

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two hands. One hand is at the top, reaching down, and the other is at the bottom, reaching up. They are positioned as if they are about to grasp each other. The background is a bright, fiery orange and yellow, suggesting flames or a sunset. On the left side, there is a vertical blue bar with three white circular punch holes.

**VICTIM SUPPORT**

NGO,  
FAITH BASED GROUP

## **MAKE THE CONNECTION**

*Supporting and stabilizing victims of human trafficking*

# MAKE THE CONNECTION

## *Supporting and stabilizing victims of human trafficking*

### **Help Link Victims to the Critical Services They Need**

Teachers, nurses, social workers, faith-based leaders, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are trusted members of communities and are in a unique position to assist victims of human trafficking. You can help victims become stable. By learning about available services, you can help put a victim on the path to long-term recovery.

### **A Victim-Centered Approach**

A victim-centered approach places equal value on the identification and stabilization of victims, as well as the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. Victims are crucial to investigations and prosecutions. Each case and every conviction changes lives. We understand how difficult it can be for victims to come forward and work with law enforcement, due to their trauma. We are committed to helping victims feel stable, safe and secure.

As a community organization or service provider, you play an important role in the victim-centered approach. You can help law enforcement better understand the sensitivities and challenges in working with victims, such as how trauma can affect how victims communicate. Your assistance in providing support and recovery services for victims is invaluable to case investigations.

At U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) we recognize that a victim-centered investigation means that victims:

- Are the key to the successful investigation and prosecution of traffickers;
- Require social services for stability, safety, and recovery. It is important to note that assistance is not tied to successful prosecution;
- Have rights even if they were complicit in their illegal entry or forced to commit an illegal act during their exploitation; and
- Have the right to be informed and have opportunities to engage in their case throughout the process.

Working with trafficking victims can be challenging due to the level of trauma victims have suffered as a result of their exploitation. Immediately connecting a victim to support services in your community can get a victim the help they need to recover and bring traffickers to justice.

### **Victim-Centered Resources**

Blue Campaign can help as you work with victims, through our victim assistance resources, or we can help you connect a victim to services in your community. Contact the Homeland Security Investigations' (HSI) Tipline or the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) Hotline. DHS offers the following victim assistance programs and services that can help stabilize a victim of human trafficking.

**Victim Assistance Specialists** – can help by connecting the victim to community-based groups to provide medical, mental health, legal assistance, case management, and other services. During HSI investigations, Victim Assistance Specialists assess a victim's needs and work with agents to integrate victim assistance considerations throughout the criminal investigation. In the absence of other resources, DHS has an emergency assistance fund which is available for emergency victim assistance needs.

**Forensic Interview Specialists** – can conduct developmentally appropriate and legally defensible interviews that are victim and culturally sensitive. If the victim is a child or extremely traumatized, these Forensic Interview Specialists can aid in investigations.

**Local Service Provider Networks** – both the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) support direct services for victims of human trafficking through local, community based service providers. Visit [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov) and [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov) to learn more.

## **Immigration Relief: Stabilizing Foreign National Victims of Crime**

Many foreign victims do not have legal status in the United States, and this is a powerful way the trafficker controls victims. Immigration relief is a critical tool because it provides a way for victims to feel secure and stabilize their status in the United States. Without legal status, victims may not be able to stay in the United States, or they may be limited in their access to victim assistance services.

You should know about the three types of immigration relief that DHS provides to help stabilize a victim without legal status. It's also important that you understand the distinct roles and responsibilities that you, law enforcement, and the victim have in securing these benefits.

**Continued Presence (CP)** – is a form of short term immigration relief that allows a potential witness to remain in the U.S. during an investigation. CP should be made available as soon as law enforcement identifies a victim; the investigation does not have to be complete prior to requesting CP. CP is requested by law enforcement. Ask law enforcement to connect directly with the local U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office (by calling the HSI Tipline) to request CP.

**T or U Nonimmigrant Status (T or U visa)** – are longer term forms of immigration relief that allow victims to remain in the United States. The T visa is for human trafficking victims. The U visa is for victims of a variety of crimes, including domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, involuntary servitude, and other serious offenses. Both require the victim to assist or cooperate with law enforcement in an investigation or prosecution (unless in T visa cases the victim is under 18, or suffers trauma). The victim applies for a T or U visa, often with the help of a community advocate or attorney, through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). To learn more visit [www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking).

**Federal Public Benefits** – are available after the T visa is approved through HHS. Minor victims (under 18) are eligible for federal public benefits through HHS immediately once they are identified as a victim.

**Declaration or Certification by Law Enforcement** – Even though the victim, often with your help, completes the main portion of the T or U visa application, law enforcement plays a role in telling USCIS about how the victim is assisting law enforcement. You can ask law enforcement involved in the case to fill out a declaration or certification. For the T visa, this is not required evidence; you can gather other evidence to show the victim's assistance, and include this with the application for a T visa. For the U visa, the law enforcement certification is required evidence. You should not fill out this paperwork for law enforcement.

The law enforcement declaration or certification alone does not provide the basis for a grant of an immigration benefit, and is only one piece of evidence that USCIS reviews before making a decision. You may need to assist in collecting other types of evidence to submit to USCIS, including assisting the victim to create a personal statement about their experience. To help a victim learn how to apply, contact USCIS at: 800-375-5283, or visit the USCIS website at [www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking).



## What You Can Do

1. **Get to know HSI in your area.** Call the HSI Tipline to learn who the HSI Victim Assistance Specialist is for your area. Build a relationship with them, even before you have identified a victim who needs services.

2. **Report human trafficking tips.**

**To report suspicious human trafficking activity or get help from federal law enforcement, call 1-866-347-2423 or submit a tip online at [www.ice.gov/tips](http://www.ice.gov/tips).**

Individuals across the world can report suspicious criminal activity to the HSI Tipline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. The Tipline is accessible internationally by calling **802-872-6199**.

Highly trained specialists take reports from both the public and law enforcement agencies on more than 400 laws enforced by HSI, including those related to human trafficking.

**Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888 to:**

- Get help and connect with a service provider in your area;
- Provide information on potential human trafficking activity; or
- Learn more by requesting training, technical assistance, or resources.

The NHTRC is a national, toll-free hotline available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. The NHTRC is not a law enforcement or immigration authority and is operated by a non-governmental organization.

3. **Learn from a survivor.** Watch the video USCIS created featuring human trafficking survivors describing their experience and the importance of immigration relief. Show this video to those you work with and encourage them to find out more. Go to: [www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking).
4. **Learn more about T and U visas.** For more information about T or U visas, to watch a video describing the steps in the T and U visa process, to download helpful Law Enforcement Certification Guides, or to get in touch with USCIS with more questions:
  - Visit [www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.uscis.gov/humantrafficking);
  - Contact us at 802-527-4888; or
  - [hotlinefollowup19181914.vsc@dhs.gov](mailto:hotlinefollowup19181914.vsc@dhs.gov).
5. **Get to know the task force in your area.** Human Trafficking Task Forces exist across the country. These task forces are comprised of federal, state, local, county, and tribal law enforcement and prosecutors, as well as NGOs providing victim services. Find out whether there is a Human Trafficking Task Force in your area by visiting [www.bja.gov](http://www.bja.gov).
6. **Visit the Blue Campaign website.** For more training, outreach materials, victim assistance materials, and information on how you can join the fight to end human trafficking, go to: [www.dhs.gov/bluecampaign](http://www.dhs.gov/bluecampaign). "Like" us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/bluecampaign](https://www.facebook.com/bluecampaign). Or, contact us at: [BlueCampaign@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:BlueCampaign@hq.dhs.gov).



## Survivors of Trafficking Empowerment Program (STEP)

### What We Do

The Survivors of Trafficking Empowerment Program is designed to serve all victims and survivors throughout their transition to stable, independent lives. STEP team works with survivors through a holistic approach to support their journey to self-sufficiency and recovery. STEP is funded by the Office of Victims of Crime through the Department of Justice.

The following services are provided, among others:

- Center Point of Contact (On-Call 24/7) for National Human Trafficking Hotline and Central Texas Task Force
- Human trafficking screenings
- Assistance for identified victims during law enforcement operations
- Liaison between Law Enforcement and other service providers
- Assist with CVC applications
- Assist and be an emotional support throughout court proceedings
- Crisis management and safety support
- Assist in obtaining Emergency and Long Term housing
- Basic needs assistance
- Job Skills and Employment assistance
- Referrals to counseling services
- Applications for public benefits
- Community outreach and Trainings to community service providers
- Skills Building Classes
- Survivor Leadership Groups

### Partnerships

Refugee Services of Texas (RST) is a core participant of the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (CTCAHT) which works collaboratively to increase public awareness and identification of human trafficking cases while providing comprehensive medical and social services for victims and survivors of trafficking. RST is a permanent member of the CTCAHT's Steering Committee due to the organization's role as the central point of contact for all survivor services in Central Texas. The Steering Committee informs and guides the work of the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking as it implements the Slave-Free City Network throughout Austin and Central Texas.

### Who We Serve and Where

We serve all survivors of human trafficking.

- Domestic and Foreign Minors of Sex and Labor Trafficking
- Domestic and Foreign Adults of Sex and Labor Trafficking
- We serve the following 5 counties: **Bell, Hays, McLennan, Travis, and Williamson**

Staff includes Supervisor Rachel Alvarez ([ralvarez@rstx.org](mailto:ralvarez@rstx.org)) and Case Managers Corinna Jay, Aneiya Harrison and Melissa Jasso