

Faces of Human Trafficking – Then and Now

By Stephanie Pratt

Stephanie has over 30 years of experience in the victim services field. Stephanie currently oversees grants focused on increasing support and assistance for victims/survivors of labor and sex trafficking. She also coordinates the Washington State Task Force Against the Trafficking of Persons, statewide trainings on human trafficking and investigations for law enforcement and prosecutors and participates in state, regional and local coordinated efforts focused on the issue of human trafficking.



Over the past 10 years there has been an evolution. Washington state has seen an increase in awareness of human trafficking. We have also experienced more centering and lifting of the voices of individuals who have experienced labor and sex trafficking, and the rise of more survivor-led programs and activities. Hearing the voices of survivors is critical as we all continue to learn and unlearn. The Faces of Human Trafficking survivors informed service providers, stakeholders and community members about the importance of person-centered support, building trust, the nuances of labor/sex trafficking, and the various strategies traffickers use. These evolving factors have led us to an understanding of the importance of autonomy for victims, meeting the self-determined needs of individuals, and being aware that building trust takes time.

I have heard and learned from many survivors that what they have experienced does not define them. They also speak to the variety of activities that assist with their healing. Healing can be nature walks, art, gathering with others, playing games and sports, beading, drumming and other traditional healing activities. Being culturally, developmentally and linguistically informed and responsive is vital. Additional insights I have gained in moving forward working as a “funder” is the importance of being aware of the unique nuances of labor and sex trafficking, and the importance of person-centered support and assistance. Supporting and requiring a service framework grounded in meeting the self-determined needs of individuals is essential.

Another priority is ensuring that funding is available to support individuals who have experienced labor trafficking. A requirement of all Office of Crime Victims Advocacy grantees that receive funding to support victims of sex trafficking is for their staff members to complete training on labor trafficking. There remains a lack of awareness, resources, services and funding related to labor trafficking.

As I have learned from survivors, one type of trafficking is not more important another. Collaborative efforts are important to support victims/survivors, to learn and evolve, and build trust. Community engagement is vital to share resources, learn about trends, concerns, needs, strengths and more.

One of the most important priorities is being open to learning as well as unlearning regarding both labor trafficking and sex trafficking, intersections, poly-victimization, person-centered approaches, and meeting the self-determined needs of individuals.

My colleagues and I are grateful for those who shared their experiences in the Faces of Human Trafficking project. They have contributed immeasurably to improving the work we do today and seek to advance in the future.