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**NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING
TRAINING AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE CENTER**

Human Trafficking Leadership Academy Class 6 Recommendations

How can communities assess and respond to risk factors among migratory families in order to reduce vulnerabilities and prevent labor trafficking?

February 26, 2021

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document was developed by fellows of the 2020–2021 Human Trafficking Leadership Academy (HTLA) Class 6 organized through the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC) and Coro Northern California. Fellows from across the Southwest region of the United States with diverse professional backgrounds and expertise, including survivor leaders, worked together to develop recommendations on how communities can assess and respond to risk factors among migratory families to reduce vulnerabilities and prevent labor trafficking. The fellowship is funded by the Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) in consultation with the Office on Women’s Health (OWH) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The recommendations and content of this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of OTIP, OWH, or HHS.

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INTRODUCTION

Project Question

“How can communities assess and respond to risk factors among migratory families in order to reduce vulnerabilities and prevent labor trafficking?”

As survivors, trainers, attorneys, advocates, policy makers, researchers, therapists, and case managers, the Human Trafficking Leadership Academy 6 (HTLA) fellows convened to examine our individual experiences and seek systemic solutions. Throughout the fellowship, we created a safe place to explore and examine new research, policies, programs, and gaps in services and education. Our goal is to improve responses—long a silent area of concern—and increase awareness, understanding, and assistance to migratory populations that may be at risk of labor trafficking. Our intention is to make this goal a priority both at the national level and in our respective communities.

Recommendations Summary

HTLA Cohort 6 provides the following recommendations

Primary Prevention

1. [Create “know your rights” trainings](#)
2. [Increase funding for requests for proposals](#)
3. [Create a national mandate for posterage](#)
4. [Develop a national campaign on labor trafficking](#)
5. [Use technology and telecommunications to combat labor trafficking](#)
6. [Engage with international stakeholders to promote public awareness of labor trafficking](#)

Secondary Prevention

7. [Process employment authorizations](#)
8. [Conduct safe outreach to undocumented laborers](#)

Tertiary Prevention

9. [Develop community partnerships for labor trafficking awareness](#)
10. [Develop person-level culturally responsive services](#)
11. [Minimize language barriers on resources to survivors of labor trafficking](#)
12. [Shift focus on labor laws to assist migrant laborer](#)

Labor Trafficking Awareness

Although labor trafficking accounts for most human trafficking cases worldwide (International Labour Organization, n.d.), only 2% of human trafficking prosecutions in the United States are labor related (Smith, 2017). The over-representation of sex trafficking in human trafficking research and awareness campaigns (Sweileh, 2018) results in a lack of understanding and knowledge about the occurrence and signs of labor trafficking in the community.

To efficiently train the community to understand, detect, and prevent labor trafficking, an integrative approach to educate and provide resources specific to vulnerable populations from within is necessary

(Zimmerman et al., 2015; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019). Therefore, to help communities assess and respond to risk factors among migratory families, HTLA Class 6 created a series of recommendations to reduce individual and systemic vulnerabilities that will lead to the prevention of labor trafficking.

As our knowledge of trafficking has developed, we learned that exploited labor and individuals trafficked into high-risk, often manual labor exploitation is more prevalent than commercial sexual exploitation. However, this knowledge is not evident in the national dialogue, nor is it prioritized by those who aim to combat human trafficking. We still see media campaigns showing young girls who are bound and gagged. We regularly hear of agencies who say they provide services to individuals who have experienced human trafficking but focus only on sex trafficking. We attend trainings on human trafficking and learn only of “red flags” of sex trafficking in identification processes. Labor trafficking prosecutions have so far proven less successful than sex trafficking prosecutions despite new mandates to identify and respond to labor trafficking crimes in the United States (Farrell et al., 2020).

Labor trafficking awareness is lacking, and laborers continue to be ignored because of this. When we discuss human trafficking, we must ensure that all types are included and not allow for one type and one population to misrepresent all individuals whose experiences need to be heard, understood, and addressed. Individuals who have experienced labor trafficking are just as important as those who have experienced sex trafficking. It’s time to bring labor trafficking to the forefront of the conversation and prioritize it in our efforts to combat human trafficking.

Addressing Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors in 2021

According to a recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) report and Polaris Project data in labor trafficking, migration in and from another country is a key vulnerability of human trafficking (David et al., 2019; Polaris, 2017). Some of the most common risk factors for labor trafficking observed among migratory populations are language barriers, economic instability, poor migration knowledge, low-wage labor or sectors not properly regulated, discrimination, policy gaps, weak networks, no knowledge on human rights, and irregular migration (Zimmerman et al., 2016). In addition, through personal experiences of this cohort, we learned that “machismo,” cultural stigmas, and delay in migratory status can make migratory families more susceptible to labor trafficking or re-victimization.

As we reflect on the year 2020, many people from across the United States are asking themselves one question: “What happened?” In early 2020, the future was bright, and optimism was at an all-time high; however, we quickly realized how vulnerable we were as a country and how fragmented we had become. All of this would be exposed by a pandemic commonly referred to as COVID-19. This extraordinary time forced all Americans to reflect on our individual vulnerabilities and how we react in times of chaos and disaster. Although 2020 was an awakening for many American citizens, documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants living in this country have been vulnerable to one of the darkest exploitations: labor trafficking.

During this unique time, those at risk of labor trafficking experienced unfair burdens, often working frontline jobs as dishwashers, cooks, janitors, farmhands, and housekeepers; often, these individuals were laid off from their jobs and tried to make ends meet. Placed with an unfair burden, they became

bigger risk takers, playing into the hands of labor traffickers looking for ways to exploit others and turn a profit.

Each day, unseen or oblivious to the common family taking their kids to school and going to work is another family that has woken up well before sunrise to get to the field, factory, or street to work an 18-hour shift for merely a few bucks. These individuals may have grown up in or migrated to the United States with a dream of a better life. Due to bureaucratic policies, legal challenges, and machismo, both in the United States and in their countries of origin, they would be preyed on because of their language barriers and lack of knowledge of their individual rights.

Many who may immigrate or seek refuge in the United States come with the pure and good intention of providing for their families — a responsibility that often falls on the shoulders of the man of the house, something that may be referred to as “machismo.” Machismo can be used as both a negative and a positive motivator for individuals to succeed; however, in the world of labor trafficking, those who are perpetrating the crime are exploiting that masculine identity and responsibility to create undue harm. By preying on the machismo of migrants, these perpetrators are forcing people to work in unsafe environments by paying below-market value (if being paid at all) for the work they do while working more hours than are lawful. This type of trafficking typically happens to men working in day construction and farming. With the pride of providing for their families, these victims do not question their lifestyle or the way they live.

It is only after these victims have been exploited to their limit and thrown away as if they are of no value that they are identified by our public health and law enforcement agencies. These victims develop psychological trauma that leads to alcohol intoxication, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and a complete distrust of society. It becomes our responsibility to ask: “How does this happen in our country?” If we fail to address these questions, we will be left picking up the pieces of humanity and asking ourselves: “What happened?”

METHODOLOGY

HTLA Class 6 conducted six leadership and project interviews and researched examples of promising practices across the class members’ experiences and agencies as well as in scientific literature and reports disseminated throughout the field.

In approaching the project question, Class 6 fellows first reviewed definitions of the terms in the question. Many of these terms were defined previously, yet we found gaps in definitions related to victims and survivors of human trafficking, or we discovered that there was no public consensus on the definition. For example, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Head Start use “migrant and seasonal farmworker families” throughout their public-facing materials. However, neither of these HHS program offices has a public definition. Instead, HHS uses some of HRSA’s migrant health and rural health technical assistance providers and other reliable sources to find the following definitions:

- The Rural Health Information Hub uses “migratory and seasonal agricultural workers,” defined in Section 330(g) of the Public Health Services Act.
- The Migrant Clinicians Network uses “migrant/seasonal farmworker” throughout its training materials and resources.

- Finally, IOM defines “migrant” as “an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.”

To account for this, Class 6 fellows created a definition for each term. Some participants used the already defined terms (see above) from organizations such as IOM or HHS, and some participants developed their own definitions based on professional and personal experiences. The class then reviewed all definitions and collaborated to vote (by using leadership tools learned in the fellowship) on the definitions that best represent the population our recommendations aim to impact (See [Definitions Table](#)).

After defining key terms, the class divided into three groups and broke down the project question into three sections of importance to maximize efforts and address all elements of this project question:

1. Addressing vulnerabilities
2. Preventing labor trafficking
3. Addressing migratory families and communities

The three groups reconvened and narrowed the focus of our recommendations through a voting process, and work was delegated to all participants who took part in writing the recommendations in this report.

Three Types of Prevention

In addressing our question, we categorized our response and its recommendations using the public health violence prevention model (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019), comprising three classifications:

- **Primary prevention:** Anti-trafficking efforts that occur before victimization and focus on stopping violence before it happens
- **Secondary prevention:** Anti-trafficking interventions that occur after victimization and focus on identification, short-term or crisis response, and prevention of re-victimization
- **Tertiary prevention:** Anti-trafficking responses that occur after victimization and focus on long-term or lasting needs such as treatment and rehabilitation services

Although efforts combating labor trafficking can be valuable without regard to the pre-existence of violence, we used this framework in developing and presenting our recommendations because we focus on a marginalized population considered both vulnerable to and at high risk of violence.

Definitions

In exploring the project question, standard definitions of terms were needed to clarify the project question and provide guidance for the recommendations. The definitions are as follows:

Labor trafficking	The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services using force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (22 USC § 7102)
Migratory family	<p>A. A family (not defined by bloodline) that moves from a geographical location greater than 50 miles from where they live to find food, shelter, clothing, or employment</p> <p>B. A family that travels from their place of residence to find needed resources or opportunities; can include all or some family members who assist each other in the need to move</p>
Risk factors	<p>A. Factors that increase the likelihood that a person will experience violence or trafficking; although the risk factors don't cause violence, it helps us categorize and take a deeper look at what's causing those vulnerabilities on a societal, communal, relational, and individual level</p> <p>B. An agent or situation known to make an individual or population more susceptible to the development of a specific negative condition</p> <p>Some risk factors in human trafficking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language barriers - Challenges of integrating into new and unfamiliar communities - Anti-immigrant biases - Citizenship - Ignorance of labor laws - LGBTQI+ - Lack of documentation - Poverty - Lack of documentation - Discrimination - Incarceration - Illegal practices by employers and landlords - Restrictive visa regimes (IOM 2017) - Impoverishment - Mental disorder - Restricted geographic and cultural knowledge - Homelessness
Migratory person at risk	An individual experiencing risk factors that requires temporary or ongoing intervention and healing to avoid long-term damaging effects during the individual's flight, experience in a refugee camp, or country of resettlement

Vulnerabilities faced by a migratory person	<p>A. Vulnerabilities faced by migratory families in situations of human trafficking related to their incapacity to respond when absorbing the impact of the trafficking situation and the lack/limitations of access and mobilization of resources</p> <p>B. A condition resulting from how individuals negatively experience the complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors that create the context for their communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinguish between emotional vulnerability and a characteristic; not a weakness but something that someone can take advantage of - Two sides to vulnerability: (1) external — related to exposure to external shocks and stresses and (2) internal — associated with defenselessness, incapacity to cope without damaging losses (Chambers, 1989)
Community	<p>A. A formal or informal group with a shared interest that could be defined by a shared characteristic such as geography, race or ethnicity, a shared medical diagnosis, or a combination of characteristics (e.g., a neighborhood in a city, an online community of individuals affected by cancer, or a racial subgroup in a city)</p> <p>B. A group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings</p>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

HTLA Class 6 is committed to making diversity, inclusion, and above all, equity (DEI) a priority in our recommendations. As a cohort, we seek to both elevate the voices of those who are marginalized in the anti-trafficking movement while advocating to those who need to hear the message more clearly or act in a way that promotes further equity. We aim to provide insight on how to better support those who are vulnerable to labor trafficking and address the risks they face individually and systemically. Our project question presented a broad challenge and asked us to thoughtfully consider what community, vulnerabilities of migrant families, and justice mean to each of us individually and to our communities.

As part of our DEI commitment, our cohort made the conscious decision to avoid using terms like “slavery” and “abolitionist” to refer to human trafficking and exploitation in our recommendations. Although we recognize that this language is broadly used in the anti-trafficking movement, we made this decision for a variety of reasons:

- To acknowledge and affirm that slavery and human trafficking are different experiences that may correlate and have similar themes, but are not the same (National Survivor Network, 2018)

- To move away from the sensationalized narrative of “modern-day slavery,” especially when the phrase is meant to illicit an emotional response and a call to action for certain types of trafficking (e.g., sex trafficking, domestic minor sex trafficking) (Dottridge, 2017)
- To recognize that prison labor — including that of migrants in detention centers — is a legal form of compelled and involuntary labor under the U.S. Constitution (labeled as “slavery”), but abolitionist terminology used in the anti-trafficking movement excludes that reality (Nasr, 2017; Penn State Law Center for Immigrant Rights, 2017)
- To honor enslaved persons’ and abolitionists’ struggles, sacrifices, and journeys; avoid exploiting Black suffering; and acknowledge that we as a country must face and pay reparations for slavery during colonization before conflating language with the prevalent exploitation since industrialism
- To be as clear as possible with our language and to choose to not participate in revisionist history by juxtaposing slavery with human trafficking

RECOMMENDATIONS

HTLA Class 6 has diverse expertise in the fields of social work, victim services, medicine, law, research, and more. These diverse experiences and expertise, along with those of our interview guests and those with lived experience, guided us along the way and led us to the following recommendations in the three areas of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

PRIMARY PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of primary prevention is to develop and change attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge while promoting safety and empowerment so that vulnerabilities are not exploited, and trafficking does not occur. The recommendation topics in this section include “know your rights” trainings, public awareness campaign funding, mandated anti-trafficking postering, national public awareness campaigns, technology and telecommunications, and engagement in the international community.

1. Create “Know Your Rights” Trainings

HTLA Class 6 recommends creating “know your rights” (KYR) trainings to be developed by HHS. These trainings can be developed in existing worker centers/job placement centers and community organizations that will use their federal funds to create trainings (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). Labor exploitation occurs when an employer benefits illegally from someone’s work and/or through a violation of the labor standards provided by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Unfortunately, some labor exploitation is legal (although unjust) and the lines between legal exploitation, illegal exploitation, and labor trafficking become blurry. Understanding workers’ rights is further complicated by the labor standards outlined by states versus federal laws, employee versus contractors’ rights, and lack of enforcement and weak penalties by state and federal agencies. Workers need to understand how labor laws protect most workers, regardless of immigration status, and they need to know the resources available to them when those protections are violated.

A KYR campaign should help workers understand federal labor laws, pertinent state labor laws, and information about resources that aid with labor violations. KYR campaigns for workers should clarify what a healthy and unhealthy work environment is, including the topics of wage and hour rights, health and safety, harassment, discrimination, and human trafficking. The training should introduce labor trafficking by expanding on the meaning of force, fraud, and coercion as well as bonded labor and involuntary servitude.

Additionally, written and portable resources should be created to complement the KYR training. DOL and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) should provide migrants working in the United States with brochures containing labor laws in English and in victims' respective native languages, as needed. These brochures should break down workers' rights from the Fair Labor Standards Act, child labor laws, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act to provide at port of entry into the United States as well as throughout U.S. international consulates to provide to those applying for immigration to the United States. Individuals need to be directed to a website where they will learn about their labor rights.

Filipino emigrants or those leaving the country to settle permanently or work as contract workers abroad are required to register with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas and attend a pre-departure orientation seminar or peer counseling session. Discussion topics include travel regulations, immigration procedures, cultural differences, settlement concerns, employment and social security concerns, and rights and obligations of Filipino migrants. However, this seminar does not focus on the rights of an employee, how and who to report irregularities, what is acceptable and unacceptable, OSHA regulations, legal practice in a workplace, and breach of contract in the United States. Without this information and knowledge, a worker could possibly fall into abuse and exploitation from their employer and eventually to labor trafficking.

In spring 2017, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University launched a 3-year multidisciplinary initiative to combat human trafficking in the agricultural sector in Texas. The Buffett-McCain Institute Initiative to Combat Modern Slavery was guided by a victim-centered approach to increase victim identification, support investigations, and increase labor trafficking prosecutions through direct outreach. The initiative interacted with about 11,000 workers, empowering them to monitor working conditions and informing them of their workers' rights in confidential and private settings to provide them options for referral to legal aide, social services, or any other type of service they might need. The initiative distributed KYR brochures in both English and Spanish and had a team of bilingual staff.

These resources should be culturally sensitive, have accessible language (not overly technical), include visual graphics, and be provided in a variety of languages. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has extensive KYR campaigns that cover a multitude of different subjects that should be included in KYR trainings. The work of the ACLU is primarily funded through grants and contributions. Local chapters of the ACLU have carried out these KYR campaigns and trainings as well as local organizations and nonprofits predominantly funded through fundraising campaigns, crowd funding, or private foundations to carry out KYR campaigns and training. To ensure accountability for both government agencies and foreign nationals, DOL and USCIS should have a mandate requiring foreign

nationals entering the United States to possess an HHS-approved KYR training certificate from the originating country. The KYR training certificate should be required particularly for working permit visas such as H2A agricultural workers visas, J1 job internship visas, H1B specialty occupation workers visas, H2B nonagricultural workers visas, L1 visas for foreign workers and business owners transferring to the United States, and EB4 religious worker visas.

2. Increase Funding to Raise Awareness for Those Most at Risk

HTLA Class 6 recommends increasing funding opportunities for community-based public awareness campaigns to build awareness and education on labor trafficking in communities with high populations of migrant families. This includes areas around the southern border states through HHS, OTIP, DOL, and/or the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) not only established the federal definition of human trafficking, but also began a tradition on a budgetary ask in which the federal government provided funding for the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of victims and survivors. This federal funding expanded in the last 20 years to provide capacity building and stability for law enforcement and victim service providers alike. As a result, awareness of human trafficking increased and a coordinated response to human trafficking is possible in communities across the nation (Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000). The funding suggested should prioritize survivor engagement and use best practices already supported by OTIP.

Requests for funding proposals (RFPs) should prioritize engagement with individuals with lived experience as well as culturally and regionally specific language, images, and disbursement of campaign materials. These practices are recommended to ethically and accurately develop campaigns to support labor training. Engaging those with lived experience ensures that survivor voices are heard and prioritized for a diversity of experience and expertise of the issue at hand. These campaigns should target vulnerable populations with the intent of preventing labor trafficking from occurring. Public awareness campaigns should assist in dispelling myths and misconceptions about labor trafficking. This work would also include information from the recommendation on KYR campaigns.

RFPs should prioritize funding local organizations with knowledge of human trafficking, labor trafficking, and knowledge of the vulnerabilities faced in their own communities. We recommend that 50% of funds are prioritized for human trafficking specifically address labor trafficking efforts.

Public awareness campaigns can use multiple forms of media, including print media, billboards, social media, radio, television, and other forms.

3. Create a National Mandate for Postering

HTLA Class 6 recommends creating a national mandate for human trafficking posters in workplaces displayed in areas such as exits, entrances, bathroom areas, or any other relevant area of display the employee can have access to. Posters would have culturally and linguistically appropriate imaging and language. In addition, posters would include community resources, local hotline numbers, and the National Human Trafficking Hotline information.

A national mandate for postering would raise the national awareness of labor trafficking and its red flags and signs, preventing individuals from initially being recruited. A national mandate for postering would also provide for access points of assistance for individuals that might be experiencing labor trafficking and prevent additional individuals from being exploited if those cases are prosecuted and the perpetrators are prevented from exploiting other individuals.

In envisioning an effective response to increasing public awareness about labor trafficking, national postering can have tremendous impact in educating the masses about labor trafficking-specific experiences. A leading agent in dismantling labor trafficking has been in the state of California. Passed in 2010, Senate Bill 1193 mandates “specified businesses and other establishments, as of April 1, 2013, to post a notice informing the public and victims of human trafficking of telephone hotline numbers to seek help or report unlawful activity” (Dyle, 2013). Ideally, these businesses would have 8.5 x 11-inch notices near a public entrance or at another location where other similar notices are posted that make it accessible for trafficking victims to access help. Senate Bill 1193 requires posting to be in multiple languages with national and local hotline numbers (Dyle, 2013).

4. Develop a National Campaign on Labor Trafficking

HTLA Class 6 recommends that OTIP develop a national public awareness campaign on labor trafficking to be shared in all 50 states and all U.S. territories and adopted by HHS grantees.

Public awareness campaigns are very successful in bringing information to the general public as well as creating dialogue around specific issues. Education is often the first step in developing systemic change.

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Blue Campaign has been highly effective in raising awareness about human trafficking. The Blue Campaign should be used as a model for a labor trafficking-specific campaign to be produced by HHS.

Even with the success of the Blue Campaign and other forms of national campaigning, no singular initiative focused solely on labor trafficking and producing content specifically to prevent and identify signs of labor trafficking. HTLA Class 6 recommends that agencies such as HHS, OTIP, DHS, USCIS, and DOL to adopt and produce labor trafficking-specific campaigns.

HTLA Class 6 recommends that this campaign is developed alongside individuals with lived experience and adheres to survivor-informed practices (National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center, 2017). It shall also focus on dispelling misconceptions about labor trafficking and promoting worker’s rights. Public awareness campaigns must be culturally appropriate through language and imaging and must include the National Human Trafficking Hotline number for potential victims or those at risk to call and access help.

HTLA Class 6 also recommends developing (1) survivor-led social media campaigns and awareness campaigns in foreign languages to educate others on human trafficking, risks, and vulnerabilities and (2) a network of survivor leaders who are available to provide services for the campaign in all areas where labor trafficking occurs. The U.S. Department of State (DOS) should contact survivors to

collaborate with consulates and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) serving foreign nationals to develop materials for these social media campaigns.

5. Use Technology and Telecommunications to Combat Labor Trafficking

HTLA Class 6 recommends that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and DOS collaborate to promote awareness campaigns both domestically and abroad at airports, local television stations, universities in foreign countries, schools, places of worship, NGOs, clinics, and bus stations. DOS and DOT should encourage telecommunication companies to provide and promote free mobile applications (“apps”) on anti-trafficking to subscribers and collaborate with federal, state, and local agencies to use these apps in the prevention and response to labor trafficking. The apps should be highlighted in human trafficking campaigns such as Human Trafficking Awareness Month, national and local campaign gatherings, symposiums, trainings, and in any form of social media, including television ads.

Anti-trafficking apps are already effective in other countries. The Albanian Prime Minister reported to World Vision that a mobile app to combat human trafficking in Albania was created and launched in 2011 with the help of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Furthermore, Thailand’s Ministry for Social Development and Human Security launched a mobile app in 2019 after being criticized for not doing enough to resolve the increasing human trafficking crimes in the country. The app provided more channels to victims and citizens in reporting potential acts of human trafficking. Thailand, like the United States, is a source and a destination of labor trafficking victims; most of the victims rescued were migrants from Thailand’s neighboring countries.

Mobile apps are effective tools in the prevention and rescue of human trafficking. They are discreet, handy, trustworthy, convenient, and save time for the authorities:

Discreet: Citizens and witnesses use the mobile app once they detect possible human trafficking at any time of the day and anywhere.

Handy: Almost every young adult and older American use mobile phones today.

Trustworthy: Mobile phone apps are a lifeline for the victim to get rescued because they know the report does not solely go to the police but also to other government agencies that are responsible for tackling human trafficking crimes in their region.

Convenient: Mobile phones can be set up to different languages; accordingly, this resolves the communication barrier that hinders victims or witnesses to report the crime in real time.

Timesaving: Some of the apps can send the actual location and place of the crime.

Examples of these existing mobile applications are listed below.

- **TraffickCam:** helps police identify the hotel room used for sex trafficking
- **BAN Human Trafficking:** provides education about human trafficking

- **Free2work:** gives information if you are buying a product that involved human trafficking and monitors manufacturers if their suppliers involve underage workers of forced labor
- **Redlight Traffick App** provides signs and a red flag indication of the victims; recognize, report, recover, release is the main concept of the app
- **The STOP APP:** an international app to report human trafficking activities

6. Engage with International Stakeholders

HTLA Class 6 recommends that DOS develops a collaborative anti-labor trafficking task force at foreign consulates located at the Southwest border of the United States; specifically, this recommendation targets Central American consulates. As reported by the United Nations of High Commissions for Refugees (UNHCR), the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the vulnerabilities of people in the “Northern Triangle,” which include Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The level of lockdowns and restrictions of movement permitted gangs to exert control over food and medicines as well as target people more easily. Furthermore, many have lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic’s economic impact, and violence against women has soared. These events continued to force individuals out of their homes to seek refuge. With the lack of security and basic needs, many of these individuals will migrate to the United States as we have seen through the caravans. In 2020, approximately 515,000 people sought refuge in neighboring countries and more than 300,000 were internally displaced inside the region (USA for UNHCR, n.d.). These displaced migrants are forced to find a means of survival, leaving them open to abuse at the hands of individuals seeking cheap labor.

In this migration, they could become victims to labor trafficking. The vulnerabilities migratory populations face includes lack of stable legal status; lack of basic needs, including shelter; food insecurity; and no access to behavioral or primary health care. These migrants have a long history of trauma in their home country, and many migrate with chronic stress and posttraumatic stress symptoms. These vulnerabilities leave them at risk of exploitation and coercion through manipulation and scare tactics that prey on their lack of basic needs and education. Many migrants do not trust authorities due to corruption they have experienced in their lives. Thus, they are hesitant to ask questions. The consulates for many migrants serve as a place to seek assistance for travel, work, and guidance. The development of the anti-labor trafficking task force by DOS in these consulates would focus on increasing public education via literature, including pamphlets specific to labor trafficking and labor rights. Each time an individual seeks to travel outside their respective countries for work or other needs, they need to be advised of their human rights, labor rights, and resources to call. The anti-labor trafficking task force would also distribute this material to areas that are vulnerable and high risk, including migrant shelters and buses where migrants ride when returning to their home countries.

SECONDARY PREVENTION

Our secondary prevention recommendations are anti-trafficking interventions that occur after victimization and focus on identification, short-term or crisis response, and prevention of revictimization. The goal of secondary prevention is to serve as an immediate response to the needs

of the victim after the trafficking has occurred to assist with their short-term needs and reduce harm or risk of further trafficking. The recommendation topics in this section include employment authorizations and safe outreach to undocumented laborers.

7. Process Employment Authorizations

The right to work is a justified response to the heightened risk of accessing income sources and seeking stability. The need to work is continuous and necessary, including during the time waiting for legal status. HTLA Class 6 recommends that a uniform process for work authorizations is a separate application process from and ahead of the principal immigration benefit requested. This alleviates the vulnerability and risks associated with working without a work authorization that facilitates human trafficking. Providing early access to a work authorization allows immigrants to gain economic stability while they await final approval of their immigration benefit and decreases the vulnerability of falling prey to human trafficking. T visa processing time is estimated to be reviewed and adjudicated within 18.5 to 29 months; through the T visa process, a work authorization is not available during the waiting period (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). This long stretch of time waiting for a response from USCIS and having no work authorization further places the victim of human trafficking at an even greater risk of re-victimization due to their vulnerable state and continued lack of access to economic mobility.

Continued Presence (CP) is an important tool that, in theory, can allow labor trafficking survivors to access work authorization more quickly than an application for a T visa. However, as many advocates know, ICE (the agency that has had authority to approve CP applications) generally has approved CP for fewer than 200 survivors a year, and those numbers have gone down in recent years. Advocates also have noted that law enforcement does not always grant CP at the early stages of investigations, rendering it less effective in addressing immediate stabilization needs. We are aware of efforts to promote greater, prompter utilization of CP, and we support those efforts. However, given the program's history of delayed, limited use, we strongly believe that it is also necessary for USCIS to promptly issue work authorizations to individuals who apply for T- nonimmigrant status within 90 days of applying.

Our strongest recommendations are for agencies to: (1) process employment authorizations as a separate application from the principal immigration benefit being sought; (2) process employment authorizations within 90 days of receipt; (3) issue Social Security numbers concurrently with employment authorizations; and (4) include a KYR labor brochure with every employment authorization document in the individual's native language.

8. Conduct Safe Outreach to Undocumented Laborers

HTLA Class 6 recommends conducting safe outreach to undocumented workers following victimization. One of the largest migrant communities at risk of exploitation are undocumented laborers, or those in informal economics (e.g., tourist visa holders in “under the table” jobs). Outreach and identification in these communities face many barriers and challenges beyond those faced by the general migrant population. Undocumented laborers are revictimized for working without legal status

or in informal jobs. This is further weaponized by traffickers who tell laborers they do not have worker's rights and are therefore criminals themselves who cannot report to law enforcement as they experience victimization.

The criminal justice approach and focus on anti-trafficking efforts following victimization create a barrier to this highly at-risk population because the criminalization of their identities as both undocumented persons and informal laborers furthers the historical disenfranchisement in the community due to not trusting government and law enforcement officials. Identifying and working with undocumented workers and those in informal labor will require local, trusted, accessible, and familiar stakeholders to avoid revictimization.

Workers' centers around the country have a history of forming and developing by, with, and for these laborers in crisis response to these shared experiences of being migrants, vulnerable, at risk, and facing criminalized identities. HTLA Class 6 recommends that HHS provides funding and support for these organizations to specifically develop programming to provide intervention to undocumented laborers to provide education and materials about workers' rights to prevent further revictimization.

TERTIARY PREVENTION

The goal of tertiary prevention is to address long-term needs or consequences of trafficking. Our tertiary prevention recommendations are anti-trafficking responses that occur after victimization and focus on long-term or lasting needs such as treatment and rehabilitation services. The recommendation topics in this section include community partnerships, person-level culturally responsive services, language barriers on resources, accessibility of person-level aid and trauma-informed services, and labor law focus shift.

9. Develop Community Partnerships for Labor Trafficking Awareness

HTLA Class 6 recommends increasing community partnerships dedicated to supporting the strengths of migratory populations by offering culturally sensitive and strengths-based community events that bring public awareness and education to labor trafficking. These efforts would also support in reducing risks this vulnerable population faces in becoming victims to labor trafficking by providing education, community connection, and social support as a means of prevention.

Migratory populations are at high risk of labor trafficking. Some of these risks include recent migration or relocation, being a member of a community that lives in a high crime and high poverty area, being undocumented or having unstable immigration status, being an unaccompanied minor, lack of education, language barriers, and limited health care and mental health access (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.). For communities to reduce the risks of this population, local nonprofits serving these communities should come together to form an anti-labor trafficking task force. An example of a nonprofit that could serve on this partnership is in Houston, TX. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston–Houston is an established nonprofit that serves refugees, trafficking survivors, immigrants, and those who are the most vulnerable in the community. Catholic

Charities offers legal services as well as case management and behavioral health services to its population. YMCA International, also located in Houston, TX, offers similar services to refugees and survivors. Agencies with similar missions should join to form a volunteer-based anti-labor trafficking team with a representative from each of their agencies. This team would consist of a legal, behavioral health, social service, health care, and law enforcement representative.

The anti-labor trafficking team's objective will be to meet quarterly to discuss interagency referrals, services, and labor trafficking in their community. The team will develop community awareness events using educational outreach to focus on labor trafficking awareness. The team will also develop a specific month to dedicate to labor trafficking awareness by bringing together the migratory community in a safe, welcoming, and culturally sensitive manner. These agencies are trusted in the migratory community and have an established network of survivors, leaders, and individuals who speak, look, and share common community and cultural characteristics of the migratory population. Therefore, having these agencies partner to build community outreach efforts for labor trafficking awareness events will facilitate a safe environment where migrants can attend to learn about their legal rights, access health care, gather information and knowledge on mental health, and become familiar with the risks and vulnerabilities that perpetrators use to gain control in labor trafficking. The more the migrant community is educated in a safe, welcoming environment with individuals they trust, the more they will become empowered and grow a connection to a greater community that will reduce risks of isolation and fear of reporting.

The migratory population faces various levels of vulnerabilities that leave them susceptible to victimization in labor trafficking. Some of these vulnerabilities following victimization include fear of law enforcement, mistrust in authority figures (including employers), poverty, single-parent home, food insecurity, lack of transportation, lack of knowledge about their basic human rights and labor rights, lack of social connection, and chronic stress in adjusting to a new country/environment. Due to these compounding vulnerabilities, many migrant populations do not report crime, domestic violence, and child abuse after they have been victimized and often live in a mental state of chronic stress, depression, anxiety, and at times posttraumatic stress disorder. Despite the victimization experienced, they demonstrate strong values and incredible resilience, which includes finding social support in their community, spirituality, and willpower (Lemus-Way & Johanson, 2020).

HTLA Class 6 recommends training community health workers (CHWs) to assist in prevention of re-victimization in communities because they have a close understanding of the community they serve. Research shows that the increasing cohesion in a community develops a sense of belonging, social support, and trust; these elements buffer the negative influences in high-risk communities (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019). CHWs usually share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and life experiences with those who have been victimized (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). CHWs can assist in raising awareness in vulnerable communities by bringing education and information about labor trafficking to individuals, families, and youth who are already engaged in a trusted relationship with the CHW in their area. CHWs can bring information and education where it is needed most, and they can reach victims where they live, eat, play, work, and worship (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Using CHWs as frontline agents of change and awareness in labor trafficking can aid in reaching underserved and vulnerable communities. Ensuring CHWs receive

labor trafficking as ongoing training in their education and certification process is essential for them to understand risks and vulnerabilities in the community members they serve and can lead to assisting in identifying victims. Having CHWs recruit survivor leaders to work or volunteer in the community would also support cultural competence skills and sensitivity in working with victims and vulnerable individuals. CHWs might be known by other names such as *promotores de salud*, coaches, lay health advisors, community health representatives, peer mentors, and peer navigators (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2021).

10. Develop Person-Level Culturally Responsive Services

HTLA Class 6 recommends increasing accessibility of person-level aid and trauma-informed services. Foreign victims of labor trafficking often face a myriad of difficulties when trying to access services. Some of these difficulties include language barriers, lack of trauma-informed care and person-level aid, little to no access to information about U.S. labor laws, and unfamiliarity with resources for legal remedies and victim services in the United States. One way to achieve this is to decrease language barriers on current resources. In addition, materials should be printed in multiple languages and then reviewed and vetted by subject matter experts, particularly experts with lived experience to ensure cultural relevance and application. Ensuring that immigrant victims of labor trafficking service provisions are trauma informed and competent is important because, for labor trafficking victims, receiving trauma-informed services from social service agencies and person-level aid from victim advocates is essential in meeting victims' needs and preventing the exploitation of vulnerabilities. Offering opportunities for personal, educational, and economic advancement can help stabilize victims. Victims are more likely to become economically and personally independent when they obtain an education, gain new job skills, develop life and social skills, learn a new language (if needed), and obtain employment — essential for a victim to reintegrate into society (Bracy et al, 2019).

While knowledge has grown about therapeutic interventions for survivors of sex trafficking, trauma-informed treatment for labor trafficking survivors in literature is nearly nonexistent. The anti-trafficking movement and the academic community should emphasize the unique needs of individuals who have experienced labor trafficking, which sometimes includes individuals who have also experienced sexual abuse and exploitation and seek to develop and evaluate evidence-based practices for trauma recovery (Bracy et al, 2019).

Our strongest recommendations to develop person-level and culturally responsive services are as follows: (1) HHS should expand its reach to migrant victims of trafficking by offering the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) language-accessible programs that address barriers to self-sufficiency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012); (2) OVC should encourage service providers during funding periods to collaborate with agencies that are credible, trauma-informed, and trained in the complex nature of labor trafficking and immigration laws for victims who are migrants; (3) DOL and DOS should focus on combating fraud and abuse of federal visa programs by employers and take legal action against those who abuse these programs; and (4) the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and USCIS should prioritize granting access to the several types of immigration remedies and victim services to facilitate access to life-saving resources and aid. These include the T visa, U visa, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), asylum, Continued Presence, special immigration

juvenile status, and humanitarian relief for children and family members before filing for T visa, as implemented in the TVPA.

11. Minimize Language Barriers on Resources to Survivors of Labor Trafficking

HTLA Class 6 recommends minimizing language barriers on resources to survivors of labor trafficking. Migrants who know little to no English are at a greater risk of being exploited or trafficked than those who are more proficient. Individuals who do not speak English may need interpretation services or access to language classes after they are able to leave their trafficking situation. ORR provides job readiness, employment services, and other programs that address individuals' barriers to self-sufficiency and integration (including interpretation and translation), English-language training, and vocational training (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2020). However, these benefits are not available to all immigrants — they are available only to refugees for up to 60 months from the date of Certification or Eligibility. HTLA Class 6 recommends HHS extend these benefits to include migrant victims of trafficking.

General educational assistance and GED assistance programs should also be made available and accessible by migrant victims of trafficking at immigrant community organizations; adult education centers; community centers (city/neighborhood), local religious settings, libraries, schools, universities and community colleges. Making these programs available and accessible may require migrant victim advocates and social service providers to reach out to the U.S. Department of Education's literacy programs for ESL (English as a second language) courses to determine whether these programs are available to survivors at a lower fee or no fee at all.

12. Shift Focus on Labor Laws to Assist Migrant Laborers

HTLA Class 6 recommends shifting the focus of labor trafficking responses to enhancing labor laws to better assist migrant laborers. Often, when migrant victims of labor trafficking are identified, the focus for first responders and law enforcement officials is to determine if the victim is undocumented. According to Bracy, even when the victims are carrying the proper legal documents, immigration officials hardly look at visa fraud and abuse conducted by the traffickers. Rather than criminalizing victims and deepening their vulnerability to exploitation, DOL in partnership with DOS, should instead focus on combating fraud and abuse of federal visa programs by employers and take legal action against the employers and traffickers who abuse these programs (Bracy et al., 2019).

After migrant victims of labor trafficking are rescued and identified as labor trafficking victims, they should be aided in accordance with the TVPA (TVPA, 2000). Because there is a need for immigration assistance by foreign victims in many cases, ICE should prioritize granting access to the several types of immigration remedies and victim services, including T visa, U visa, VAWA, asylum, Continued Presence, special immigration juvenile status, and humanitarian relief for children and family members before filing for T visa, as implemented in the TVPA.

CONCLUSION

The depth and sincerity of this report reveal the eagerness and ambition of HTLA Class 6 to prevent labor trafficking in our communities. We hope it initiates positive change to not only increase state and federal resources but also to directly save lives. Our fellowship would like to thank and acknowledge the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center and Coro Northern California for the opportunity to collaborate, grow, and support other fellows and for facilitating conversations on our worldly neglect of the tragedy of labor trafficking. We also thank our respective employers for their understanding of our time commitment to this project and our family members and loved ones for all their support as we do this work, we hold so dearly.

APPENDIX A: OUR STORIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

A terrified and often traumatized victim of human trafficking suffers in a dark, hidden, physical, and mental prison of despair, desperately yearning to escape the invisible chain that has trapped their soul. It is the hope and optimism of this group, HTLA Class 6, that we will see a renewed focus in 2021 to care for those victims of labor trafficking and see that we can truly reduce the susceptibilities of those without a voice in our country. The following testimonies are from members of HTLA Class 6. These are their survivor stories:

“Flourishing” by Yuri Guerrero

Broken into a million pieces: scattered, and irreparable. These are some of the words that I can use to express how I felt during my experience with labor trafficking.

Today, I write this testimony freely and in acknowledgment that this freedom of expression did not occur overnight and that it is still being developed through my lifelong journey to healing. Through this freedom of expression and awareness of my own trauma, I hope to one day have the courage to write a book that will have the potential to help others and guide them to heal. In the meantime, I am compelled by my experience as a survivor of labor trafficking to advocate for victims and survivors and educate and empower others to continue fighting against human trafficking.

My experience with labor trafficking began in Mexico and became worse in the United States. How did this happen to me, to my sisters, and my family? My trafficker, a woman who was a U.S. citizen, preyed on and groomed vulnerable children in my community; my sisters and I became her victims. She and her family abused us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They stripped us of our identity, changed our names, beat us, deprived us of food, forced us to work without pay, and controlled everything in our lives. Additionally, my trafficker and her family separated and isolated us from our family.

“Why didn’t you escape sooner?” This is one of the infamous questions that most people ask us. The reality of human trafficking is not what it always seems. Contrary to the public perception and academic findings, my sisters and I did not fall into the trap of Stockholm Syndrome; we did not fall in love with our abuser, nor were we used to being abused and being slaves. In all those 20 plus years, we aimed to survive one day at a time in the best ways we could. We lived in survival mode and trusted our human instincts to guide us at times when we did not have the capacity to think clearly. We were abused daily, our freedom to make choices was taken away from us, and we were deprived of our freedom and basic human rights. As intriguing as it may sound, we did not understand at the time that we were victims of a crime, victims of a severe form of human trafficking.

After we saw a poster in a store about red flags of human trafficking, with the help of an organization, we reported our case and went to court. Unfortunately, my case expired so the crime

went unpunished. However, in one of my sisters' cases, the trafficker received a low sentence. Our trafficking experience was like being hit by a tsunami — it came and did enormous destruction that has lasting effect. We survived the ordeal of slavery/labor trafficking for more than 20 years. My personal journey has been long and difficult; however, I feel full of gratitude to be among the few survivors of this horrible crime that is human trafficking affecting millions of people around the world.

Very few survivors can report the crime. Sometimes they do not know they are victims. Other times, they are not in positions to report the crime. Most of the time, it is other people who recognize the red flags and can seek help for the victims.

Every human being has vulnerabilities and can be victims of a crime. Every survivor story is unique and valuable and, after being physically free, we must deal with all the health issues that took a toll on our being. We have a lot to do to restore our lives: learning new life skills, regaining our identities, learning healthy boundaries, reuniting with family and the community that will help us to become stronger. My sisters and I not only survived; we are flourishing. Our lifelong journey of healing continues every single day. Some days are sunshine, and some are rainy, but every day is a new opportunity to live with the freedom, dignity, and justice that every human being deserves.

My purpose in life is being holistically healthy and physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually strong for my family, my community, and me. Continuing to advocate for victims and survivors, we can thrive, dream, flourish, love, trust, soar, and rebuild our lives after trauma.

“Once Promised the American Dream” by Benz Adriano

My name is Benz Adriano and I am from Palawan, an island in the country of the Philippines. Growing up, I lived a very comfortable life, had high morals and values, was very religious, and respected by my community. Both of my parents were working for the government; my father served as a mayor for 15 years, and my mother worked at the government office. My parents were able to provide for my three younger siblings and me comfortably. My life, however, took an unfortunate turn in the late 2000s. My father had lost his bid in the election and my mother lost her job as well. My family was financially pauperized. Despite being one semester away from my bachelor's degree, I decided to work and became my family's provider. With three younger siblings still in school, I made it my duty to ensure they continued pursuing their dreams and aspirations for education. I found an amazing career working in luxury cruise ships.

In April 2008, I decided to leave my family, my community, and my job in pursuit of a greater job offer in the United States. As a contract employee, my employer promised me a good-paying job with unlimited overtime pay, a comfortable apartment to stay, great health and life insurances, and promotions. I arrived at St. Louis International Airport and was picked up in a van together with nine other Filipinos who I had no idea were employed and coming to the United States for the same employer. The van transported us to Branson, Missouri, in the middle of the night. That very same night we arrived, I was hit with the harsh reality that all those promises my employer

made were not true. In Branson, we were kept in a dingy hotel room where shady people were staying and hanging out. My employer collected thousands of dollars from me to pay back debt from flight tickets, food, transportation, and hotel rooms. He continued to make up debts while I worked for him in order to keep me working for him for free. I was nearly starving and resorted to digging trash cans for food and hunted for leftover food and rotten fruits and vegetables from hotel rooms I was cleaning just to survive and get by. My situation got worse as I was forced to walk miles in cold weather between places I worked and the hotel where I was kept.

From the moment I arrived in the United States, my employer and his partner began brainwashing and coercing me. My employer and his partner also had an associate who served as a lookout and supervised my movements. After a period in Branson, I was transported to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to work at a resort hotel. There, I became really sick multiple times and was not checked into the hospital due to fear instilled in me, being constantly told that I did not have any rights to access care at the hospital by the person who was supervising me. Instead, I was told to keep working each time I felt a little better. Due to bonded debt, I had no way of getting out of the trafficking situation. I was afraid to seek help from law enforcement, and my employer instructed me to never talk about my ordeal — ever.

As you're reading through my survivor story, you might be asking why I keep referring to my employer as "my employer." This is because at the time of my trafficking situation, I did not know I was being trafficked, and I did not know the right terminology and language of what was happening to me. However, for someone who lived a life of a prince and royalty, I knew deep down in me that something was not right. For months, I decided to save money from the tips I earned while cleaning hotel rooms. I purchased a plane ticket to California without my traffickers' knowledge. I wanted to go as far away as I could so my traffickers could not find me.

The night before my flight, I escaped and ran for my life and fled to California the next morning. While in California, I found employment at a home health care facility. Due to vulnerabilities of not knowing anyone, isolation, and in need of money, I found myself trafficked once again. My trafficker in California physically, psychologically, and financially abused me. I was forced to sleep in a garage where I had to use cardboard to protect my back from cold concrete. My trafficker forced me to work 16-18 hours a day, 7 days a week, and shortened my daily nutrition. Additionally, my trafficker did not allow me to leave the facility and coerced me over and over to do things I did not feel like doing.

Before coming to the United States and after arriving, I was ignorant of the labor laws and my fundamental rights as a human being. I was not provided with brochures by the U.S. transportation authorities on how to protect myself and who to report to in situations where I find myself exploited. These were a partial reason as to why I became vulnerable and a target for labor trafficking. In 2016, I finally accepted the fact that I was a labor trafficking victim. With the help of my attorney, I won my case against my trafficker. They were all charged and prosecuted.

My experience of labor trafficking traumatized me, and, at times, I was ashamed of myself. It has forced me to not trust anyone. My trafficking experience has left me suffering mentally and

psychologically. Luckily, I am doing self-care with the help of my psychiatrist and medications — I am doing better each day. I am continuing my education in the United States, and I am a semester away from earning my degree. Aside from my aspiration to earn an education, I dedicate my free time to volunteer and do my internship at the Refugee Services of Texas. I am also a public speaker, using my trafficking experience and ordeal to raise awareness about how cruel, inhumane, painful, and degrading human trafficking is. I am lucky to have escaped it. No one deserves to be treated and manipulated this way. No son of God should be owned like a property by anyone.

I am a thriving labor trafficking survivor.

“My Journey as a Survivor” by Ingrid Guerrero

My sight was lost in the whiteness of the snow; flashes of the memories of all the abuses I had lived were rushing through my mind. One part of me wanted to share my story so others can be rescued and have a second chance in life. The other part of me just wanted to forget, to erase all the pain, to scratch my soul and mind of all those wounds that have not healed, to feel strong, happy, and to feel whole. It was then that I realized that I needed to share my story not as a labor trafficking victim alone, but my journey as a nine-year survivor. The reason for my decision came as a reflection of the need for the community to really understand what labor trafficking is and for us to open our eyes and see the gaps within the system that often makes survivors susceptible for re-victimization.

I was robbed of my childhood, youth, and some part of my adult life. I carry in my soul, mind, and my body the scars and pain of 27 years of psychological, physical, and emotional abuse.

I was freed from my trafficker almost ten years ago. For the first four years, I did not have a clue I had been a victim of human trafficking. I cried for hours and felt an open wound in my heart but did not understand what had happened to me or how to heal. It was not until my sister read and shared information of a human trafficking poster that we realized what happened to us, and one of my sisters decided to reach out to the number provided to ask for help.

Our case was reported to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The following year was another nightmare: I had to revive 27 years of abuse. My body and mind were not prepared for the levels of stress I went through that year, from applying for an infinity of papers to have a legal status to many hours preparing for the prosecution. In August 2016, after a week in court, our trafficker was convicted, or better saying partially convicted; she was never prosecuted for trafficking my sisters due to the statute of limitations.

I wake up every morning wanting to forget what I have been through, wanting to forget that I am still fighting to survive, wanting to forget the uncertainty that I still live in. My journey as a survivor has been hard. I have recognized that my soul gasps for air to breathe. It is not my body, but my soul that needs a break. It is seeking not to no longer fight hard; it needs healing.

It is an honor for me to be able to share my story — but not for people to see me with pity. I have learned that my value as a human being is not in the things I do, the career, or things I possess. However, my courage is in how I treat others, not to abuse power when I have it over another human being, and value the rights of others and treating others in the same way that I want to be treated. The value as a human being is in not blinding them in the quest to have more, more, and more at the expense of another human being to have materialistic things. Beauty comes from the inside and can only be achieved through happiness and health. No money or materialistic things in this world can buy beauty.

I hope my story serves as a testimony to all those who are facing abuse and are robbed of their rights. I hope they understand that no human being in this world, no friends, and no family has the right to steal from them what belongs to them and what they work for and that no one should force them to do anything they do not want to do. I hope they know that all human beings have the same rights of expression and freedom, regardless of social, economic, or socioeconomic statuses.

In these past five months, being part of HTLA Class 6 has empowered me to continue my journey as the voice of all those labor trafficking victims that never had the opportunity to be freed, the voice of all the victims that are still in slavery, and the voice of all those that were able to be freed.

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