

Cast's 24-hour hotline connects survivors with emergency housing, food and medical care.

## Promoting Survivors' Health and Wellbeing

“As a human being, what are we wanting most? Security and love. If we're not getting them because systems are broken, traffickers say, ‘I will love you, I will take care of you, I will give you housing, I will give you work.’”

Angie Rodriguez-Watkins, Cast Clinical Supervisor

For everyone including survivors of human trafficking, wellbeing isn't just about a healthy mind and body - it is also about having safety, stability and a good quality of life. With access to education and well-paid work, survivors may never have been trafficked in the first place.

Because of systemic racism, BIPOC are more likely to experience homelessness,

the foster care and juvenile systems as well as human trafficking, and BIPOC survivors often face the most barriers to wellbeing like being able to get good jobs and housing. Survivors who are not US citizens experience extra barriers to work or accessing public benefits.

The experience of being trafficked is traumatic and forces people to live in a perpetual

state of fear and survival. It causes and exacerbates developmental delays and mental health problems - 67% of new clients this year had post-traumatic stress disorder. Some survivors have traumatic brain injuries, memory loss and suicidal ideation. Poor mental health makes it even harder for survivors to access services or find suitable housing and jobs.

The survivors we served the past year have reported untreated injuries, chronic pain, poor vision, major dental problems and disabilities. Those being trafficked are not free to access healthcare and even when they escape, they may not know how to get help or they may be excluded from it. When survivors are not able to fully process what happened to them, they can be triggered even when life seems stable.

Cast saw this happen at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when survivors who had graduated from our programs asked for our help again. What made them vulnerable to trafficking the first time made them vulnerable again, and systemic racism and the pandemic have compounded their trauma.

**“A lot happened during the pandemic and survivors have been left with all of this trauma to carry because they haven’t been able to process it.”**

Miriam Ochoa, Cast Senior Case Manager

**131**

In-person emergency responses

**92%**

to BIPOC survivors

**2,210**

Hotline calls

**67%**

Survivors who had PTSD symptoms when they came to Cast

**10%**

Survivors who had PTSD symptoms when they graduated from Cast

**\$525,000**

Survivors’ lost income compensation won to date

**140**

Microgrants (up to \$1,000) made to survivor leaders, totaling \$62,500

## What Cast is doing

Survivors in crisis – or anyone who is concerned – can call Cast’s 24-hour hotline for help. **Last year we took 2,210 hotline calls - over half were from potential survivors.** We provided emergency response to 131 survivors who had mostly just escaped; responding virtually has enabled us to help survivors faster than before. As well as providing wraparound services including access to healthcare, our focus is on creating rapport and providing emotional support to survivors for as long as they need it.

When survivors struggle to make ends meet, Cast explores every possible avenue to address this, especially by connecting them to training and good jobs and covering upfront fees. In the short term, lost income compensation from the state of California pays survivors back for pay stolen from them while they were trafficked. **This year, we won \$175,000 in compensation for survivors.** We also provided 140 micro-grants worth \$60,000 to survivor leaders across the US who were facing financial hardship or who wanted to start a course or small business. Survivor leaders who are active in the anti-trafficking movement are often still living precariously and need basic as well as professional support to be successful.

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**“Unfortunately, the thing standing in between so many of us survivors and a life of safety is money. Direct financial aid is a live-saving service.”**

Survivor of human trafficking and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women epidemic, who used funds to regain her independence after leaving an abusive partner.

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Our **Survivor Advocate Program** shows how Cast is responding to human trafficking and laying the foundation for a public health response that can help end it. When people escape a trafficking situation, they often go to a hospital because they are too afraid to go to the police, but most healthcare professionals don’t know how to identify them. Through this program, hospitals call Cast when they suspect their patients are human trafficking survivors, and our staff with lived experience of trafficking respond and connect survivors to services. They also educate healthcare professionals on human trafficking and how to identify it in healthcare settings so that in the future, survivors can be spotted sooner and treated better.

Cast's **Youth Program** hosts regular group activities and workshops to increase youth survivors' confidence and life skills.

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**“What youth survivors most enjoy is the opportunity to just be themselves, have fun, and be in community with other survivors.”**

Miriam Ochoa, Cast Senior Case Manager

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Beyond healthcare, we have been **training child welfare professionals in LA County** on how foster children are at very high risk of trafficking; and training attorneys and social workers across the US on how intersecting marginalized identities make people more vulnerable to trafficking – reaching over 14,000 professionals.

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**“I feel more at ease with myself and learned to have more patience with myself and others. I also learned that it is important to give others a second chance and learned to accept myself and what happened to me.”**

SM, Cast Client

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**Human trafficking is happening everywhere.** We all have a role to play in addressing and ending it, and that starts with treating it like a public health issue. We need more outreach programs like the one connecting Cast to hospitals, and less that arrest survivors for being victims. We need those working in schools and community centers - and anywhere vulnerable people are - to be able to spot human trafficking and to know what to do. And we need to make quality healthcare accessible to all survivors, if we ever want them to recover.