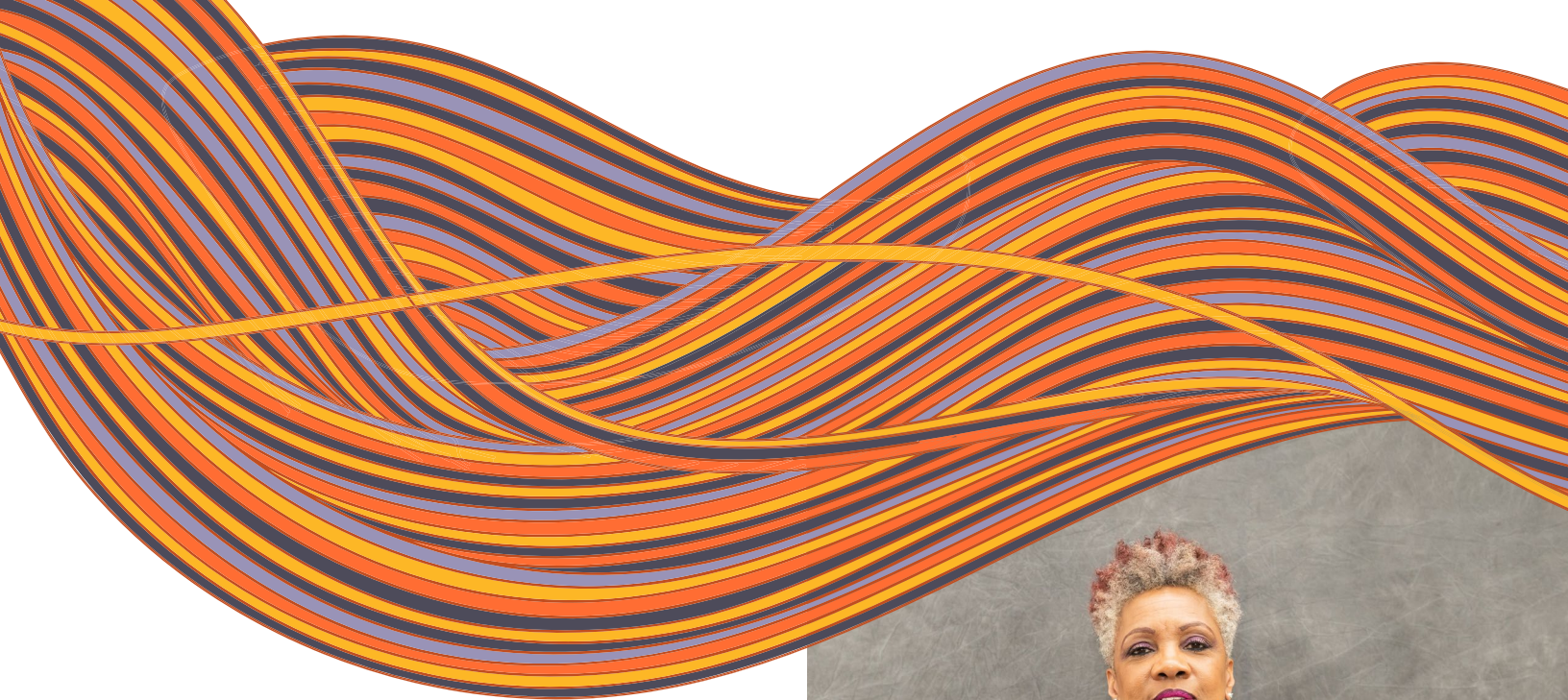
# Building a Movement

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FNUSA is committed to supporting anti-trafficking organizations and advocates that are dedicated to a human rights-based approach. We supported several working groups, including the Race and Human Trafficking Working Group that was established in 2019. This working group undertook an equity assessment of the network's staff and members in 2020. **As racial equity issues rose to the forefront after the murder of George Floyd, FNUSA decided to further invest in this work by hiring an Equity Consultant to strengthen and expand our capacity for this work.**

In order to respond to the evolving needs of our members, the FNUSA provided many opportunities to convene to support one another in navigating the unprecedented challenges of 2020. FNUSA provided member-only webinars on topics including accessing mutual aid networks, using technology in outreach to agricultural workers during the pandemic, and responding to conspiracy theories driven by QAnon.





# Shifting the Narrative

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The dominant human trafficking narrative does not effectively address human trafficking and instead perpetuates and enforces oppressive systems. This framework conflates consensual sex work with sex trafficking, ignores forced labor, denies the agency of sex workers, centers the experiences of cis-white women, and relies on the criminal justice system. This narrative has been highly effective because it harnesses fear and simplifies the trafficking experience for the audience. In fact, it was so effective, the Trump Administration and QAnon used human trafficking as a strategy to recruit followers and strengthen political will for racist policies. It also supports the mass incarceration of immigrants and BIPOC people, including trafficking victims, who are most likely to be arrested in “trafficking stings.”

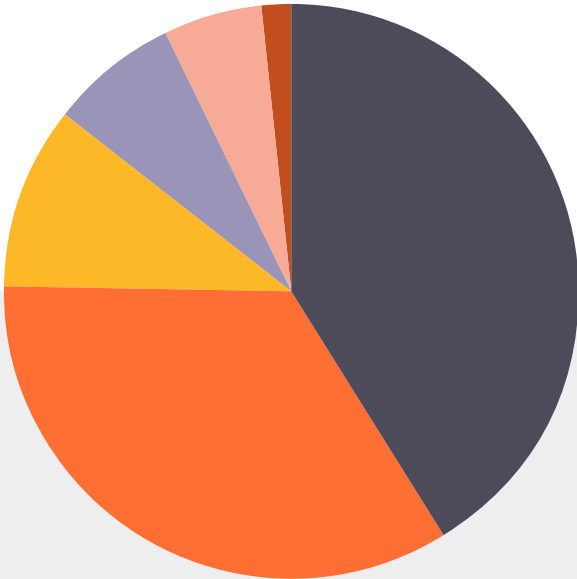


**FNUSA staff participated in the Communications Initiative Advisors Table, hosted by NEO Philanthropy, throughout 2020.** The table brought together a team of advisors who work in a communication capacity in the anti-trafficking field under a shared goal of reframing how different stakeholders understand this issue. The table was charged with developing a new framework grounded in a shared narrative and messages that could be shared with the field. FNUSA will continue this work into 2021 and beyond.



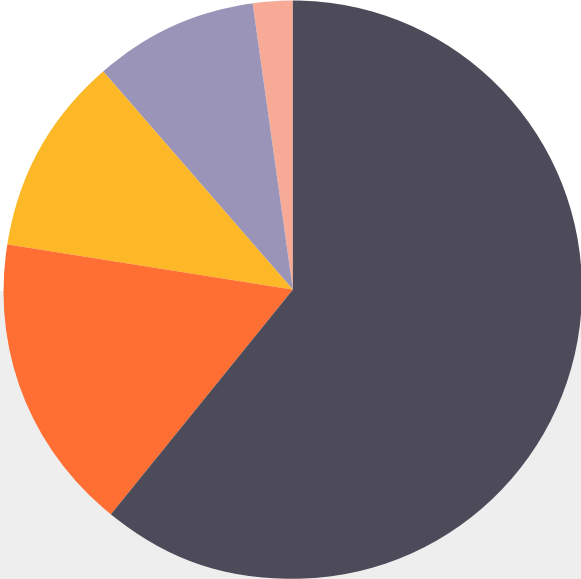
# 2020 Financials

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### Income

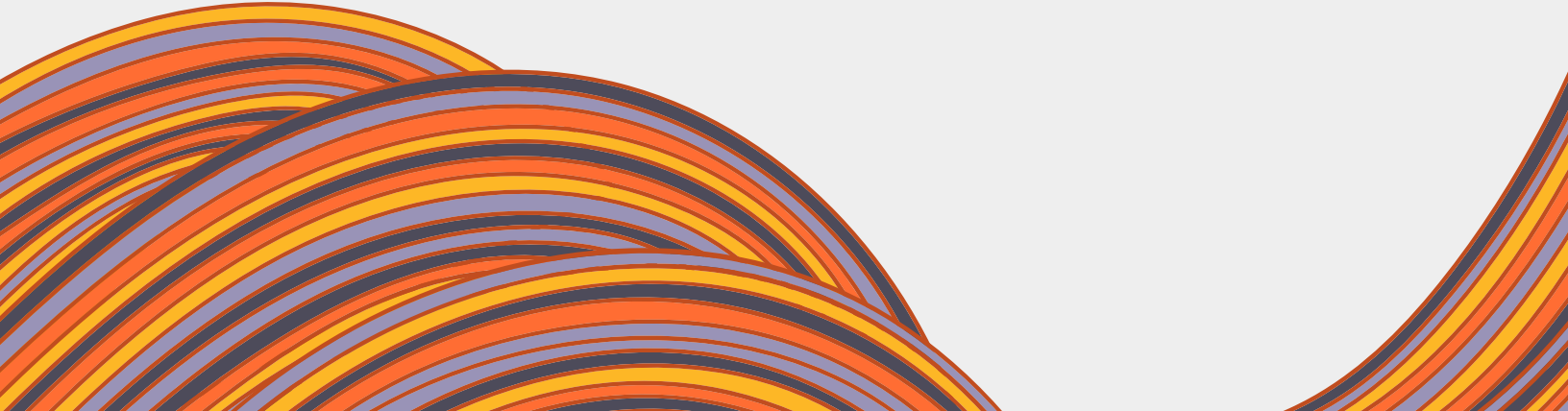
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:darkslategray; margin-right:5px;"></span> Government Grants	\$310,010
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:orange; margin-right:5px;"></span> Foundation Grants	\$255,000
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:yellow; margin-right:5px;"></span> Program Income	\$76,950
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:purple; margin-right:5px;"></span> Individual/Corporate Donations	\$54,272
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:pink; margin-right:5px;"></span> Investment of Previous Income	\$41,537
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:darkred; margin-right:5px;"></span> Other	\$11,732
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$749,501</b>



### Expense

<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:darkslategray; margin-right:5px;"></span> Personnel	\$457,968
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:orange; margin-right:5px;"></span> Contract Services	\$123,489
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:yellow; margin-right:5px;"></span> Operations	\$82,962
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:purple; margin-right:5px;"></span> Program Expense	\$68,646
<span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; background-color:pink; margin-right:5px;"></span> Other	\$16,436
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$749,501</b>

\*Please note these numbers are based on preliminary unaudited financials.



# Our Team

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## Staff

**Jean Bruggeman**  
Executive Director

**Karen Romero**  
Freedom Network  
Training Institute Director

**Melinda Smith**  
Director of Partnerships

**Carrie Eischeid**  
Freedom Network Training  
Institute Project Manager

**Alana Jones**  
Freedom Network Training  
Institute Coordinator

**Tatiana Torres**  
Training Specialist

**Ciara Dacosta-Reyes**  
Training Specialist

**Meg Hughey**  
Resource Specialist

**Julissa Ponce**  
Training Specialist

**Amanda Norwood**  
Operations Assistant

**Haley Epping**  
Communications Intern

**Jillian Drake**  
Social Work Intern

## Board

**Kathleen Morris**  
Chair

**Tammi Hogan**  
Secretary

**Wendy Rhein**  
Director

**Jacqueline Murray**  
Treasurer

**Maria Odom**  
Director

**Keisha Stanford**  
Director

**Rebecca Middleton**  
Director

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