

Post-Production FILE

EPISODE 25

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING - A CONVERSATION WITH FREEDOM NETWORK USA
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>> Hello, and welcome to Stories of Transformation, an NRCDV Radio podcast production. Each January in recognition and support for survivors of human trafficking, we acknowledge Human Trafficking Awareness Month. On today's episode, guest host Marium Durrani, our very own NRCDV's Policy Director, discusses the proliferation of human trafficking and resources to those serving victims and survivors.

>> Hello, and thank you for joining me. My name is Marium Durrani. I'm with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. I'm pleased to be the guest host for this special NRCDV Radio episode on human trafficking. Today I'll be speaking to Karen Romero, who is the Freedom Network USA's training director. Thank you, Karen, for joining me today. Let's get straight to the questions.

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>> So I know you're here on behalf of Freedom Network USA. Can you tell us a little bit about what human trafficking is and what are some of the most common misconceptions about trafficking survivors?

>> Yeah, absolutely. First of all, thank you for having me. I think this is a very important topic to talk about. And of course human trafficking, I feel like it's gathered a lot of attention. So I think it's good to really hone in on it and understand a little bit more of what it is. So at its root, it really is a violation of human rights through the exploitation of an individual for economic gain. So the U.S. does have a legal definition through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which has actually been expanded and updated several times after. And it identifies utilizing the means of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of exploiting someone for commercial sex or labor.

So a lot of people have utilized the word or the term modern day slavery to an

equivalent of human trafficking. So really it is taking a person's freedom away and forcing them to be in commercial sex or in forced labor.

And so I know there are many misconceptions. I think some of the ones that we hear the most often -- and I think some of it is portrayed by media or just things that get sensationalized are that human trafficking is sex trafficking, specifically of young girls.

And so although that does happen, it's not the most common. And trafficking really, again, is forced labor and commercial sex. So it can be either/or or both.

It can include forced labor, for example in agriculture, or domestic servitude or restaurant work, hotels. Really it can happen in any industry. And it can happen to people of all genders, all ages, all nationalities.

Another misconception that we hear frequently is that trafficking or human trafficking happens abroad. And the reality is it does happen abroad. It happens all over the world and it also happens here in the United States. So the United States has trafficking in every state, you know, in rural areas, urban areas. So it's important to understand that that happens here and that a person does not need to be moved -- so trafficking does not require movement. Does not require movement from one state to another or movement across an international boundary. A person could actually even be trafficked in their own home. It doesn't require physical movement. So I think that's an important thing to keep in mind.

And then finally, I think something that we also hear often is around traffickers. So a lot of times we think of traffickers being a stranger and kidnapping a person. So again, that can happen. However, most commonly, traffickers are people that are known to the individual, to the survivor. So whether it be a neighbor, a relative, a peer, or just someone that they are familiar with. Most oftentimes people are being recruited, being promised a job. And then once they go into the job and it's usually something that they are exploiting their vulnerability. So if there's a financial need by an individual who may be living in poverty, et cetera, thinking about obtaining a job, that sounds like a great idea. And then when they get to the job, they find out that it's not what they thought at all. And there's a lot of exploitation. But also a lot of control that continues to be in place in order to keep them, you know, in that situation.

So there are many misconceptions. But I think those are some of the top ones that we see.

>> Wow. It sounds like it can be a lot more complicated than I think we might think at face value. Thanks for sharing all of that, Karen, that's really important.

Could you tell us a little bit more about Freedom Network USA and what it is that you guys do?

>> Absolutely. So Freedom Network USA is an anti-trafficking coalition. So we are member based. Which means that we have direct service providers throughout the U.S. And we really work on forwarding and pushing forward a human rights perspective and approach to human trafficking. And that means we are looking at the different circumstances of how a person is trafficked. But also realizing that human trafficking is a

violation of that person's human rights.

So we really want to ensure that we understand that trafficking happens in all -- it can happen to any person. It can -- it can happen in labor and in sex. And so -- or excuse me; it can be labor or sex trafficking. And that every survivor is acknowledged. And every survivor has access to services. So that's extremely important for us as we work in having advocacy work throughout the nation as we see the challenges and policies that may be detrimental to survivors of trafficking. And also potentially heightened vulnerabilities for groups that already are vulnerable to trafficking.

We provide training and technical assistance. So that way we're building up our capacity in the field to respond to these cases. And also really supporting our members and understanding from the ground what those trends are, what the needs are, and how we can best advocate for them.

>> Great, thank you so much. Thank you so much for the important work that you do. So we have just a couple of minutes left. Is there anything else that you think is important for people to know or that you want to share before we wrap up?

>> Yeah, I think, you know, again, human trafficking can seem like a huge concept. I think it is important for especially those service providers and advocates who are already working in the field. Just like a lot of people may not be familiar or may be overwhelmed with what domestic violence means or sexual assault and how to help a survivor from those areas. In the end, it comes to the individual. And it's really about understanding and assessing, what are their needs? And how can we best meet those? And are we -- can we meet those? Does it make sense for us to refer and work in collaboration?

And so I think it's more -- it's really important to look at how we can screen into our program, then screen out. Sometimes with difficult cases or with cases that we feel can be challenging, sometimes it's common to try and make that referral instead of seeing how we can do our piece, do our role, and serve that survivor and then also connect and have another organization work and serve around their area of expertise.

So I think just in the victim services field, I think there is a lot of movement towards that collaboration. And I just see how successful we can be in being able to meet the needs of all survivors. And really thinking about how we can leverage a lot of the resources that already exist. We have great expertise around human trafficking. There's great expertise around domestic violence. And there's great expertise around sexual assault. And we know that there's victimization where a person may experience all the three or two or there may be various levels of trauma that they have endured. And I think when we come together and we're able to work and really start making that -- pushing that movement forward and shifting it to really address the needs of that survivor, I think that's where we can be the most successful. Really centering our services around what it is that they need.

>> Thank you so much, Karen. I think that is phenomenal advice and a really great point to remember. It really just shows that collaboration can really change the way that

services are provided and help survivors get the services that they need in a different way than they might not be able to before.

So what are some of the most immediate needs that trafficking survivors have when they are trying to get out of a situation or when they are seeking safety?

>> Uh-huh, yeah, that's a great question. So really the needs are going to always be very individualized. I think for any survivor of any kind, it really depends on the person. I think there are some commonalities as to what we see the most often. And that's usually housing is the top need. Jobs, just access to jobs. That's also very important. Access to legal services. So that includes immigration, civil legal services. And we can talk more about this. But unfortunately because of the trafficking situation, a lot of survivors are criminal records due to crimes that they were forced to commit during the trafficking situation. So that precludes them from being able to access other options, once they access the situation, such as jobs and housing. So that's very important.

Healthcare is also extremely important. A lot of them have not -- a lot of survivors have not had access to healthcare in a long time. And especially if they were in a trafficking situation, it's likely that they weren't able to access medical care or dental care during the time they were in that situation. Or even potentially before then.

So those are very important in order for them to have a more holistic -- their needs more holistically met and making sure that we are covering all of those.

So I think when a survivor of trafficking exits a situation, it's really important that they be connected with a service provider that can explore those options with them. And allow them to choose what fits the best for them. What it is that they need. And also identify any other potential needs that the survivor may have.

>> Yeah, I think we know that connecting to an advocate can often greatly help survivors of so many different crimes. So I can imagine that it's just the same for trafficking survivors. Something that I want to pull out that you mentioned, you mentioned that immigration ties into both short-term and long-term stability and I think that there is a very big focus on that. It's one of the main things that we hear about in the news and in the media and when service providers are trying to help survivors. But you also mentioned housing as one of the critical needs.

Can you talk about more -- can you talk a little bit more about why that's a critical need for survivors? And what that entails?

>> Yeah, absolutely. So I think for survivors of trafficking, they are in this very unique situation where their housing was determined by the trafficker and by that trafficking situation. So whether they were living onsite, let's say at a factory or whatever that meant, that was always determined by their trafficker. So once that individual, that survivor exits that trafficking situation, they are now left with no place to live. Obviously not having a place to live is a vulnerability in itself where it could potentially lead to trafficking again. Right? Or to other challenges.

And so the challenge for -- around housing is that there's not a lot of human

trafficking specific shelters. And the shelters that do exist, such as homeless shelters, emergency shelters, or domestic violence shelters may not always be accessible to survivors of trafficking or they may not always be the best option. Thinking about the trauma that people and that survivors have endured, it may be a retraumatization.

Thinking about safety for some of them, it really depends on the survivor. So I think that's where housing can be very challenging, especially that immediate access. And really one thing that we've been thinking about is how do we begin to expand that network of resources that exist around housing that we'll be able to create or at least allow survivors to access safe and stable housing that not just looks at the short term but also looks at the long term because they are going to need housing 30 days after their stay? On emergency shelter.

And so for anti-trafficking programs and domestic violence programs, a lot of times we have to think about confidentiality. And that's very critical. It's very important. And I think a lot of times it's really centered around the safety of survivors.

So it's extremely on the same wavelength that anti-trafficking programs are also thinking through.

And as we look at potentially allowing access to a domestic violence shelter or to any type of shelter, it's a thing to keep in mind. It's important for programs to work together ideally beforehand. You know, some domestic violence programs or other types of shelters may already be seeing or have had experience with survivors of trafficking. But it's helpful to start collaborating and start developing those relationships with the anti-trafficking program within your community so that way you know what services that they provide, what services you provide, how you can be a referral to each other. How you can really have a more holistic approach in being able to address those housing needs. And also knowing that there might be survivors that are coming to a domestic violence shelter who may also be survivors of human trafficking. Because we know that trafficking survivors often have multiple traumas or multiple -- or a history of other types of violence. So that is common.

And so really with the housing, we want to really start looking at what can we do definitely immediately because we know it's an immediate need. But also how do we begin to think about accessing long-term solutions that will allow a stable place and a safe place for a survivor that will then, in turn, allow them to access other services and really engage in that long-term healing that they are going to need.

>> Great. I think long-term solutions are where we really need to go for all survivors. So I know you talked about the challenges with housing survivors of trafficking and it sounds like they are complicated. And survivors have so many different needs. But can you talk about some of the solutions that people are undertaking to address the housing challenges? Are there any successful programs that are happening around the country? Anything positive that you can share?

>> Yeah, absolutely. So with challenges I think that they are in addition to all of the immediate housing, as we start to look into longer-term housing, a lot of those options

require a criminal background check or a job history or personal identification. And that can, again, exclude trafficking survivors because oftentimes they will have some sort of criminal history because of the trafficking situation. They won't have a job history. So they won't have paycheck stubs to show or to show that history.

So that also makes -- brings up a challenge. They may not have access to their personal identification because those were taken.

So we have seen some really great solutions as far as working with a landlord. And these are individual anti-trafficking programs that are in the community. And they are making relationships with landlords to really facilitate that process. And facilitate the access of being able to lease out for -- with a unit that wouldn't require that criminal background check, that job history. Or at least they understand why these pieces may not be in place.

And so for the long-term solutions I think what's really exciting is that there are efforts of being able to bridge the gap between what already exists out there for individuals who are homeless or that are experiencing housing instability and for survivors who, by definition, they are homeless. They do have housing instability because they don't have a place to live.

So fortunately there is a really great system and there is a great network. And obviously there's a lot of need out there. But I think what I'm really excited about is that there's that system in place. And if we can begin to communicate with both worlds. If we can begin to bridge that gap. And understanding what resources are out there so we're not trying to recreate something that already exists but really plugging people in to systems that are already in place and can continue to support them around housing, I think that will be really exciting.

So one of the programs we have seen is out of Chicago there's a program Heartland Alliance that has been working with their public housing agency. And through them they have designated some vouchers that allow a person to lease up and have a subsidy on the rent.

So that has been extremely helpful. And also we know that as they have been working through that, there have been challenges as far as being able to lease up. And that's where the landlord relationship comes in.

So I think there is this opportunity to continue to do that work. And to continue to find creative solutions. And for Freedom Network USA, we want a housing, training, and technical assistance project to really look at these questions and to really address and really help bridge that gap of here is what we know is available in the housing world and connect that information to anti-trafficking programs who are experts in the field and who are experts in anti-trafficking. But maybe they don't have the expertise or at least the time to go out and make -- do that research or understand those systems. But if we can provide that to them, then it helps connect those pieces.

So I think that's extremely helpful. And just being able to also learn from other fields, such as the domestic violence field. Understanding some of the work that they have

already done. And also what are the challenges that they face? And what are some of the solutions? Because we may be facing the same thing. And it's helpful to have those lessons learned and be able to -- where the work has already been done -- really learn from it. And really try to utilize it to benefit survivors of trafficking, as well.

>> Great, wow, it sounds like some really exciting, promising practices. And it sounds like some great work that Freedom Network USA is doing.

So we know that there are going to be advocates and service providers who work with trafficking survivors all the time. And as you mentioned at the beginning, others who may just interact with them once or twice. So what are some best practices, tips or general advice that you would give to both of those groups?

>> Yeah; yeah. We know that this is going to come up. And human trafficking I think when somebody hears it who may not be as familiar with it or who may not have worked with either the field or with survivors, it sounds a little overwhelming and a little scary.

So it is -- in the end you are working with an individual who has experienced violence and trauma. Very similar to domestic violence. And yes, they have unique needs. But so does every survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault.

And so really meeting that person where they are at and really getting to understand what their needs are and being able to assess more holistically what those needs and what their wishes are, we very much want to respect the survivors' wishes. And we know sometimes what their wishes or what they want to do may not make sense to us. We may want something different for them. But it's important to understand our role and to share the options that we know are available for them and allow them to choose for themselves.

I think it's also very important to have in place language access. Because for survivors -- and I think this is really for any survivor, it's important for them to be able to communicate in their preferred language.

So being able to have that already in place and allow a person to share their -- whatever it is that they want to share, I think it just facilitates that rapport building and that relationship.

That also being said, with I think any type of violence, sometimes it gets sensationalized. And that definitely happens with human trafficking. And what we try to be very careful about is not sensationalizing human trafficking and definitely not just thinking about a person through what happened to them, through their human trafficking experience, but thinking of them as an individual. And what it is that they need now. And allowing them to share whatever they feel comfortable sharing. And really there are sometimes details that we just don't need. They may be interesting or sometimes we get curious. But we don't need them.

So just allowing and setting that boundary, that safe zone, for survivors to be able to share as much or as little as they want. For some, confidentiality in regards to safety, it's a real concern. So I think it's more safety. Because we want to ensure confidentiality for all.

But you know, there's a spectrum. For some, the trafficker may be in prison. And for some it may be another country or another state. And they may feel safer disclosing or reporting. For others, they may not. And they may have a real concern on disclosing much, you know. And really just understanding that it's about them and although programs do need to have their policies and protocols, we need to understand that those policies and protocols don't always allow for a survivor to feel like they are being heard and the program is trauma informed or centered around the actual name of the survivor. So I think just having that flexibility is extremely, extremely helpful.

And I think lastly I would say it's really important to connect with your local anti-trafficking organization. I think partnerships are extremely helpful for everyone working within a community. So having a partnership in collaboration with an anti-trafficking organization, a domestic violence organization, a sexual assault organization, you know, your housing organization, is really going to allow that safety net to develop. And it will allow for all of those organizations to have a referral network.

And so it's helpful because an individual, a survivor, of trafficking may come to any of those three or four organizations. And they may have once connected to an anti-trafficking organization who can really address trafficking-specific issues. And also they can open up a lot of options for them.

And so by connecting to an anti-trafficking organization, that survivor may have access to a lot of services that would not be available through something other than an anti-trafficking organization. It may be legal services, for example immigration and being able to apply for a T visa if needed, which is specific to survivors of trafficking or being able to start a reunification process for family members or dependents back home where that person or that individual can be reunited with their family member here.

So there's those options. There's also assistance programs that social service providers have access to. That can provide resources and support for food, shelter, clothing, transportation, among other things for those survivors.

And so there's this -- a lot of resources that can be made available. But that connection needs to happen. And so if a program, if a domestic violence program, has that collaboration, has that working relationship, it's easier to be able to make those referrals. An anti-trafficking organization may come into contact with somebody that has a domestic violence incident or experience. So it's good to be able to refer over there. So it just allows for the needs of survivors to be met in a more collaborative way. In a more community-oriented way. And for everyone to bring their expertise and really center around the survivor.

So I think the most important piece that I would share or that I would advocate for is just really having that collaboration. And it starts with a phone call.

Go ahead and look up who your local anti-trafficking organization is. Or make a phone call. Or set up a time to go visit with them. Or just set up a meeting to get to understand what services they provide. And what you provide.

And just have that point of contact available. That can be a great thing to have in

place. Because at some point it's likely that programs, advocates, service providers, will likely come in contact with a survivor of trafficking.

>> Great, thank you so much for all of that phenomenal advice. I think it's going to give people a lot to think about. So I wanted to thank you again for joining us. And I look forward to all of the work that you do and hearing about it and really excited about everything that we learned in our talk today. Thanks so much.

>> Yeah, absolutely. And if people are interested, they can definitely reach out to us and look for us on our Website on freedomnetworkusa.org feel free to reach out and we're happy to connect.

>> Great. And that's freedomnetworkusa.org. Thank you so much for having us again.

>> Thank you so much.

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>> Thank you so much for listening to our broadcast today and to my guest, Karen Romero. I hope you learned something new. I know I certainly did. It has been a great experience being a guest host and I really hope you tune in for our next podcast.

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