



Working with Survivors of Human Trafficking – Lessons I've Learned –

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What We'll Cover:

- ▶ Recap: Ontario's Free Legal Support Program for Victims & Survivors of Human Trafficking
- ▶ Lessons I've learned including:
 - First contact
 - Building the Relationship
 - Maintaining the Relationship
 - Offering Healthy Experiences
 - Understanding Behaviours
 - Working with Barriers
 - Risk & Safety
 - Partnering with Other Supports

Unique to My Experiences

- ▶ Based solely on my experience supporting my clients – not necessarily universal
- ▶ Some lessons unique to aspects of this role – e.g. solicitor/client privilege
- ▶ Learned most of what I know from my clients – what they need from me in order to build a relationship of trust that leads to being able to effectively support them in their journey to escape their trafficking situations.
- ▶ **I DO NOT KNOW IT ALL! (But I do know it's important that I realize this)**
- ▶ Sometimes I do it well
- ▶ Sometimes I've gotten it wrong – e.g. preconceived notions of what a victim of HT looks like, background, language, feelings towards their trafficker, assumptions, music, travel awareness

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Go the extra mile, get creative, think outside the box, meet them where they're at – recognize the uniqueness of HT victims
 - complex trauma, trust issues
 - lack of self worth, disassociation
 - may not self-identify as a victim of human trafficking
 - Few, if any, consistent people in their lives (except trafficker – missing them, trauma bonded, worried about trafficker's future, understand the complexities of their relationship with the trafficker)
 - used to systems (consequences of disclosing – CAS/doctor)
 - could have no supports in place, great supports, or could have supports who aren't informed or provide misinformation

First Contact

- ▶ Start with **Trauma Awareness**
- ▶ Often first connection with any support – prior isolation
- ▶ Immediate needs – they may have no idea
- ▶ Immediate wants – they may have no idea – may have no ability to make a decision
 - what to do with that?
- ▶ Where are they at? What stage? Often hard to gauge

- ▶ **BE NICE...really nice**
- ▶ Explain who you are - what you can offer – safety – a safe relationship
- ▶ In **our** relationship it's ok to change their mind – again and again and again
- ▶ Talk about anything (nails, hair, apps) – what they can talk about, what they want to talk about – or just talk
- ▶ Ask questions – ask first if that's ok (e.g. why they hate police if this comes up – provides insight)

- ▶ IF IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE GETTING NOWHERE – THE SITUATION WILL CONTINUE TO GO DOWNHILL – they'll be back (e.g. jail visit)

Building the Relationship

- ▶ Meaningful – Effective – Trust
- ▶ Look for opportunities to connect (e.g. birthday - BP house)
- ▶ Remember – they often don't self identify – that's a process – as is their feelings for their trafficker (often changing) – **meanwhile trafficker's associates may show up**
- ▶ Humour and self disclosure – responses to humour – you're a real person
 - Self disclosure – does it relate – is their value in it – keep it minimal
- ▶ Covid – watching hearings online
 - You're in their corner
 - You're there to help
- ▶ Driving the bus – because they haven't been → EMPOWERMENT

Maintaining the Relationship

- ▶ It's going to change over time
- ▶ May come a point they don't want to disappoint you or will shut down
- ▶ Ask questions – e.g. extensions (provides insight)

- ▶ **Show up** when you say you're going to
- ▶ Keep Promises – don't overpromise – for burn-out reasons, too
- ▶ Bring skills development to the relationship (daytimer)
- ▶ Know you will be tested

- ▶ They may just shut you out, period – accept that
- ▶ Consider harm reduction strategies and supports

Offering Healthy Experiences

- ▶ Meals out – in a restaurant if possible
- ▶ Plays/events – look for free tickets (impact)
- ▶ Tours, beaches, schools, neighbourhood
- ▶ Strawberries
- ▶ Birthdays – birthday parties
- ▶ When asked for advice – where are the boundaries?

Celebrate small successes

Understanding Behaviours

- ▶ Behaviours may not make sense – but they do
- ▶ Experience with shelter client (chair and walking)
- ▶ Clients dealing with drug addictions – provided by trafficker
- ▶ Sex trade workers – popular and cool
- ▶ Working with clients with developmental delays
- ▶ Working with an autistic clients

- ▶ May have never met the trafficker – only know street name
- ▶ Believing the same story twice – different trafficker
- ▶ A lot won't appear to add up

Working with Barriers

- ▶ Complicated – they believe they’ve lost their “person”
- ▶ Believe they love their trafficker – trauma bond – complex trauma
- ▶ Lies they believe told by their trafficker (jail)
- ▶ Lies the trafficker tells about you (only there because it’s your job)

- ▶ You may be up against everything their trafficker has convinced them to believe – take baby steps – keep building – **be consistent**

- ▶ **Show up** – as much as you can
- ▶ Recognize they can make their own **choices, collaborate, empower**
- ▶ Harm Reduction

Risk & Safety

- ▶ Set boundaries – particularly with safety
- ▶ Careful with cell phones and texting
- ▶ Do not confront trafficker
- ▶ YOU are threatening their livelihood
- ▶ Do not share your personal information
- ▶ Traffickers re-enter lives – the trafficking may start again
- ▶ Traffickers do not want YOU supporting the victim

- ▶ Ensure your supervisors supports your “working outside the box” to meet victims needs

Partnering with Other Supports

- What supports are in place, if any – are they effective?
- What's needed – what's available?
- What's actually available? (transportation, moving, timeline)
- Building a team – coordination - do they want this – will it work?
- How to connect with other supports

- Time wasted connecting to supports that won't actually help
- Accessing other supports that compliment what you can offer
- Don't give out numbers to connect – connect together with them
- Recognize the impact of changing support people in their lives

- Going back to sex work – what's available – Canadian Sex Worker Support Organizations

Contact Information

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