



Housing Needs of Survivors of Trafficking, FAQ Sheet

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.¹

Survivors of human trafficking face obstacles to independence after exiting their trafficking situation. Access to shelter and stable, long-term housing continues to be the hardest part of this process.

Financial Oppression

Poverty is the highest common denominator among persons who are victimized by human trafficking.

Traffickers, through either force, coercion or impersonation, will exploit and/confiscate any available financial resources of victims to include cash, property and credit.

Survivors of human trafficking have little to no financial resources or stability once they exit their trafficking situation and attempt to access shelter/housing.

Criminal Marginalization

Traffickers place victims as a buffer between themselves and law enforcement.

This manifests as victims’ illegal behavior being more visible to law enforcement and victims engaging in observable contact with other victims through communication or transportation.

Victims are compelled into additional illegal actions during trafficking through the same tactics by which they are trafficked: force, fraud and coercion.

Alcohol and drugs are utilized both by traffickers for control and for coping by victims to endure the abuse by their trafficker(s) and the nature of the activities/labor they are forced into.

This abuse of alcohol and drugs within trafficking situations can lead to both illegal actions and long-term struggles with addiction.

Survivors of human trafficking can also have trafficking charges and be on sex offender registries because of actions they were forced to commit during their trafficking.

As a result of the above, survivors of human trafficking can have long and complicated criminal histories, far beyond the expected prostitution and drug related charges.

¹ <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>



Barriers to Access Shelter/Housing

Those applying have not been identified as a survivor of human trafficking and no accommodations or support are offered to help them access shelter/housing or other services.

Agencies serving trafficking victims/survivors are often siloed and not knowledgeable about the shelter and housing options available through various HUD and community programs.

Most human trafficking programs have “clean” drug screening requirements for admission.

If trafficking history is known, survivors can be propositioned to exchange sex acts for shelter/housing.

Persons who are registered sex offenders or have drug-related convictions are not accepted into many shelter/housing programs.

Mothers who have custody of their children are not able to access many shelter options; those with sons over the age of eleven have nearly zero shelter options.

Persons without immigration documents for a T /U-Visa or continuing presence are denied shelter.

Those with limited employment options, either from lack of documentation or criminal background, often must accept jobs with shifts outside of shelter/program curfews.

Persons with bad credit, eviction history or who’s rent is greater than 1/3 of their income cannot be approved for many housing units.

Survivors of trafficking are not typically aware of HUD and community programs they qualify for.

Recommendations for Shelter and Housing Programs

Engage survivors on boards of directors, advisory boards, in staff positions and as volunteers.

Train staff on trauma-informed intake and care, human trafficking and barriers survivors face in accessing safe and affordable housing.

Create informational videos on HUD programs and share with service providers and survivor networks.

Talk to survivors and/or referral source about barriers and create individualized options to successfully access shelter and/or housing.

Support shelter and housing programs in a variety of locations; high crime areas are not a safe option after survivors exit their trafficking situation.

Criminal histories should be considered on a case by case basis, to include understanding of charges related to the trafficking situation and the progress and needs of the survivor at the time of application.

Be flexible, accommodating and recognize that trafficking survivors have many barriers to get approved for housing and those issues are part of what made and keeps them vulnerable to traffickers.