

# Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking



## THE LINK BETWEEN ECONOMIC SECURITY AND SAFETY

Economic insecurity increases an individual's vulnerability to violence and exploitation due to the lack of financial resources needed to meet their most basic needs, such as food and shelter. In fact, abusive individuals specifically seek to control, sabotage, or exploit financial resources to undermine economic opportunities leaving survivors trapped in unsafe relationships with limited options for independence.



**Traffickers target the economically vulnerable** through force, fraud, and coercion luring them with promises of work, shelter, food, and support.<sup>i</sup>



Many trafficking victims **return to their traffickers** due to “sustained unemployment, unpaid debt, and desperation to provide for themselves and their children.”<sup>ii</sup>

Economic security is a means to safety. Access to sustainable employment in quality jobs—those with a living wage, benefits, and workplace protections—is a critical protective factor for survivors as it can reduce vulnerability that comes from financial insecurity, diminish isolation, and help ensure that survivors have the resources and support necessary to seek safety and long-term stability.

Abusive individuals often sabotage education and job training opportunities in order to impede survivors' opportunities to be independent.<sup>iii</sup> Direct efforts to sabotage, coupled with the impacts of trauma, undermine survivors' education, training, and employment success, despite individual capacity and desire. In fact, **survivors who experienced severe psychological abuse were between two and five times more likely to drop out of job training programs, and 60 percent of survivors reported job loss due to the impact of abuse.**<sup>iv</sup>

While the workforce development system is intended to support individuals with complex barriers to employment, a lack of understanding of the dynamics of human trafficking, and environments that are not responsive to the impacts of violence and trauma, often push survivors out of the very programs that hold the key to achieving greater pathways to economic independence. Even when survivors successfully



secure a job, due to the complex and traumatic relationship survivors have with work itself due to their exploitation, they may still experience significant obstacles to maintaining employment.

Recognizing that access to economic independence is a key to safety and recovery, many human trafficking service providers are eager to connect survivors to education and employment through a range of economic empowerment services. While there are some successes on a small scale, most victim service providers lack the capacity, knowledge, and resources to replicate the robustness of our national workforce development system. Collaboration between victim service providers and the workforce development system not only helps connect survivors receiving services to economic opportunities, it helps ensure that all survivors—whether they seek services or not—are more likely to succeed as the workforce development system becomes more trauma-responsive and supportive of the needs of survivors.



## OUR SOLUTION

Futures Without Violence (FUTURES) believes that reducing obstacles that have prevented marginalized communities—particularly Black, Indigenous, and other women of color—from accessing quality education and employment opportunities that offer a pathway to economic security will not only help survivors of human trafficking recover from harm, but also prevent future exploitation by addressing the economic conditions that increase vulnerability to violence, abuse, and exploitation in the first place.

To do this, FUTURES' Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Trafficking (PEOST) Training and Technical Assistance Project engages with victim service providers, workforce development programs, and employers across the country in order to:

- Develop and/or strengthen partnerships between and among victim service providers, educational institutions, workforce development programs, and employers; and
- Build the capacity of victim service and workforce development providers to develop and implement trauma-responsive pathways to improved employment opportunities and outcomes.

The PEOST Project fosters collaboration through one-on-one technical assistance and its free interactive in-person training institute. Participating teams formalize and strengthen their multi-disciplinary partnerships, develop promising practices to address obstacles to accessing and retaining quality job opportunities for survivors, incorporate a trauma-lens and practices that promote resiliency into program design, and create opportunities for survivors to explore and define their immediate employment needs as well as their aspirational career goals. Having refined their collaborative model, teams leave the Institute with a concrete and actionable project implementation plan that is supported by FUTURES through on-going technical assistance and peer mentorship opportunities.

The PEOST Project also provides a range of virtual training opportunities and online resources designed to increase the victim services field's capacity to build sustainable partnerships with the workforce development system.





## OUR IMPACT

Since 2017, the PEOST project has provided training and technical assistance to over 4,100 victim service agencies, workforce development providers, and employers, building sustainable local collaborations and the capacity of these agencies to provide trauma-informed, survivor-centered opportunities for economic empowerment and stability.

- ✓ Developed 12 local victim service/workforce development/employer collaborations across 10 cities/ states;
- ✓ Supported the development and expansion of economic empowerment services at 155 victim service agencies;
- ✓ Provided guides, training tools, and other resources accessible to over 400 Office for Victims of Crime grantees that provide services to over 10,000 survivors of trafficking a year;
- ✓ Hosted 45 trainings and peer learning events for victim service providers and workforce programs.



*"[The Institute] has been one of the most valuable conference experiences I have had! Thank you! We have been able to take our experience and the group activity and implement a workforce empowerment program for survivors (we already picked a date to start!) The passion and dedication of the FUTURES team is so prevalent also."*

- 2019 Institute Participant

*"The support through this series was exactly what I needed. Thanks for this opportunity to learn and share."*

- 2021 Peer Learning Series Participant

*"As an employer, this helped me better understand the challenges faced by the programs we have partnered with."*

- 2019 Institute Participant

*Through collaboration with our team during this conference, we have been able to join multiple agencies in our city in order to create a program to empower survivors within their workforce. Bringing the agencies into the same environment. We have been able to extend more resources to survivors that we may not have been able to do. Thank you so much!!*

- 2019 Institute Participant

*"The [peer learning] series gave me new energy and motivation. It has been very affirming to hear about the similar challenges other programs have faced in doing this work. I've been reminded to be creative and veer from traditional frameworks, even internally. I intend to incorporate some of the ideas inspired by our conversations to do more program planning."*

- 2021 Peer Learning Series Participant





## LOOKING FORWARD

With continued support, FUTURES will work to enhance organizational capacity and build the cross-sector collaborations necessary to ensure that survivors have meaningful access to education and employment opportunities and the necessary supports to build and sustain economic security. This work will center around two pillars—systems alignment and empowerment services.

- (1) **Systems alignment:** FUTURES will continue to foster the development of local collaborations between victim service and workforce development agencies through its training institute. In addition, FUTURES will partner with national workforce development coalitions to develop and promote trauma-informed interventions and tools for the workforce system to ensure survivors are able to succeed.
- (2) **Economic empowerment services:** To help close the gap in services between crisis and job readiness, FUTURES will advance innovative economic empowerment practices to inform the development and implementation of programming designed to address the unique employment obstacles experienced by survivors of human trafficking through training and peer exchange opportunities, training for victim advocates, and a suite of web-based resources.

These strategies will not only support survivors seeking services, but will advance economic justice and stability for all those who face obstacles to economic opportunity due to histories of violence and trauma, helping to reduce vulnerability and promote healing and greater safety.

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Office on Drugs and Crime 2008; U.S. Department of Justice 2017

<sup>ii</sup> Anderson et al., 2003; Polaris Project 2015

<sup>iii</sup> Curcio, 1997; Brush 2003; Borchers et al. 2016; Partners for a Competitive Workforce, 2016; Voth, Schrag & Edmond, 2017; Hess & Del Rosario, 2018

<sup>iv</sup> Brush 2003; Ridley et al., 2005

