



March 2023

# We Name It So We Can Repair It

Rethinking Harm,  
Accountability, and Repair  
in the Anti-trafficking Sector



## Executive Summary

LIVED AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE  
MOVEMENT-BUILDING WORKING GROUP

# Acknowledgements

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## Recommended citation:

Lived and Professional Experience Movement-Building Working  
Group. *We Name It So We Can Repair It: Rethinking harm,  
accountability, and repair in the anti-trafficking sector, Executive  
Summary*. (2023).

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# Introduction

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In recent years, research and dialogue about best practices for incorporating survivor input into anti-trafficking programming and policies have come to the forefront of work to end human trafficking. Historically, the infrastructure of addressing any form of violence emerged out of the work of impacted people organizing to advocate for their needs.\* For example:

- Early work to eliminate sexual and partner violence emerged from the efforts of survivors finding ways to care for each other. It eventually formalized into nonprofits and government agencies that address sexual and partner violence.
- Early work to end labor exploitation emerged out of worker organizing and the development of unions. This includes a variety of factory and trade workers, as well as farmworker organizing. The Department of Labor emerged in response to demands from the labor movement, which was led by impacted workers.
- The sector that arose to address civil rights and modern anti-racism emerged out of African American grassroots organizing. The NAACP (and eventually the Office on Civil Rights) did not spearhead the movement to address anti-Black racism; rather, those organizations were developed in response to the movement, to advocate for its needs. Still, it took 20 years for the NAACP to have its first Black executive leader.
- While all of these sectors and organizations have struggled at times, they have always been driven by the work of impacted people.\*\*

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\*It is important to note the power funding has to shape how “the work” is done. For example, the powerful activism of movements often leads to the creation of sector structures, but government funding does not fund activism that continues the movements’ work (which often challenges government’s power) and private funding is often guided by the values of the donor rather than the values of the movement. This is a power dynamic that must be acknowledged, especially among sector professionals trying to bridge the movement-sector gaps.

\*\* See: [https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc\\_archives/ncvrvw/2005/pdf/historyofcrime.pdf](https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/ncvrvw/2005/pdf/historyofcrime.pdf) for a more detailed history of the crime victims’ movements.

The modern anti-trafficking sector has not historically had the same responsive relationship with impacted people. In the United States, much of the momentum from the chattel slavery abolition movement has continued through anti-racism activism critiquing oppressive systems and structural racism (such as policing, the prison system, and forced prison labor), but the anti-trafficking sector has historically leveraged these same systems. Such anti-trafficking efforts were developed by people without lived experience, with the stated aim to help people and communities of which they had limited understanding. In the US, much of the modern anti-trafficking approaches echo messaging from the racist White Slave Panic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Abroad, many anti-trafficking efforts are directed and funded by Western nonprofits working in Global South countries, often without regard for the ways in which colonial legacies created the very conditions that allow human trafficking to flourish.

Policy research demonstrates that when anti-violence initiatives and accountability structures are developed largely by people who are not part of the communities they want to help, these initiatives are far less likely to succeed. Further, there is the risk of causing additional harm by using oppressive practices, principles, and messaging to try to “help” people recover from harm they experienced as a result of similar oppressive practices, principles, and messaging. To quote Audre Lorde, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”\* Because colonial intervention to “civilize” indigenous populations created famine, war, and poverty, colonial intervention cannot “fix” those problems; rather, decision-making power must be in the hands of those who are closest to the problems. Because oppressive systems (financial, carceral, housing, etc.) created the conditions of poverty, de facto segregation, mass incarceration, and historical trauma that are now risk factors for human trafficking, those oppressive systems will not themselves “fix” those problems. Radical transformation must be led by the people most directly impacted.

People can do good, be good, and still cause harm. Similarly, the anti-trafficking sector can engage in powerful advocacy, support many victims of human trafficking with essential services and support, and to the survivors who work in its initiatives. While not all survivors have experienced such harm, many have indeed been hurt by anti-trafficking movement that states its aim as supporting and serving survivors. It harms them through prevention strategies that replicate the very stigmas, power dynamics,

*\*Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. p. 110. 2007.

biases, and cultural oppressions that make people vulnerable to violence (including trafficking), or by not speaking out when “bad actors” within the movement do so. It harms them through forced services that don’t meet clients’ needs, or by telling survivors and other clients the service organizations know their needs better than they do. In order to stop causing this harm, we must first understand these actions and many others as harm, fully acknowledge the harm, commit to making repairs, and change our approaches.

We recognize that we are a small number of the many survivors who are working in the movement. As such, we do not reflect the numerous perspectives, needs, and concerns held by all survivors of human trafficking. However, we made intentional choices to increase the diversity of our work. Survivors were selected for our project based on their extensive skills, knowledge, and diverse experiences working in the anti-trafficking sector. These survivors also bring their own identity-based and cultural knowledge, based on their lives as queer and trans survivors; Black, Indigenous, migrant, and Mestizo survivors; survivors of both sex and labor trafficking; survivors who are neurodivergent, disabled, or have chronic illnesses; survivors who have worked in corporate positions, government, philanthropy, nonprofits, and as community organizers and activists.\* Almost all of us work in positions mentoring and supporting newer survivor leaders, and as such we are familiar with the challenges faced by people currently moving into leadership. Additionally, we are drawing on existing research exploring survivors’ experiences of leadership, and by doing so, we expand the perspectives brought into this conversation. Not all of the harms described in this document have been experienced by all survivors nor even all survivors on our project team. However, these harms are common enough that most of us have either experienced them personally, or we know someone who has.

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\*Some individuals prefer person-first language, such as “people with disabilities” or “person with autism.” For a while, this was broadly recommended in social services and advocacy spaces to highlight that all people are people first, and that their humanity isn’t defined by their disabilities, health conditions, or other experiences or identities. Some self-advocates have pushed back on person-first language due to a concern that it downplays the extent to which their identities or experiences impact their daily lives and self-understanding, or that person-first language somehow makes their disabilities or identities feel like something of which to be ashamed. Identity-first language might be worded as “disabled person” or “autistic person.” It is important to always remember that changes in language norms (person-first, identity-first, “survivor,” “victim,” “thrivor”) must always be paired with changes in perceptions and biases to have more-than-superficial impact. It’s always important to follow the lead and language preferences of the person with whom one is speaking. Learn more at: <https://educationonline.ku.edu/community/person-first-vs-identity-first-language>

We recognize that all of us are doing work in the United States; in fact, this working group emerged out of a convening of US-focused anti-trafficking leaders. This document was written specifically with our colleagues in the United States in mind. We cannot write effectively and authoritatively about harms and repairs needed in other regions. We have heard from our global partners that the US's export of its definitions and approaches to trafficking, as well as its models for survivor leadership, have caused harm to communities abroad. This is often the case when Western NGOs and governments establish interventions in Global South countries without strong leadership from local groups closest to the problem and its solutions. For this reason, we caution our global partners from taking this document and modeling global solutions on it. Rather, we present the findings from our own process of research, discovery, and discussion, and we have included an appendix outlining "lessons learned," so that those in other regional contexts who wish to hold similar working groups can conduct their own processes of research, discovery, and discussion. Survivor-centered processes in other regions of the world will likely lead to unique findings and recommendations, which will be far more effective and impactful for the local populations than anything our group could create.

We offer our gratitude to Philippe Sion and our other partners at Humanity United for supporting our project with continued encouragement, a willingness to engage in dialogue, and through financial support.

Finally, we recognize that our readers come from different backgrounds, different levels of familiarity with either grassroots accountability expectations or nonprofit norms, varying degrees of the lived experience of exploitation, and different roles in our sector (funder, executive leadership, direct service provider, or activist). While we hope that this complete resource will be useful and spark an innovative transformation of sector norms, we have provided a full table of contents so that those with limited time or capacity can easily find sections specifically relevant to their work.

View the full report with appendices here: We Name It So We Can Repair It at <https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/harmandrepair/>



# Recommendations

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## 1. Continue this dialogue with your resources & power

Understand this document and our work as starting a broad conversation about harm and repair in our sector, and understand this as a living document, so that we can move the conversation forward rather than repeating the same conversation annually.



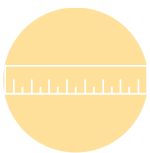
## 2. Decenter yourself as an ally

Being a good ally means decentering yourself. This applies to people in our sector or movement who do not have lived experience of trafficking, as well as to survivors working in our sector or movement who have certain kinds of privilege (white, cisgender, middle class, heterosexual, US-born, survivor of sex trafficking).\*



## 3. Shift funding requirements & expectations

Some funders want to solve a problem, but by offering a “solution” that does not address root causes. For example, advocating for more funding to be poured into universal basic income, supportive community programming (by and for the communities), homelessness and rapid rehousing funds, and refugee/asylee supports would be more likely to produce sustainable results in trafficking prevention than pouring more money into “anti-trafficking.” Consider what funding requirements, restrictions, and expectations exacerbate, rather than repair, the conditions that lead to trafficking.



## 4. Reconsider measurement, evaluation, & impact

Reimagine the way our sector measures impact to reflect the importance of our interventions as investment in communities impacted by human trafficking and mitigation of harm to communities impacted by our interventions. Schedule strategy meetings with survivors to evaluate change, identify current trends and future focus areas, and appropriateness of current standards. Clarify how we define our movement and this work, specifically around “human trafficking” and “modern-day slavery.”





## 5. Directly address harm through prevention, mitigation, & repair

Understand that harm will happen, and this does not mean you or your organization are bad or untrustworthy; the way you prepare for the possibility of harm, prevent it where possible, mitigate it when it is happening, and intentionally make repair can demonstrate integrity, transparency, and trustworthiness.



## 6. Continually invest in survivors along the continuum from initiation of support to the highest levels of leadership

Leadership is a skill, and calling every involvement or engagement of human trafficking survivors “survivor leadership” can create confusion about roles as well as skewed public perceptions of how many survivors are in leadership positions in our sector. Fund and build out promising practices for services and empowerment beyond case management by investing in survivors’ capacity for leadership in and out of our sector. We can do this through professional development programming and ongoing skill-building support.



## 7. Ensure that storytelling or sharing trauma narratives for others is a genuine choice

Offer survivors time to heal and ample spaces to share their story in therapeutic or peer support spaces before inviting survivors to share their trauma narratives in spaces that are not specifically designed and structured to benefit the survivor’s healing. Ensure that a survivor’s choice to share their personal trauma narrative is made from good options, and not out of a sense of obligation or economic necessity. Develop survivors’ strategic storytelling skills so that they can shape the story to their strategic outcomes, rather than feeling compelled to frame the story according to your shaping and your outcomes. Adequately prepare survivors for the unintended and often unexpected impacts of publicly sharing their narratives.



## 8. Provide protections for when a survivor's image & story are their livelihood

To ensure each survivor fully owns their story and likeness, include appropriate compensation and revocation protocols with every contract where a survivor's story or likeness is used.



# Causing Harm

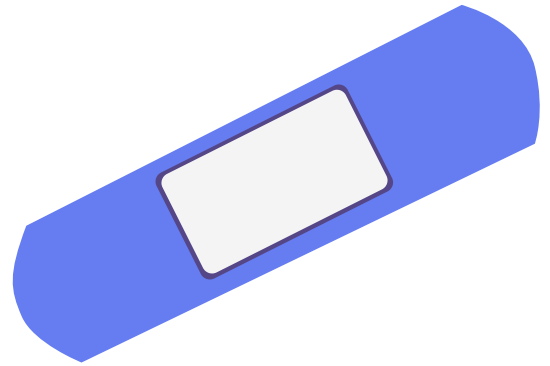
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Hurt, harm, and abuse can be caused by individuals, families, collectives, or organizations against other individuals, families, collectives, or organizations.

Please see the table on the next page explaining the differences between hurt, harm, and abuse in their underlying intentions, manifest patterns, and impacts, as well as examples of each.

A certain degree of hurt is normal and unavoidable in all interpersonal and organizational interactions. Some anti-trafficking leaders and organizations have harmed survivor participants or clients and leaders in ways that rise to the level of abuse or exploitation. Even in these extreme cases, though, changes in the broader anti-trafficking sector could reduce the normalization of harm and help ensure accountability across the sector.

When organizations model accountability for harm, it normalizes the practice of acknowledging that harm has happened and making an intentional repair. This transforms the conditions that allow unacknowledged, unchecked harm become abusive.



## A note on learning about having caused harm

**It can be challenging for any of us to hear that practices we have implemented, supported, or funded have caused grievous harm to the very people our organizations exist to empower and heal.**

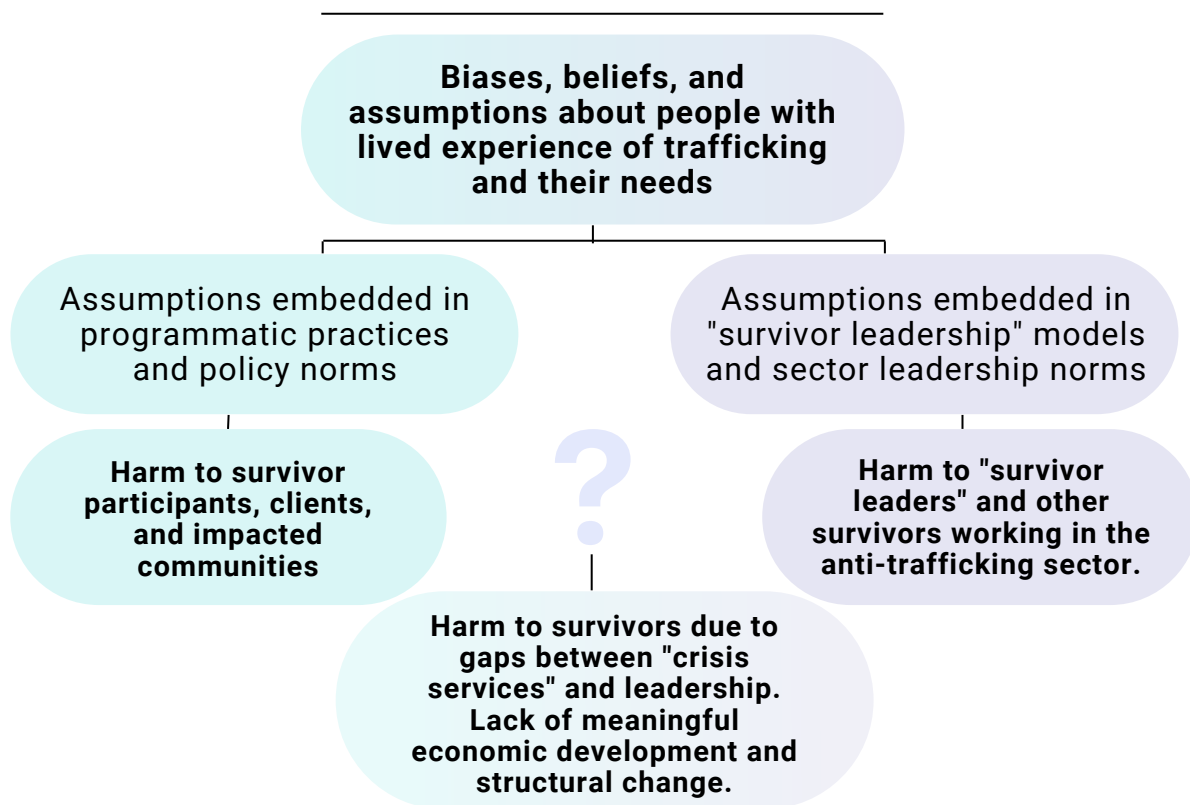
**For many of us, prior experiences of naming harm have taught us to fear hearing about harm, to internalize shame about having harmed others, or to expect that the naming of harm means an attack or absolute loss of trust will follow.**



	HURT	HARM	ABUSE/ EXPLOITATION
Intention	Often unavoidable, usually unintentional, can come from “not knowing better.” If the hurt is intentionally-caused, it is harm.	Avoidable with planning. Sometimes unintentional, but all intentional hurt is harm; if you know an action causes hurt and continue doing it, it becomes harm.	Usually intentional (even if through lack of consideration). Strategic leveraging of harm against others for personal benefit.
Incident(s) or pattern	Often isolated incidents, such as a scraped knee or hurt feelings due to a misunderstanding.	Can be incidents or patterns. Incidences of harm that are not addressed become patterns.	A pattern of behavior that maintains power and control over others.
Impact	Often resolves on its own or with minimal interaction; easier to overcome.	Causes personal, emotional, or economic damage that needs to be repaired to restore wellbeing.	Causes long-lasting and serious economic, psychological, and social damage.
Example	Coworker 1 gives feedback to Coworker 2 without thinking about how much effort Coworker 2 put into their report. Coworker 2's feelings are hurt by the feedback.	An employee new to nonprofit work is not provided with adequate supervision, support, and guidance around workplace boundaries to maintain a manageable workload.	Due to lack of supervision and support, an employee regularly works or is expected to work unpaid hours. Leaders in the organization know this is happening without ever providing appropriate feedback or redirection.

When we remove our expectations of shame in addressing harm, we can understand hearing about harm as a gift of trust and opportunity for repair. We name harms not as an attempt to shame, but as an attempt to educate, and we do so with the expectation that people who caused harm are willing to repair it. They cannot make a full repair without first reflecting on the conditions in which harm occurs. We will offer hope, suggestions for repair, and practical guidance later in this document – the hopeful part is coming! But if you have ever struggled to understand what survivors meant when they indicated that they have experienced grievous harm from the sector, this next section exists to better explain what forms of harm survivors experience within anti-trafficking work.

## How survivors experience harm



"We cannot create effective anti-trafficking policies and programming without meaningful input from people with lived experience, and we cannot get relevant, quality recommendations without investing in survivors at the earlier levels of survivor engagement." **Investing in survivors at all stages reduces lateral violence by decreasing economic competition that pits survivors against each other out of desperation.**

# What kinds of harm do survivors experience in our sector?

National Survivor Network and Cast are conducting ongoing qualitative research about harm experienced by survivor leaders. We assessed this data and cross-checked it with information about the prevention of harm in survivor leadership in the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre's research on Engagement of lived experience in international policy and programming,\* the section on survivor leadership in the recent Trafficking in Persons Report,\*\* and the notes from our May convening in San Francisco. After categories and examples of harm were identified, our group discussed the findings and added or expanded them based on our own experiences in the sector both as professionals and as mentors to other survivors.

We focus on harm experienced by survivor leaders, but each of these harms stems from a fundamental spoken or unspoken belief about all people with lived experience of human trafficking. Survivors in movement or sector leadership are the “canaries in the coal mine” for how our sector understands our participants or clients. If we cannot value survivor leaders as capable of agency and self-determination, we cannot value the expertise our participants or clients have about their own needs and lives.

If we mistreat and tokenize survivors in our movement leadership, it reflects underlying assumptions about survivors that influence how we treat them as participants or clients. Organizations say they struggle with hiring survivors due to their “unmet trauma needs,” but this points to significant problems with what we as a sector are currently doing to meet those needs. This is a harmful, tokenizing feedback loop that is self-reinforcing, and it requires meaningful survivor leadership at all levels of the anti-trafficking sector to effectively disrupt.

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\* See: <https://modernslaverypec.org/resources/best-practice-engagement-lived-experience>

\*\* See: [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1679009394845690&usg=AOvVaw36bnVkMqKcmwH553e\\_NKT](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1679009394845690&usg=AOvVaw36bnVkMqKcmwH553e_NKT)

The broad categories of harm experienced by survivors in the anti-trafficking sector, both as participants or clients and as movement actors, include:

- Exclusion from anti-trafficking decision-making spaces, particularly of those with different perspectives or oppressed identities;
- Identity-based or oppression-based harm;
- Harmful funding restrictions, norms, and practices;
- Labor exploitation within the human trafficking sector, including by organizations that are survivor-led and by well-known survivor leaders;
- Lateral victimization by survivor leaders, who may also cause harm to other survivors, and the practice of non-survivors, organizations, and other advocates fueling lateral victimization;
- Exceptionalization of survivor leaders;
- Poorly managed conflicts around the sex trades rooted in carceral feminism;
- Poorly managed conflicts around language, labeling, and frameworks that favors carceral systems;
- Engagement that comes from a savior complex (the “rescue industry”).

If you are unfamiliar with any of these categories, or if you don’t feel like you fully understand them, read through that category’s section in Appendix 1 of the full report: Full outline of harms, examples, beliefs, and impacts.

<https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/harmandrepair/>

## What are the dynamics of this kind of harm and how do they impact our work?



It might be easy to believe that these are harms experienced by individual survivors, enacted by individuals in error, and that apology and repair should be interpersonal priorities. However, there are structural and sector-wide influences that shape and normalize this kind of harm, and when impacts are experienced by a large group of people who are often in community with each other, the impacts are collective. This harm erodes trust, leaving the very communities we hope to support skeptical of our entire sector.

As with any form of structural harm, the people most impacted by harm in the anti-trafficking sector are more likely to recognize it when it happens and to speak out about it than those who aren't impacted. As with any form of structural harm, those who aren't directly impacted can choose to learn about the dynamic in order to recognize it more easily, in order to take action against it. Actions can include speaking out when you see the dynamic going unchallenged, and making changes in your life and work so you don't continue to directly participate in the dynamic or benefit from it unfairly.

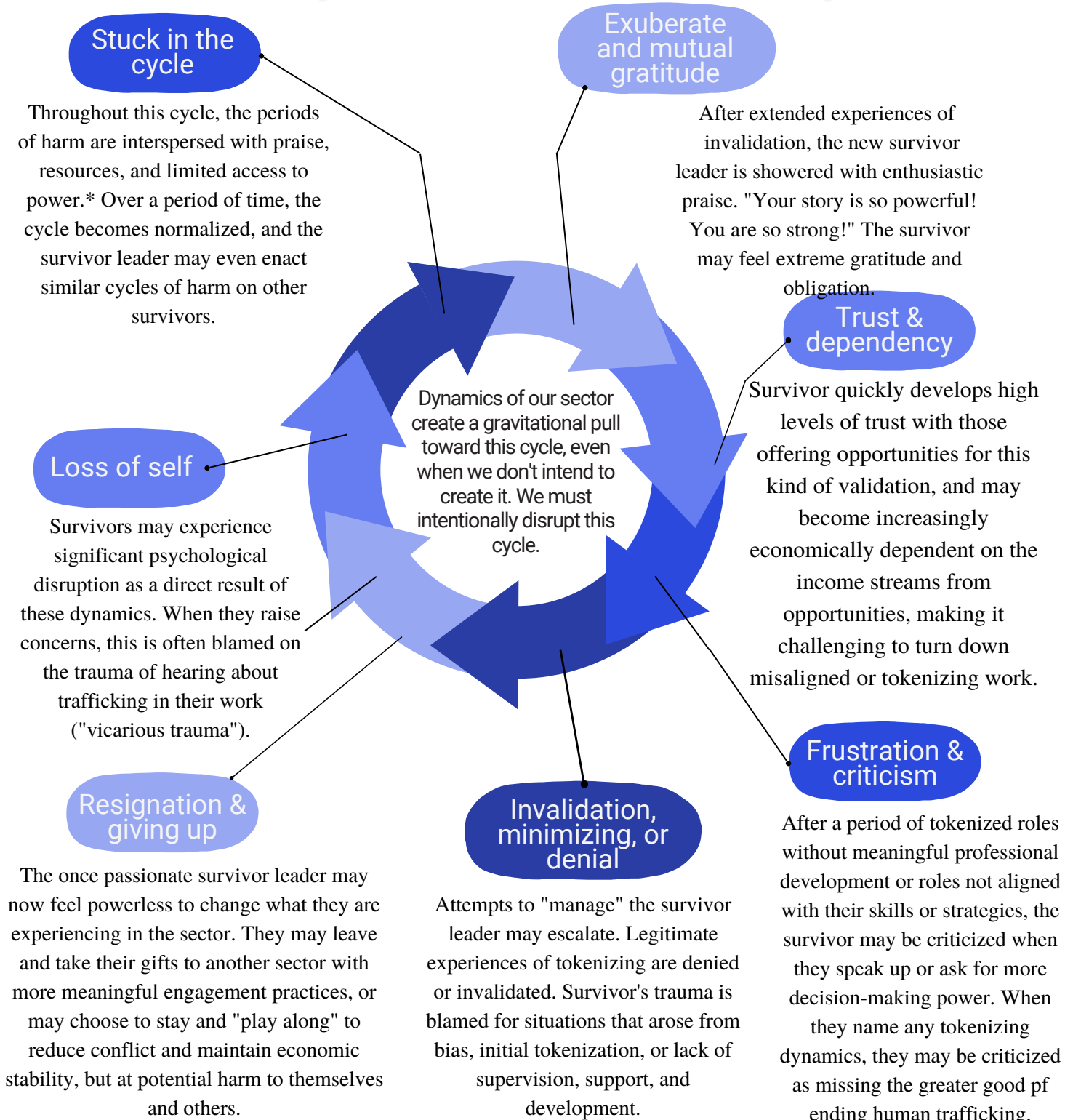
This may be uncomfortable for non-survivors to hear, but many survivor leaders experience the dynamic of their relationship with anti-trafficking advocates, organizations, and funders as an unhealthy attachment cycle (see illustration on next page). Even when there is no intention to establish or leverage power, our current funding norms, service structures, and sector-wide narratives may create a cyclical dynamic that replicates the stages of the trauma-bonding cycle. To be clear: It is normal and healthy for an organization or advocate to want to help a survivor. It is normal and healthy for a survivor to feel gratitude for the support and services they received and to acknowledge the life-changing impacts these services can have. It is normal that an organization would want to demonstrate the personal, human impacts of their work to funders and donors, and that funders would want to know where their money is going. And still, these dynamics can create and perpetuate an unhealthy attachment cycle if unhealthy power relations are not intentionally prevented and disrupted.

As you read, let go of any attachment to whether this cycle is intentional or unintentional, and instead think about the impact this has on the person experiencing it. This cycle can develop even when the dependency isn't the intent, and even out of well-intentioned efforts. Remember that the goal isn't to feel shame or self-negativity if you recognize yourself in this cycle, but to acknowledge and disrupt it. And because organizations, advocates, and well-placed survivor leaders are usually on the end of this dynamic with more power, the burden of disruption falls heavily on us.

As you read through this section, remember that these dynamics are rooted in biases and assumptions about people with lived experience of human trafficking. Consider the ways these and similar cycles show up in policy, programming, and service delivery.

# Survivor Leadership

## Unhealthy Attachment Cycle



\*This interspersed praise may even be the result of an organization's attempts to continue providing economic opportunity or support to the survivor while trying to address workplace challenge. Remember: the intent is less important than recognizing and disrupting this cycle when you see that it is formalizing.

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### **1) Exuberancy and mutuality**

When new survivors enter survivor leadership, there is often praise. “Your story is so powerful!” “You are so strong!” “I’m so excited to have you here!” Many professionals are afraid to offer healthy, compassionate, critical feedback to survivor leaders; they may fear “talking over” the survivor to an extent that they avoid generative conversations altogether. This period of newness is usually full of mutual gratitude and enthusiasm.



### **2) Trust and dependency**

Many survivors have repeatedly been told they are worthless or that they can’t do anything right. The praise and compliments make them feel valued for a change and may create a significant sense of trust. When survivors are paid for this work, they may also develop financial dependence on it. They begin to trust the people or organizations who “take care of them,” lift them up, and provide resources and services. Additionally, extreme praise after a long period of extreme abuse can be a rush! This can create a reinforcing cycle of dependency in which the survivor becomes reliant on external feedback to feel an internal sense of value. It can become problematic in the absence of adequate support to strengthen an internal sense of wellness and worth as well as a growth mindset.



### **3) Frustration and criticism**

Throughout this time, survivors in leadership typically are not offered adequate support to develop their professional and leadership skills. If they speak up nonetheless, they are often criticized for the ways in which they speak up, or for what kinds of issues they raise. For example, when they notice and name some of the tokenizing or dependency-building dynamics, they may be criticized for “going off script” or for missing the greater point of ending trafficking. This reflects a phenomenon often referred to as the nonprofit “halo effect,” in which the perceived “greater good” of the work deters accountability for harmful practices.



### **4) Invalidation, minimization, or denial**

Eventually, direct criticism may fail to redirect the survivor into the role that the organization had anticipated they would fill. Alternatively, a survivor who does

not have the capacity to do the job they were hired to do (due to an inappropriate hire) may be unable to respond as expected with direct coaching and support. Whether intentional or unintentional, the attempts to “manage” the survivor leader may become invalidating; attempts to minimize the dynamics causing the survivor’s frustration may even rise to the level of denial or gaslighting.

Gaslighting in this setting might include things like: telling the survivor they’re a valued member of the team while tokenizing their contributions or identities; suggesting that they are not experiencing tokenization or workplace discrimination but that they are only perceiving it as such because of their trauma; or coercively expecting survivors to share the same understanding of their story that you do.



### **5) Resignation**

Ultimately, survivors may begin to feel powerless to change what they are experiencing in our sector. They may give up and leave their survivor leadership work, or take their gifts and skills to another sector. If they are unable to leave due to economic, interpersonal, or emotional pressures, they may choose to continue their work in survivor leadership, making small changes where they can but largely choosing to “play along” to preserve their security and safety. They likely have conflicting feelings about their work, organizations, and our sector, and may limit most of their conversations about the painful dynamics to a small number of survivor-only spaces.



### **6) Loss of self**

Over time, without attaining real decision-making power, survivors may experience significant psychological disruption. They can feel stuck in these dynamics and unable to change them. When this disruption becomes apparent to others, it is often blamed on “vicarious trauma” without acknowledgment of the direct trauma the survivor has experienced from organizational harm or of the lack of options that keep survivor leaders “trapped” in certain kinds of survivor leadership.



## 7) Normalization of the cycle

Throughout this cycle, the periods of harm are often interspersed with praise, resources, and limited access to power. It is important to note that this does not have to be intentional! Often, awkward attempts to praise what is being done well while you are otherwise frustrated with a survivor's performance or feel attacked by their criticism can feel like a trauma bond to both of you; this can hold true even when such praise is an attempt at thoughtful, balanced management. The cycle becomes normalized over time, and the survivor leader may even enact similar cycles of harm on other survivors.

As with other cycles of harm, the impacts on the survivor are often intensified when survivor leaders speak up about the harm, when they prepare to leave, or right after they leave. This affects our ability to build trust with these survivors and other survivors in our movement, which then disrupts our ability to increase meaningful survivor leadership in the sector. It also negatively impacts our ability to collaborate with other nonprofit sectors, either when survivors we have excluded have become integral parts of those sectors or when our norms about lived experience differ significantly or are seen as tokenizing or paternalistic.

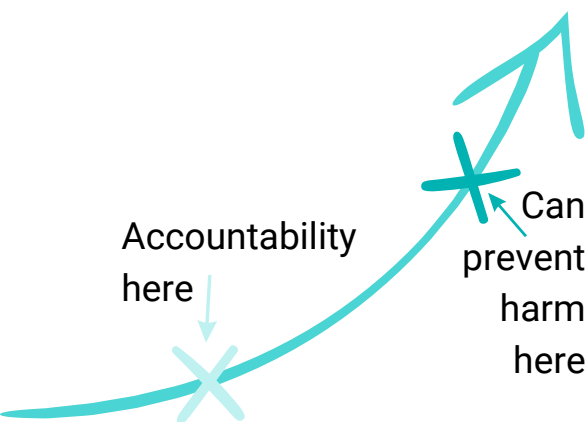
"People can do good, be good, and still cause harm. Similarly, the anti-trafficking sector can engage in powerful advocacy, support many essential initiatives, provide many victims of human trafficking with essential services and support, and still cause harm—both to the recipients of their services and to the survivors who work in their initiatives... In order to stop causing this harm, we must first understand these actions and many others as harm, fully acknowledge the harm, commit to making repairs, and change our approaches."

# Prevention, Accountability, and Repair

## What do we mean by prevention, accountability, and repair?

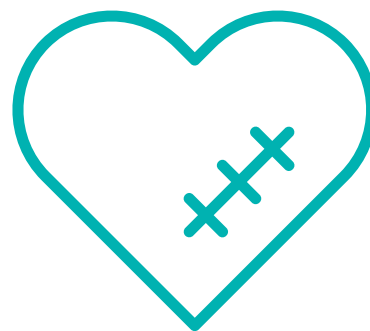


**PREVENTION** means practicing meaningful survivor engagement from the start so that you do not cause avoidable harm to survivors.



**ACCOUNTABILITY** means taking appropriate steps when harm happens, and, according to transformative justice practitioner Mia Mingus, includes the following steps: self-reflection, apology, repair, and changed behavior\*. Consistently taking accountability for smaller harms makes accountability a routine, normalized part of our social expectations and builds our systems for taking accountability for bigger harms. Consistent accountability for smaller harms can also prevent larger harms by disrupting harmful patterns before they escalate.

**REPAIR** is an essential part of full accountability, and it can only be done in relationship.\* \* This means that you are responsible for changing your behavior moving forward once you have harmed a survivor, regardless of whether or not



\* See Mia Mingus: The Four Parts of Accountability for more on accountability for harm (<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/>) or attend a training by SOIL (<https://www.soiltjp.org/our-work/101-trainings>).

\* \* Mia Mingus, The Four Parts of Accountability & How To Give A Genuine Apology. <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/> Accessed December 9, 2022.

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that survivor wishes to accept repair or engage in a dialogue. However, if you want to make repair for harm caused to a specific survivor (or group of survivors), this will require ongoing dialogue to ensure that: 1) your apology actually addresses the harm experienced by the survivor (and not just the harm you believe you caused), and 2) the kind of repair you would like to make will be seen as meaningful by those harmed. You can change your behavior without being in an ongoing relationship with those harmed, but your accountability and the appropriateness of your solutions to harm will be more meaningful if they are developed in such a relationship.

In short, accountability requires both an apology and changed behavior.

In order to be sincere, an apology must be preceded by self-reflection (as a person, a leader, an organization, or a sector). Sincerity ensures adequate understanding to facilitate behavioral change. An apology requires acknowledging explicitly that you, your organization, or your sector caused harm. If you gloss over the depth of harm, minimize it, or avoid mentioning it altogether, any changes in behavior will be perceived by survivors as a public relations and media stunt, and trust in your work will not be rebuilt.

**YIKES! Our legal advisor is going to be very unhappy about the idea of us explicitly acknowledging harm, and our communications and development teams might be even more upset!**

Yes, this is true.  
And this fear is what has traditionally prevented organizations and sector leaders from taking accountability for harm caused to survivors.

# Remember:

1. Acknowledging and taking accountability for harm sooner can prevent small harms from becoming patterns of exploitation or silencing, which are practically and legally easier to navigate than extended patterns of harm over time.
2. Acknowledging harm is not the same as acknowledging incompetence, cruel intentions, or untrustworthiness. On the contrary, competence in acknowledging harm, apologizing, and making repair demonstrates good intentions and models trustworthiness and transparency. On an individual level, it models for the survivor that leaders do not have to pretend to be perfect to do good work. This in and of itself supports higher levels of meaningful survivor leadership. Additionally, in a movement where harm is widespread, you have a chance to demonstrate that your organization is actually doing something about it.
3. Denying or minimizing a survivor's experience of harm (regardless of whether or not harm was intended) is gaslighting. Anti-violence organizations should take care not to replicate the patterns of abusers.



**But what about social media spin? Will we get publicly “canceled”?**

Perhaps. Unfortunately, none of us can control how others will react to our actions, but this should not stop us from taking accountability.

## **Case study on modeling accountability: Love 146**

In 2021, Love 146 stopped using chattel slavery language in their work. Rather than quietly make a shift, they addressed it directly in a blog post.

<https://love146.org/words-matter/>

# Remember:

Survivors are often not in control of how others perceive or interpret their actions, and they are often on the receiving end of unfair or exaggerated claims. They are also frequently denied opportunities for forgiveness and repair. We model accountability for each other by making it a routine practice to acknowledge and address harm.

Also remember, when harm is not addressed, harmful dynamics escalate. A giant public and/or legal mess can often be prevented with sincere acknowledgment and apology.

And if you are afraid of escalated conflict dynamics, remember that many escalated dynamics with survivor leaders are the direct result of not providing adequate organizational support, supervision, and ongoing development to all staff and contractors.

## Values around repair and accountability

The following values inform our recommendations in this report:



**We believe that we all cause harm (intentionally or unintentionally) and that nobody is disposable.**

**We believe that repair and accountability must be voluntary and honest, and that they take time, cultivation of trust, and a commitment to transformation. Trauma-informed principles apply to accountability and repair**



**We believe that repair is possible, that it is an ongoing process, and that it is always messy and requires us to get comfortable being uncomfortable.**

**We believe that repair and accountability happen through actions (not just words) and require changed behaviors.**







We believe that changing the harmful behavior is not the same as repairing the harmed relationship, and changing harmful behavior does not obligate someone to forgive or be in relationship again. We can still honor and witness the person who was harmed, acknowledge the harm, and not expect them to engage in repair when they do not have the willingness or capacity.

We believe that community is essential to ongoing accountability, and it can support us in our regenerative work.



We believe that just because a funder or executive created harm, this doesn't mean the funder has responsibility for finding the solution— that still leaves the power in the hands of the funder. We must shift from corporate, top-down models of accountability to grassroots, bottom-up models that redistribute power.

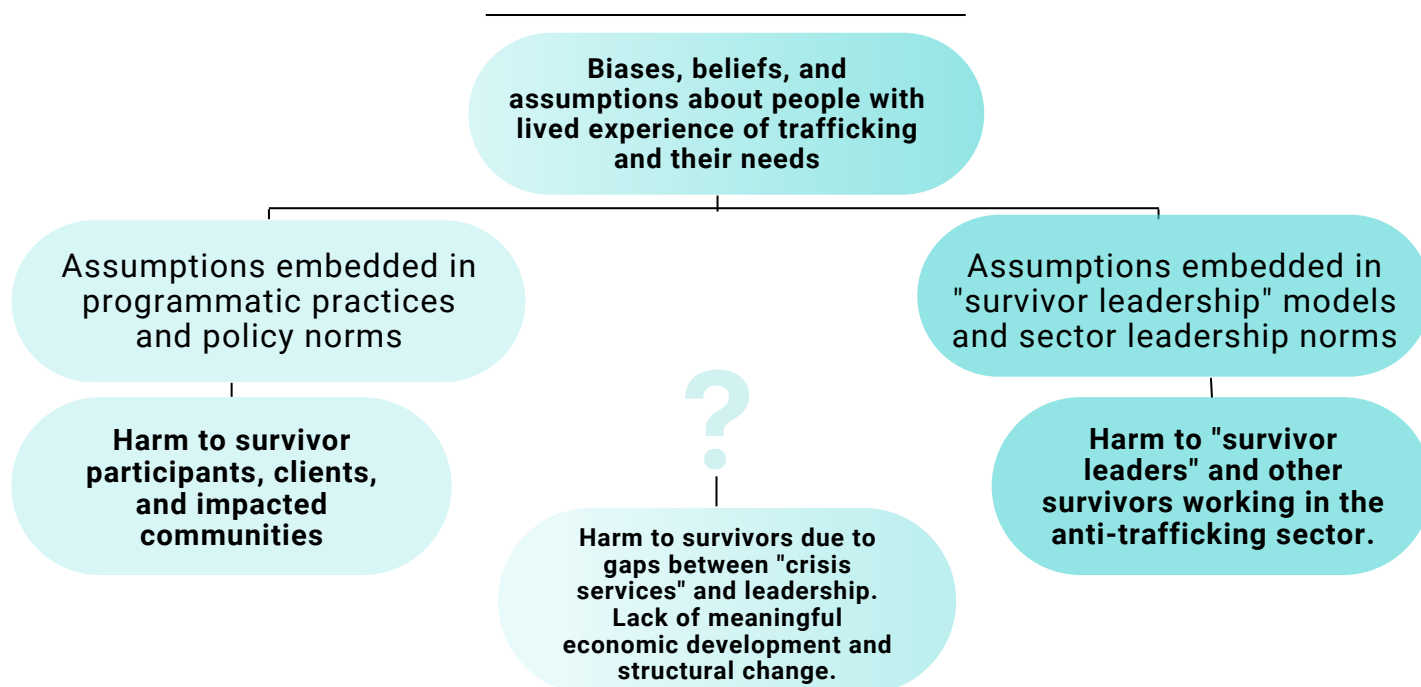
We believe that ego can get in the way of accountability and repair. Genuine accountability and repair require being mindful of what impulses are coming from our ego, or our need to be seen as good, rather than our need to own our actions.



## Two Challenges, One Core Issue

We have heard funders and organizational leaders express confusion about how to support meaningful survivor engagement while still performing their essential programmatic and policy work. They understood these to be two separate issues or “tracks” of work, but the fact is these tracks of work are both rooted in biases and assumptions about people with lived experience of human trafficking— why they struggle, what they need, and what their capabilities are. Biases and assumptions often ‘other’ survivors of human trafficking by reducing them to their trafficking experience, rather than understanding their lives in the full context of their other experiences and their communities.

## How survivors experience harm



Such biases, beliefs, and assumptions often lead to policy and programmatic practices that replicate the coercive or carceral threats of traffickers. These practices disregard the goals of the survivor or impacted community, and impose a form of “rescue” that does not address fundamental structural vulnerabilities or build sustainable, long-term wellness.\*

Such biases, beliefs, and assumptions lead to a significant gap in services and support for survivors after their initial crisis and case management period. Survivors are often offered one-size-fits-all “economic development” programs that disregard the variety of skills, interests, and hopes they have. These programs are emphasized at the expense of structural change that could promote long-term community wellness for the survivors’ community.

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\* See the “Five Domains of Wellbeing” by Full Frame Initiative for a framework that accounts for the tradeoffs people often make to care for themselves with a structural lens.

[https://www.fullframeinitiative.org/cat\\_resources/five-domains-of-wellbeing](https://www.fullframeinitiative.org/cat_resources/five-domains-of-wellbeing)

This leads to double harm when survivors are then called upon for “survivor leadership” without adequate support and professional development, which results in tokenization. Survivors are either hired for non-decision-making roles based solely on their trauma experiences and willingness to share that trauma with others, or they are hired for specific professional roles without having the necessary skills or being offered adequate professional development. This is a direct result of biased support services that largely stop post-crisis.

Even when survivors come into professional positions with adequate or exceptional professional skills, they are still subject to bias and assumptions. Survivors whose roles have nothing to do with survivor leadership or engagement are often looked to as the “survivor voice” or expected to answer questions about survivor engagement. When these survivors question sector norms, it’s often assumed they are speaking from their trauma, and their concerns are not taken seriously until their frustration bubbles over. And when that happens, it is often viewed as the result of their trafficking trauma rather than a response to unaddressed, ongoing workplace dynamics.

Clearly, policy and programmatic anti-trafficking work is related to survivor engagement work– survivors are experiencing the same harmful biases at different points in their relationships with the anti-trafficking sector. We cannot improve survivor experience at first point of contact without improving survivor experience at the highest levels of leadership, and we must change them both at the same time.

We cannot develop meaningful policy recommendations without investing in survivors who are interested in learning policy. We cannot develop meaningful prevention recommendations without investing in survivors who are interested in learning about how comprehensive, effective prevention strategies are developed. We cannot develop meaningful recommendations about direct services without investing in survivors who are interested in learning crisis response skills, shelter management, peer support, or clinical skills. We cannot develop meaningful recommendations about new ways of funding or organizational management without investing in survivors who want to learn business or fiscal management, accounting, or organizational operations. We cannot attract survivors to work in our movement who already have these skills so long as our sector reduces their expertise to their lived experience of trafficking.

Survivor engagement is not the new, trendy thing in anti-trafficking work, and it must not become a meaningless buzzword. Meaningful survivor engagement means survivor investment, which can offer survivors more choices about if and how they want to engage in sector work, with less harm, less competition, and no more “Oppression Olympics.” Finally, we must always remember that survivors don’t owe our sector these skills or roles. Investment in survivors should be based upon the survivor’s interest, and for many survivors, their interests will fall outside our sector.

Maintaining a strict separation between “survivor” and “professional” in any sector disregards the humanity of people with lived experience by assuming survivors cannot or should not have access to all opportunities that non-survivors have. Relegating survivors to roles that are tokenizing or focused on sensationalized trauma narratives impacts solutions our sector is able to offer, and it impacts how our work is done on the ground. Many types of sector work that survivors are currently offered generate public panics rather than public awareness, and panics create ineffective or harmful policy responses. In sum, we cannot create effective anti-trafficking policies and programming without meaningful input from people with lived experience, and we cannot get relevant, quality recommendations without investing in survivors at the earlier levels of survivor engagement.

