

Path to Freedom

Executive Summary

Survivors of trafficking face significant socioeconomic barriers which require equally significant public policy responses and organizational support. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and other physiological effects of trauma inhibit a survivor's ability to see positive ways forward while economic factors perpetuate the cycle of exploitation. Policy makers, advocates, and organizations can work to make changes that help survivors access economic opportunities. However, these changes take time and survivors of trafficking cannot wait.

In the short term, entrepreneurship provides survivors of trafficking with a viable avenue to secure economic resources for themselves and their families. Entrepreneurship, being one more tool in the toolkit, allows survivors to capitalize on pre-existing aspirations, build confidence, and control their future.

In this report, twelve of the leading non-profit organizations in the country outline a set of best practices for programs that seek to promote entrepreneurship for survivors of trafficking, and individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities.

Leaders Interviewed



Andrew Glazier
CEO
Defy Ventures



Cynthia Luvlee
Founder & Executive Director
Shyne



Iliana Perez
Director of Research &
Entrepreneurship, Immigrants Rising



Jean Bruggeman
Executive Director
Freedom Network USA



Jesús Gerena
CEO
UpTogether



Kofi Kenyatta
Director of Policy & Practice
UpTogether



Laura Hackney
CEO & Co-Founder
AnnieCannons



Olivia Reposa
Survivors to Entrepreneurs Program
Director, Survivor Ventures



Omar Freilla
Founder, Green Worker Cooperatives
Cooperative Development Consultant
& Cofounder, Collective Diaspora



Quenia Abreu
President & CEO
New York Women's Chamber
of Commerce



Samira Cook Gaines
Managing Director of Strategic
Partnerships, Rising Tide Capital



Sarah Gonzalez Bocinski
Program Director, Economic Justice
and Workforce Initiatives
Futures Without Violence



Sandra Diaz
Director of Economic Empowerment
Restore NYC

Highlights from the Report

The purpose of the Path to Freedom report is to share best practices in economic empowerment through survivor entrepreneurship and to call upon policymakers and corporations to remove obstacles for work authorization, while driving further investment into this space. We summarize the insights from twelve leaders building innovative programs that create opportunities for survivors and other marginalized individuals beyond a living wage. The organizations listed in this report received funding through private, federal, and state grants as well as corporate sponsors and private **donations at a range of \$450,000 to \$11.7 million per fiscal year.**

All organizations worked to help survivors and others with intersecting vulnerabilities see their potential as entrepreneurs while using trauma-informed, survivor-centered methods of program delivery.

Organizations partnered with corporations, local and state governments, and private donors to provide business and personal development, legal assistance, funding, and technical training using in-person and online delivery methods to support survivor entrepreneurs.

Actionable Steps for Stakeholders

Call to Corporate: If you can't hire, invest.

- In business startup capital
- In certifications
- In nonprofit organizations

Call to Communities: Become sponsors.

- Form cooperatives and source financing to sponsor projects at a local level for returns that beat inflation and strengthen communities.
- Buy or contract from survivor-owned businesses.

Call to the Industry: Provide skill-building opportunities.

- Create economic empowerment programs through entrepreneurship for survivors to learn and grow within a venture of interest.
- Provide pro-bono services and resources to survivor-owned businesses.

Call to Educators: Provide the necessary tools for success.

- Increase access to livable wage careers through funded certification programs.
 - Provide culturally-informed instructional materials in several languages.
 - Design flexible programs that meet the needs of survivors.
-

Recommendations: Foundations for the Future

Call to Policy Makers (Federal)

- **Amend the Trafficking Victims Protection Act** to expand the ability to file Continued Presence applications at the state, local, and tribal levels of government agencies. These include law enforcement, juvenile justice providers, child welfare agencies, court systems, immigration attorneys, prosecutors, and state-appointed service providers. Appoint a survivor advocate for each jurisdiction.
- **US Citizenship and Immigration Services (UCIS)** to provide immediate work authorization for T-Visa applicants, as processing times for this visa application may take up to 33 months.
- **Gather information on victims of trafficking** over the number of traffickers or cases. Prioritize thorough data collection on the number of Continued Presence applications filed each year.
- **Update FAST program requirements.** Small business loans of \$10,000 for 12-months 0% interest are not accessible to a survivor without a personal credit score readily available for the application process. Support organizations with sponsors to help survivors secure loans.
- **At the state level,** allow entrepreneurs who are survivors of trafficking to obtain required licenses and permits while in the process of receiving immigration relief.