



2023

JOURNEY TO JUSTICE

-Survivors' Voices

A resource guide for organizations and agencies providing services to individuals subjected to sex trafficking and / or sexual exploitation.

London Abused Women's Centre 2023
Funding provided by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)



Women and Gender
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Introduction

This guide has been created as a resource for agencies and organizations that provide support to individuals subjected to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Journey to Justice Survivors' Advisory Committee hopes that individuals use this guide to educate themselves about the reality of survivor's experiences so they can be better resources and supports. As well, this guide reflects promising practices regarding Survivor Advisory Committees and how the voices of survivors can enrich programs and practices through their lived experience and knowledge.

Who is the London Abused Women's Centre?

The London Abused Women's Centre (LAWC) is a feminist, abolitionist counselling and advocacy agency. We offer free, woman-centered, trauma-informed, feminist counselling to women and girls who are or have been subjected to male violence, including woman abuse/intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, being prostituted, or subjected to non-state torture. We also offer support and resources to family members whose loved one is missing, murdered, or has disappeared through trafficking.

About LAWC's Phoenix Program

The London Abused Women's Centre has a specialized program for victims and survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation – the Phoenix Anti-Trafficking Program-Prevention, Healing and Recovery from Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. Through Phoenix, LAWC provides comprehensive, survivor-centered, wrap-around support to women and girls who are, have been, or are at risk of being sex trafficked. LAWC can offer an extended length of services to these clients as well. LAWC works in partnership with Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services and Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) to deliver the Phoenix Program. Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services provides peer support and community outreach to victims and survivors, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited provides Phoenix support for individuals ages 16 to 24.

JOURNEY TO JUSTICE:

In 2021, the London Abused Women's Centre received grant funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) for a 24-month project for the development and implementation of an intervention practice specific to victims and survivors of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. This intervention practice includes providing trauma-informed services and resources to trafficked individuals with a focus on education and support accessing the criminal justice system and what that entails, as well as exploring other avenues of justice besides the criminal justice system as part of their healing journey.

A primary goal of this initiative was to enhance LAWAC and the Phoenix Program's existing knowledge base through engagement with survivors so that their lived experience and expertise are embedded into the larger work that we do. From the beginning of this initiative, starting with the writing of the grant for this funding, survivors' insights and perspectives have been invaluable in the creation of Journey to Justice.

A significant part of the Journey to Justice Program is the Survivors' Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC is comprised of survivors, two Advocate/Counsellors from the London Abused Women's Centre (LAWAC), and an Outreach Peer Support Worker from Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services (SACJS). The SAC meets on a monthly basis and participants receive an honourarium provided through grant funding. The Survivors of this committee have used their voices to shape the Journey to Justice Program and have provided comprehensive training to staff. Their voices, experiences, and insights are the foundation of this guide.

LAWAC and the Journey to Justice SAC thank the external Evaluator, funded through this grant, who has been a resource and kept us on track throughout the entirety of this initiative.

Defining Sex Trafficking:

The London Abused Women's Centre defines sex trafficking based on the United Nations definition.

In 2000, the United Nations adopted several protocols to supplement the 2000 Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, including a protocol specific to human trafficking. This protocol, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children was adopted by United Nations General Assembly and entered into force on 25 December 2003. Canada ratified the Palermo Protocol in 2002.

It is the first global, legally binding instrument with an agreed definition on trafficking in persons.

Human Trafficking is defined in the Trafficking Protocol as "the recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023

In essence, the Palermo Protocol identifies the act, the means, and the purpose of trafficking. What actions a trafficker is using or taking, the means a trafficker uses to have control over the victim, and the why, the purpose of trafficking. There must be some experience from each category to fit this definition of sex trafficking.

WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

THE ACT	THE MEANS	THE PURPOSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Someone recruits you (they seek you out and lure you in)Someone transports youSomeone gives you or sells you to another personReceives or buys you	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ThreatsForceCoercion (persuasion through intimidation, insistence, demand, manipulation, drugs...)AbductionDeceit/fraud (not telling you the truth about what is going to happen or be done to you, lying)Abuse of powerAbuse of vulnerabilityBribes (money, makeup, clothing, rent, drugs, opportunities ... in exchange and often not followed through on)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">For the purpose of prostitution (sexual engagement for payment) or other forms of sexual exploitation

IF YOU ARE UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE, you cannot consent to being in the sex trade. Anyone who has recruited, transported, sold or bought you, has trafficked you and can be charged with a sex trafficking offence.

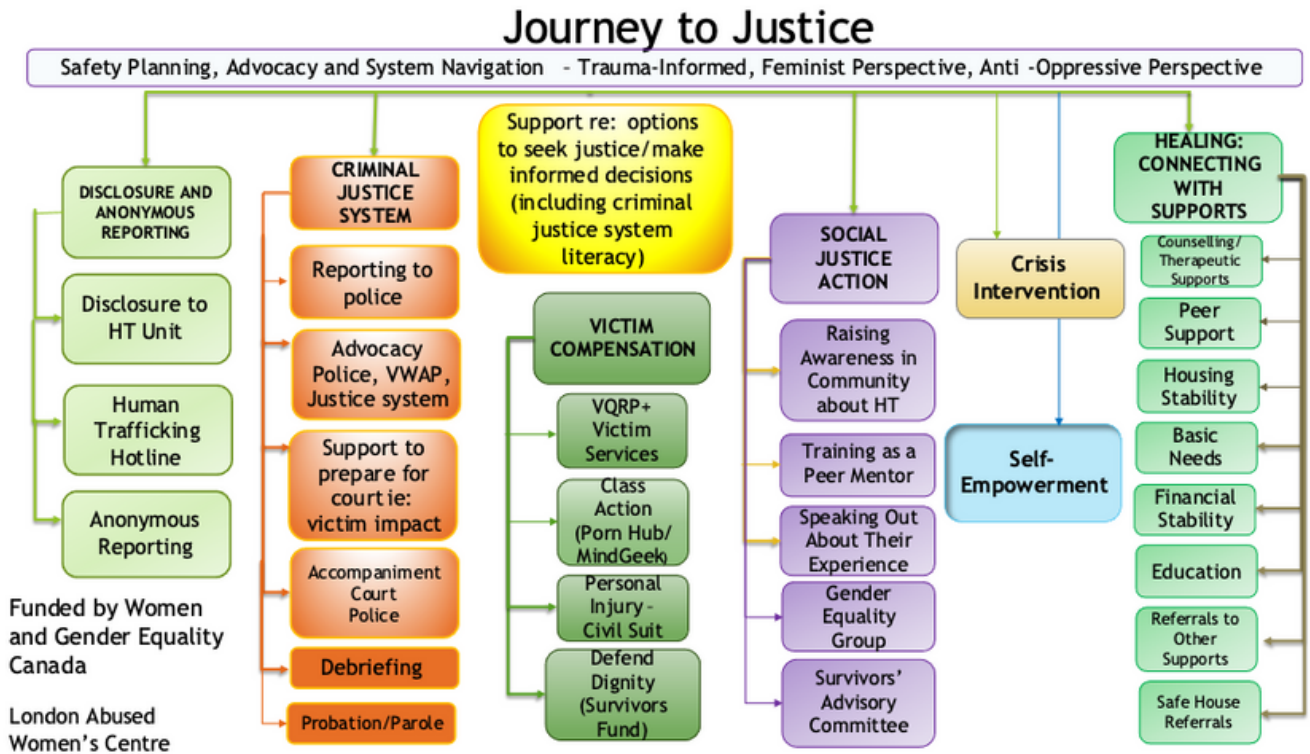
JOURNEY TO JUSTICE IN PRACTICE:

Using expectations outlined in the Journey to Justice grant application, the SAC created a justice navigation tool that outlines services, supports and options to be offered to every Phoenix client/survivor of trafficking. Based on feedback from the SAC, this tool is discussed within the first several appointments with a survivor, always in consideration of their circumstance, including being in crisis. Using the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool, survivors are able to see an overview of supports that are available to them, are able to identify their specific needs, and are provided an opportunity to have open discussions about the criminal justice system and alternatives to traditional forms of justice. This tool had several iterations as the Journey to Justice Program evolved.

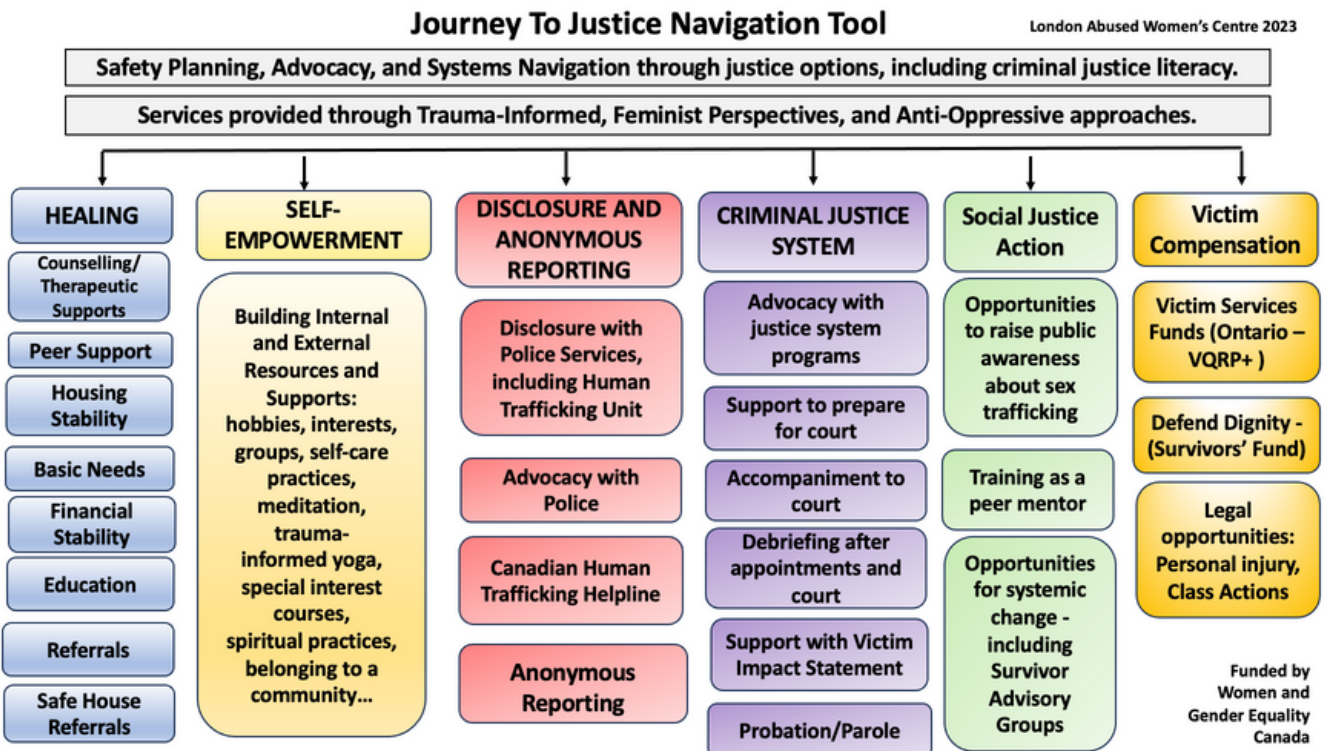
An integral part of the Journey to Justice Program has been the expertise of Survivors. They have provided feedback that has expanded our concept of justice with the added expectation and purpose that these insights are then shared with victims/survivors, as well as those organizations that provide services to victims/survivors.

Journey to Justice is survivor-informed from inception to practical implementation.

Working Journey to Justice Navigation Tool:



Final Iteration:



The Journey to Justice – Survivors’ Voices guide breaks down the information Survivors want you to know about the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool and their own personal insights about their experiences seeking justice.

The following sections in this guide detail Survivor and Advocate/Counsellor’s experiences and perspectives specific to each column/segment of the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool.

Safety Planning, Advocacy,
Systems Navigation
Through Justice Options,
Including Criminal Justice
Literacy

Safety Planning, Advocacy, Systems Navigation Through Justice Options, Including Criminal Justice Literacy

Supports, services, and options shown in the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool are rooted in safety planning, advocacy, and navigation through the criminal justice system, through trauma-informed, feminist theory (perspective), and anti-oppressive lens.

To paraphrase one of the women on the Survivors' Advisory Committee: "People fail to realize that going to get help isn't always as simple as going to get help. All of those things (trauma-informed, feminist and anti-oppressive stances) can be factors in deciding who you call, or if you call."

Safety Planning

Safety planning is embedded into the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool and every aspect of the tool is part of a survivor's safety plan. While this is not an exhaustive list due to the complexity of survivors' experiences, the points below all come from the safety plans of actual survivors.

"It is helpful to offer us strategies and ideas while recognizing that we have been keeping ourselves safe all along." - Survivor

Survivors want you to know:

- During one of our J2J discussions, an Advocate mentioned that it may be beneficial for a survivor to give themselves permission to call 911 if needed. While doing so may come naturally to those without severe trauma, one survivor shared that that statement was mind-blowing to them and added *"I never thought in that context that I could give myself the right to do that"*. It is important to let survivors know that having a safety plan is their right and something that they deserve.
- It is important that service providers do not pressure a survivor into following the provider's safety plan. Please, have no expectations as a survivor is ultimately the expert and knows what is safest for them in the moment.
- It is helpful to offer a survivor strategies and ideas while recognizing that we have been keeping ourselves safe all along. Know that what is beneficial to one person can be harmful to another and thus, our safety plan may not look like yours, but ours has kept us alive so far.
- It is important not to insist to survivors that something or someone is safe – it may not be safe or at least may not feel safe to them. Instead, ask compassionate questions and seek to understand why they may feel unsafe and what they need to feel safe.
- It is important to try to understand why something is difficult, counter-productive, or may not work for a survivor, rather than choosing to assume that we are stubborn or do not want to heal. Many survivors have been exposed to harm at the hands of those who possess much more power and privilege, and have had inaccurate and unfair judgments, assumptions, and labels placed on them. *"We've had our right to choose and to be in control of our path taken away from us, resulting in despair, low self-esteem, and a sense of powerlessness and helplessness."* It is essential that service providers do not exacerbate this damage.

Advocacy and Systems Navigation

As a survivor, we may have to navigate these systems, and this is not an exhaustive list:

- Police and “Justice” / court system
- Ontario Works / Ontario Disability Support - financial support systems
- Shelter and / or Safe House
- Housing
- Counselling resources
- Food security / food bank
- Medical services / Mental health support / Addiction Services
- Children’s Aid Society
- Education resources and schooling
- Employment - both seeking employment and current employment
- Childcare
- Pets and pet support

Survivors may be dealing with these things all at the same time. One Survivor on the Committee noted that [“There are only 2 on the list that I wasn’t dealing with.”](#)

To best support a survivor, it is key to have an awareness of what your community offers related to the diverse needs of survivors.

Please note that Survivors put quotes around the word “Justice” when referring to the court system above. Many survivors spoke about the lack of justice they found through the court system and reported the word to be ironic.

Survivors need you to:

- Be open-minded and willing to learn. [“Give us choice and control.”](#)
- If you don’t know something or think you don’t have the capacity to support a survivor, offer a referral to someone who is better equipped, but not in a way to make a survivor feel like we are [“too much”](#) or are being [“abandoned”](#). [“Treat us how you would want to be treated.”](#)
- Don’t try to tell a survivor a certain individual or agency is safe, and definitely don’t be offended if we disagree about whether they are safe or not. Making suggestions is okay but don’t pressure a survivor into taking them. Try to understand why a survivor believes things may not work rather than assume that we are being difficult. Remember, some of the people who have hurt a survivor have made judgments about them, or have turned out not to be safe individuals, have had power and privilege, or we have been conditioned by our trafficker/abuser to believe that no one can help ...



Services Provided Through
Trauma-Informed, Feminist
Perspectives, and
Anti-Oppressive
Approaches

Trauma-Informed

“Trauma-informed care understands that each individual has endured different experiences, is affected in a unique way, and needs “customized” care – what works for one survivor can harm another. Cookie cutter programs / responses can do harm.”

-Survivor

An academic definition of trauma-informed refers to identifying and understanding the consuming nature of trauma and asks that services and supports create safe spaces to avoid further harm through re-traumatization.

The Committee agreed with the definition but finds that the term trauma-informed gets used without agencies/counsellors/individuals really understanding the depths and nuances of what it means.

“Trauma-informed care is not just a theory but a belief system and understanding of the human experience and our responses to trauma. “Trauma-informed” has become a buzz word that professionals are using to engage clients but lack the tenacity to follow through with true trauma-informed care. To truly engage in trauma-informed practice, the service provider must be willing to address their bias(es) of what they deem to be problematic behaviour and understand these behaviours as trauma responses, as well as redefine what engagement, progress and success look like. Trauma-informed is not a concept that can be taught. It is an understanding and belief that all people are worthy of compassion and connection no matter what stage they are at in their journey, and that their presenting behaviours are not indicative of a service resistant client, but a wounded nervous system that will always benefit from a patient and safe caregiver.”

-LAWC Advocate/Counsellor

Trauma-Informed as identified by the Committee:

- Meeting and seeking to understand and empathize, accept, and support a client where they are at.
- Understanding impacts of trauma – the depth and range of these impacts and responses; and recognizing that a person’s best and what they are able to do one day is not necessarily the same as what they can do the next day.
- Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Responses/Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Responses:

-“Paranoia” – just because you (as a helper or professional) can’t fathom it, doesn’t mean it’s not happening.

-Anxiety, phobias, deep fear of anything connected to/reminders of the trauma, trying to avoid thinking and/or talking about the traumatic events, avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic events.

-Hypervigilance, easily startled or frightened, acutely aware and over-active sympathetic nervous system, hardwired to always being on guard for danger, difficulty distinguishing present/immediate danger from past and/or perceived danger, heightened fight/flight/freeze/fawn responses, living in survival mode.

-Low self-esteem; difficulty trusting; difficulty maintaining relationships; negative thoughts about yourself, other people, and the world; lack of boundaries and assertiveness; conforming and people pleasing, fawning and not being able to say "no"; not feeling able to be authentic or true to yourself or even necessarily knowing what that is for you; detachment; over apologizing; being overly responsible; overanalyzing; trouble bonding; fear of abandonment and rejection; withdrawal; isolation.

-Difficulty regulating emotions, hopelessness about the future, depression, despair, irritability, stress, anger, rage, grief, shame, self loathing, emptiness, difficulty experiencing positive emotions (joy center of the brain is actually damaged in trauma), worthlessness, overwhelmed, fear, terror, sense of not being wanted/accepted or belonging, feeling unlovable, feeling like a burden and/or people would be better off without you.

-Guilt: over what happened to you, what you may have had to do to survive, seeing impacts of your experiences on others, internalizing messages people have told you about what happened, guilt over the coping strategies you have turned to in order to get through, other people's judgements and expectations (if you just did this, you'd be fine).

-Shame: internal and external. A lot of shame that comes from external sources comes through the language that is used, such as the way questions are worded - (police/Crown/defense lawyers) all place shame, whether intentional or not; why you did what you did, why you didn't do what someone thinks you should have done... Trafficking is not cut and dried. There are so many influences on the experience of being trafficked.

-Previous trauma, how long you've been trafficked, who your trafficker is... It's hard to defend a choice when you don't always understand or know the reasoning behind what brought you to that point. "It can feel like things were actually my fault because he instilled that in me" – hard to separate from that internalized belief.

-Difficulty processing and remembering information, difficulty concentrating/making decisions and with executive functioning, memory problems (both long and short term) including not remembering time and details of traumatic events.

“Humiliation. It’s not that you are suicidal, but you want to disappear. Your very existence, especially when you are going through the court process, is a humiliation.”

-Sleep paralysis, nightmares, insomnia, trouble falling and/or staying asleep, over-sleeping, nightmares/distressing dreams about the traumatic events or in general.

-Auto-immune disorders, health difficulties, asthma, arthritis, headaches, migraines, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, chronic fatigue, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart issues, IBS, Crohn’s, acid reflux, ulcers, colitis, and reproductive challenges.

-Triggers, flashbacks, recurrent unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic events, reliving the traumatic events physically and emotionally as if they were happening again in that moment, severe emotional distress and/or physical reactions to anything that reminds you of the traumatic events. Somatic and emotional reactions can last for days.

-Avoidance, detachment, dissociation, depersonalization, derealization, feeling disconnected from events/experiences (both past and present)/self/family/friends, addiction, self harm, and automatic/autonomic attempts to withdraw from overwhelming emotions and circumstances.

-Depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed, lack of self care, self punishment, self sabotage, addiction, eating disorders, withdrawal, isolation, hopelessness, and attempts to escape from unbearable circumstances and overwhelming feelings.

-Eating disorders, upset stomach, lack of rest and digest, anorexia, bulimia, EDNOS (Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified), binge eating, combination of any/all of the above, over-exercising, laxative abuse, purging, restricting, using food for reward or punishment, changes in weight or appetite, eating addiction, IBS, Crohn’s, acid reflux, ulcers, colitis.

“Eating disorders, upset stomach, lack of rest and digest – don’t label these as “maladaptive” coping skills when speaking to clients – they aren’t maladaptive when it’s the only thing keeping someone alive. Switch the focus to harm reduction, not the complete removal of these tools until they are ready. Alive and wounded is better than dead.” - Survivor

Other thoughts Survivors want you to consider regarding being trauma-informed:

- Please note that survivors cannot simply stop, shut down, or reason their way out of these C-PTSD responses, no matter how deeply they desire to, as this degree of trauma literally changes the structure and functioning of the brain and nervous system, among other things, and thus many of these symptoms are autonomic and automatic; healing generally takes true safety over a long period of time and is a non-linear journey.

“Also, just because someone (even as a helper/professional) is unable to fathom or comprehend the survivor’s story and/or symptoms and struggles, it doesn’t mean that it didn’t happen or isn’t happening - sex trafficking and the resulting impacts are often unfathomable for those who have not endured it. Please be patient, kind, and gentle.”

- Understanding that just as healing is not a linear journey, neither is the story that a survivor shares. Their story may also come out in pieces and incoherent fragments which does not mean that they are lying.
- Understand that just because the “event” is over, does not mean that the trauma responses are over. There is not a right or wrong time for how long impacts stay with you, but they will stay with you. Healing is often a life-long journey.
- Be aware of tone of voice, of the atmosphere in your workspace, whether you are wearing a uniform, or of any changes in the environment that a survivor is accustomed to, no matter how subtle or personal. All of these things can impact on a person’s sense of safety when sharing their story.
- Transparency. Tell the truth in “love” and do not sugar-coat or manipulate, or try to elicit what you want to hear from them. Tell the truth, not what you think the Survivor wants to hear or in order to get them to say what you need. A Survivor has had choices taken away – don’t add to it.

“Believe her when she shares her story. Believe her when she says she’s trapped; when she says that there is no way out. This is her truth. Some of my most violent clients were doctors, lawyers, police. Believe me when I say I couldn’t go for help.” -Survivor

- Breathing exercises are NOT relaxing/calming for everyone – some survivors have had their breathing controlled/restricted. This just goes back to not assuming what helps, or what we need. Ask over assume. This goes with everything really; we know ourselves best. Don’t label a survivor as unwilling to heal or try because we say no to something suggested or give you a reason for why we feel it’s not helpful.

- It's important to be aware of how you are responding to a survivor. Be respectful, calm, and listen. Give people a moment to think. You don't have to fill a silence – give the person time to gather themselves to share with you. Also recognize when they do not want to share and do not force, pressure, manipulate, or coerce them to.
- You don't have to have a solution to everything – you don't have to have a product at the end. Ask “what do you need from me – what can I do?” If you can't fulfill their needs yourself, help connect them to additional resources and/or supports. Network with the survivor's permission.
- Don't try to avoid topics so that the other person isn't triggered. Ask “when you feel like this, what do you find helpful” ... and then reintroduce the topic or keep going with the discussion. Even use an appointment to talk about how you can support them in managing trauma responses – let the survivor lead you. Also check in with the survivor, try to gauge how well they are handling things/if they are safe, and make sure there is a safety plan in place for if/when they are triggered outside of your office.
- Understand that even using the word “survivor” can be hard because some days you don't feel like a survivor, especially during days where you are having a hard time existing.

“Trying to convince me that I'm a survivor can feel like a lie in the moment.” - Survivor

Quotes from the SAC:

“Let them know you believe them, appreciate their trust, will support them, affirm their courage.”

“My opinion from my own personal experience. If it's the first time, or first few times you are talking to someone and are asked "do you want to report" it can feel judgemental or threatening, like the survivor will disappoint you or waste your time or be rejected if they don't, or ultimately pressured or manipulated into it because they believe it's your end goal.”

“Ask them what they need ... don't assume what they need. Give them true choice and control without fear of negative consequences.”

“I know for me, when I've been asked from other agencies the question about reporting without any trust built it has come across in a way that I'm supposed to do it, or if I don't, I'm in the wrong. Whether or not that was the intended message.”

Feminist Theory (Perspective)

An academic definition of feminist theory addresses gender inequality, social norms and expectations of women, focusing on promoting the needs and concerns of women.

The SAC agrees with these principles and also believe that feminist theory (perspectives) requires:

- Meeting survivors where they are, using their terminology, taking their lead, joining with them in their goals. Accepting where they are in their journey, not where you want, hope, or expect they'd be.
- Asking the survivor what they need from you and provide them with tools to be as safe as possible.
- Trusting that survivors are experts of their own lives and own experiences. Trust that they have their own capacities, own experiences, and own intuition.
- Valuing and honouring women's/survivor's experiences. Acknowledge and focus on women's/survivor's strengths but also acknowledge where the survivor says they feel weak. Talk about what they can do to gain strength/make progress in these areas to help increase their sense of self esteem, self confidence, and safety. This goes back to the idea of being called a survivor when you may not feel that way – because focusing only on the strengths can put the sense out there that you are wrong if you don't feel the way you "should" about yourself. It can come across as invalidating or dismissive. *"Just because you say it doesn't mean that, it still feels true to me. Validate that it's okay to feel what you feel and that those feelings and thoughts are real and true for me."* Acknowledge that it's okay not to feel okay all the time. Don't use the "I believe that you believe" kind of language. There is an underlying message that the survivor is wrong about their own reality. It also sends the message that the survivor can't tell the truth to this person and then has to hide their experiences. Also, what isn't acknowledged can't be worked on and healed. *"Saying" Oh you're so strong" doesn't acknowledge the impacts of what I've gone through."*
- A willingness to listen and to learn. The survivor is the ultimate expert on themselves, their lives, their needs, etc. Survivors deserve unconditional acceptance and belonging; of being believed.
- Understanding the nature of gender inequality and how these inequalities play a significant role in the sex trade and trafficking and in the survivor's life and recovery/healing in general.

- Understanding how social, economic, experiential, familial and environmental factors play a role in women's and survivors' choices or lack of choices. Ask and believe the survivor – they may experience things you didn't realize/haven't thought of.
- Providing opportunities to build a sense of personal power.
- Do not assume ANYTHING. If you don't know, ask questions, take an interest. You are harming the survivor and taking away from their lived experiences by making assumptions, which can be damaging to your relationship and re-traumatizing for them.

Anti-Oppressive Perspective

An academic definition of anti-oppressive practice focuses on creating and re-creating power structures that address existing systemic injustices on all levels – individual to institutional. This is especially important from a feminist perspective which identifies patriarchy as the oppression of women, girls, and vulnerable members of society.

The SAC agrees with these principles and also believe that anti-oppressive practices require:

- That survivors have the freedom to make their own decisions - true choice, free from judgment, free from fear of the withdrawal of support, etc.
- Working collaboratively to come to agreements. Become a "team" - we are stronger together.
- Not using your position (as a professional) to bully, intimidate, push, expect
- Work to end socio-economic oppression.
- Ensure that survivors are fairly compensated if you are wanting them to share their expertise for your agency's benefit, such as speaking at events, participating in groups/committees. Consider whether your request for their story is exploitive or triggering - consider the cost to them in all aspects, what they need, etc.
- Recognize vulnerabilities and different experiences of women, including Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQI+ persons, youth, women living in poverty, and other marginalized individuals.
- Teach skills to someone instead of doing it for them but go at a pace that is appropriate for them; don't set them up to fail.
- Never censor a survivor's story, even if there are parts of it you don't agree with or that would make them look "bad".
- "You don't have to protect me. Ask me what I think." Survivors need to have control over their own stories. It effectively places shame on a woman for her experiences when you state it's to 'protect' them. "We don't need someone to save us or 'protect' us, we need support, not someone with a saviour complex."
- Survivors should have access to anything that is about them. If you are concerned about the impacts of a survivor learning information, ensure they have supports in place.



Disclosure and
Anonymous Reporting

Survivor's Thoughts on Disclosure and Anonymous Reporting

"Disclosing to police for me was very difficult and was a huge step. It can be difficult to feel as though the police will believe a survivor, particularly if they have had negative police experiences in the past. An issue that I faced was feeling as though it was a "he said she said" type of case, which happens a lot of the time with human trafficking and the police have disclosed to me that this is why it can be hard to get convictions because there is often little to no evidence of the crime left behind. All of this can be re-traumatizing. It is helpful to have someone in my corner who I am sure believes me, and cares about my well being throughout the process. It is important to have someone who can be honest about what support they are able to provide and can also provide resources for areas that they cannot touch on. To ask "what do you need from me, what do you think could help you right now?" You may not have all of the resources that that person feels they need but you may be able to put them in touch with another organization that can." -Survivor

Another Survivor identified the need, if possible and safe to do so, for survivors to document their experiences. When a survivor is experiencing the "he said, she said" issue in the legal process, these documented experiences may be the only thing a survivor has to support their claims.

Survivors Want You to Know:

- If a Survivor is going to speak with the Police about their experience, it is important that they have a support person they can talk to between giving information to Police and then giving a statement for an official report. It is also important to have a support person to debrief with after making a statement, and while engaging in all of the above if possible and wanted.
- Survivors have the option to meet with Police off the record before making a final report. If Police are made aware that there was an intimate relationship between survivor and trafficker, then Police are mandated to lay a charge as they will consider the disclosure a domestic related offence. Prepare survivors for this so they can make an informed decision about reporting, understanding that they may lose control of the process when police receive this information.

- Survivors can make a statement to Police about being trafficked, without having charges laid. This can be done so that the experience is documented and can potentially be used in the future, or so that Police are aware of the trafficker.
- Police within the Human Trafficking Unit cannot make any guarantees or promises of results. They can say that they will lay a charge, but they can't guarantee what the Crown Attorney will do, and they can't guarantee a conviction or length of sentence.

"The law is not justice." - Survivor

- There is a difference in laying charges and getting a conviction. Consider the concept that Police have to be 51% certain that a crime was committed while the Crown Attorney has to be 99% certain that they will get a conviction.
- The Crown Attorney has their own agenda that may not align with what the survivor is hoping for.
- It is important to create a safe place for survivors when they are going to share their story, talk to Police, or make a statement. To help create that safe place, ask survivors what safety means to them and what they need to feel safe or safer. Giving choices allows a survivor to have some sense of control over the process. Being non-judgemental is imperative. Depending upon the agency, you may need to review your agency mandate when it comes to what you have to report to authorities. Have tactile objects on hand for comfort and/or grounding. If possible, have personal needs items ready and available. Provide a facility tour if possible so survivors know exits and the layout. Let survivors know how the agency would handle a situation if the trafficker came to the agency.

"Any wording regarding reporting so that it doesn't happen to someone else, places guilt and shame on the survivor who is talking about it and may significantly impact on their decision as to whether they report or not. They don't owe it to anyone to report. As someone who did report, it is nice to be on the other side of it and see that your experience helped someone else, but that can never be the motivator or the expectation." -Survivor

Cons of Making a Statement to Police:

- Potential impacts to safety when a trafficker learns the survivor has spoken to the Police.
- Trafficker could be antagonized, and safety risks could worsen if they have no consequences.
- Systemic Injustice: the survivor can be revictimized and retraumatized by the people who are supposed to be there to protect them.
- Time. The legal process is a long and drawn-out process, and this can be exasperated if parole and probation are factors. It can take years.
- With the length of the process, the triggers and trauma responses related to being trafficked can also be intensified.

Pros of Making a Statement to Police:

- There is a record of the crime.
- There is a potential for consequences for the trafficker.
- There is a potential for the survivor to have a sense of safety.
- There is the potential for a survivor to feel as though they have regained some power and control in their life.
- It can be an empowering experience to have a voice and to see the process follow through.



Advocacy

Survivors have indicated that having an advocate throughout the justice process is key, especially in the beginning of their journey.

Survivors shared that they had been conditioned by their trafficker/s to believe that using their own voice was not safe. Survivors identified the following internalized messages that have created challenges for them speaking up for their needs:

- You are taught that you shouldn't speak up because your feelings and opinions don't matter and/or you could get hurt.
- If you try to stand up for yourself, it doesn't matter – it doesn't make a difference and you end up getting hurt.
- You are supposed to shut up and comply.
- It is dangerous to have a voice.
- You are not allowed to say no. Your trafficker/abuser is just going to do what they want. They are just going to take what they want and then use your voice against you.
- You are too ashamed to speak for yourself.
- Your self-esteem/self-worth is so low it feels like it doesn't even exist. You believe you have no value so what you have to say has no value.

An advocate needs to create an emotionally safe space for survivors to express their needs. A safe space means that a survivor is listened to, supported, not judged, and feels safe to be vulnerable. A survivor is looking for and needs empathy and compassion.

As an advocate, please remember,

- Only share what you have been given permission to share.
- Do not force, even subtly, your opinions or own agendas onto the survivor. Advocacy is reflective of the survivor's needs, not what you think is in the survivor's best interests.
- Survivors need to know that their voices matters. If you go outside of that, you are no longer a safe support.



Support to
Prepare for Court

Support to Prepare for Court:

In the words of Survivors to survivors:

"I have stumbled in understanding that the justice system takes a lot of control away from me, and what that looks like. It's hard to feel comfortable enough to have faith in the system, to take that first step to begin with.

There are worries about feeling alone or being made out to be a liar."

-Survivor

- The Defense Attorney can cross-examine you. It can feel like you are the one on trial.
- The system is not trauma informed so if you can't remember something or the order something happened in, which is very much related to how trauma is processed, the Defense Attorney will try to twist it around so that you are perceived as a liar – or that it wasn't as bad as you are saying or that you consented.
- Coping mechanisms for the trauma that you may have developed can potentially be used against you as well.
- Arrange for a court room tour or get a description of the physical layout of the courtroom – who sits where, roles of each person...
- Understand that the court process, and everything leading up to it, is humiliating and degrading. You want to disappear. It feels like you are the one on trial. You feel the need to defend yourself and you don't always know or have the answers for why you did what you did in that moment. No one knows what they would have done in that moment.

You can know all of this and still not be prepared for how challenging, painful, awful, and retraumatizing the experience can be.

"I knew things were going to be bad but didn't know how bad until I had to relive it. Having to live through it the second time was harder than the experience of being trafficked. The defense lawyer is trying to put thoughts in your head. Gaslighting you is their profession. The blame shifting sits with you. I know it's their job, but it still sits with me. That's her job but it's my life." - Survivor

As a Committee, we talked this through about why it's harder in some ways to recount the experience of being trafficked almost more than the actual experience. The SAC shared that when you are trafficked, you are trying to survive from one experience to the next experience. When you have to share your story, it is reliving each of those experiences all at once. As well, in the words of one Survivor, "Survival helped me keep going."When you are not having to survive, having to relive your experiences becomes overwhelming. Your nervous system doesn't run on a clock. Your experience of being trafficked is in the past but your nervous system and body doesn't understand that. It tells you it's happening now and is retraumatizing. This is a survivor's experience and reality, even if it doesn't seem logical."



Accompaniment
to Court

Accompaniment to Court

From a LAWC Advocate/Counsellor's experience:

Accompaniment to court goes beyond being present with a survivor. It entails being an advocate, support system, distractor, debriefer, and guide. There is so much that goes on through the court process that requires you to be engaged with the client as well as the system, and to be knowledgeable of many aspects of this institution.

This is not a user-friendly system; therefore, it is your responsibility, as the service provider, to gently guide your client through the physical realm of the courthouse, ensure their rights are upheld and needs are met within your scope of abilities through advocacy, and be the grounding presence that your client will need. Be prepared with tangible fidget toys, visualization techniques, breathing techniques or whatever grounding skills your client has practiced and noted as effective for them.

The working relationship that you have built with the survivor will be a part of the safety net that sees them through one of the hardest undertakings of their lives.



Debriefing After
Appointments and Court

Debriefing

Debriefing is an integral part of supporting a survivor navigating the criminal justice system, from beginning to end.

"I have provided debriefing after meetings with Crown Attorneys, after reviewing statements and evidence, after trials, after judgement hearings and sentencing hearings, and for probation hearings. The one thing that I would like everyone to know is how re-traumatizing all of these experiences are, even when the results are favourable. There is a depth of trauma attached to being trafficked and a depth of trauma responses that come with these experiences. I think when people talk about debriefing after an event, most people think of reviewing what happened. That is the case when supporting a survivor through these events, but debriefing also includes supporting her as she relives her trauma and is saturated by trauma responses. In those moments, as her support, you become her anchor. You need to understand that she likely will need support to feel safe, even if she is in a space where she is fully protected. Debriefing is meeting a survivor where they are at and supporting them from that place; it is a process and often starts with support and coping strategies."

-LAWC Advocate/Counsellor

Survivors often struggle to deal with difficult feelings including shame over what everyone now knows about their experiences, and guilt over speaking out about their trafficker because the survivor has been conditioned from a place of fear to protect him. Many complicated emotions may arise all at once and don't often make sense to the survivor or to others who don't understand the prevalence of victim blaming in trafficking. This is where validation of feelings, education about dynamics of trafficking is reiterated, and conversations about self-compassion and grace are offered.

Debriefing is a complex and nuanced practice that really focuses on meeting a survivor where they are and supporting them with empathy, non-judgement, and compassion from that place.



Support with Victim
Impact Statement

Support with Victim Impact Statement

"I hated doing it. It's important but it sucks a lot to have the offender who purposefully hurt you get confirmation that they hurt you." -Survivor

From a LAWC Advocate/Counsellor's experience:

Many survivors struggle with whether they will complete a Victim Impact Statement or not. Some survivors have said that they don't want to give their trafficker additional power by having their trafficker become aware of how their experience has hurt them. The purpose of the Victim Impact Statement isn't to explain or give information to the trafficker; it's to explain to the judge how the survivor's experience has impacted them with the intention that it will influence the sentence a trafficker gets. That being said, it doesn't mean that it is any easier for a survivor.

It can be extremely difficult for many survivors to write their own Victim Impact Statements. When someone has been subjected to this degree of trauma, organizing thoughts, and then moving those thoughts to the paper, can be challenging and re-traumatizing. Sitting with a survivor and brainstorming impacts of their experience with a support person and writing thoughts down can be less triggering for a survivor. Victim Witness Assistance Programs provide a guide that helps but the actual assistance of putting pen to paper can make all the difference.

When it comes time to read the Victim Impact Statement in court, many survivors expressed concerns about breaking down or not being able to speak. There are options if they cannot, such as having the Crown Attorney read their statement. Some survivors have shared that after everything was done, they regret not having read their statement, while some survivors have no regrets. It really is about choice and only a survivor has the right to make that decision. At the end of it all, even with regrets, if a survivor has made the decision at that time to do what they believed was in their best interest, then talking about giving themselves compassion becomes important.



Victim
Compensation

Victim Compensation

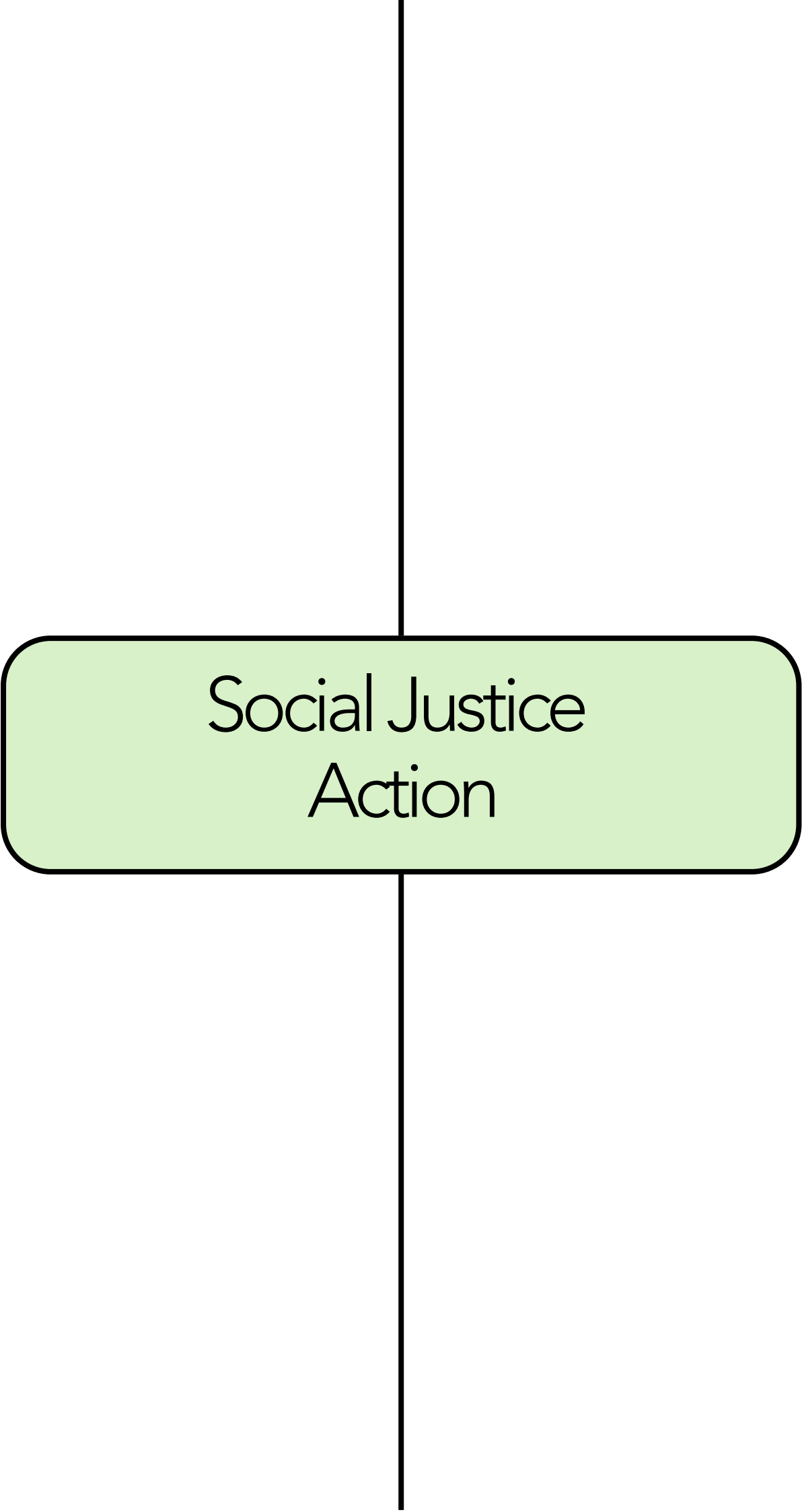
VQRP+ (Victim Services): Victim Services is a program in Ontario that specializes in helping victims of crime, tragic circumstance, and disaster. Victim Services provides directed funds for individuals who have been trafficked called VQRP+ (Victim Quick Response Program+). Victim Services can assist with supports such as emergency hotel stays, tattoo removal or cover-up, counselling, and assistance in transportation to a safe house.

Class Action Lawsuit (i.e. Porn Hub/MindGeek): When Journey to Justice first started, the London Abused Women's Centre was aware of a class action lawsuit launched against Porn Hub/MindGeek for individuals who had sexual images of them posted on these sites when they were minors. LAWC is not currently aware of the status of this lawsuit.

Personal Injury – Civil Suit: This is a problematic option for many women, girls, vulnerable and marginalized individuals who have been trafficked for a number of reasons: not being aware of who your trafficker is, your trafficker could be your family member or partner which creates additional challenges, or your trafficker could be through a gang or organized crime which increases the risk to your safety. Pursuing a civil suit is rare and no survivors with whom we consulted chose to do so.

Defend Dignity Canada Survivor's Support Fund: "was created to provide accessible financial support to individuals who have experienced any form of commercial sexual exploitation in Canada, such as prostitution, sex trafficking, intimate images being shared without consent, camming, escorting, massage parlours, strip clubs, survival sex, and/or involvement in pornography." Defend Dignity Canada

More detailed information and applications for this funding can be found at <https://defenddignity.ca/survivor-support-fund/>



Social Justice
Action

Social Justice Action

“Speaking out about my experience and having the platform to do so, has been very therapeutic to me. Feeling as though I went through a horrible experience but came out on the other side has given me the knowledge to be able to help and support others who are still stuck being trafficked. It has been the only positive outcome out of a horrific situation. It makes me feel as though I matter, and that my voice is important, even though it was hushed for so long before.” - Survivor

The Journey to Justice Survivors’ Advisory Committee believes that survivors should be compensated for their time when contributing their expertise in informing best practices to support other survivors of sex trafficking/sexual exploitation.

Examples of some opportunities that the London Abused Women’s Centre, Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited have provided to survivors to take social justice action:

- Keynote speakers at fundraising events
- Media interviews
- Documentary about sex trafficking
- Gender Equality Advocacy Group
- Interviews with Members of Parliament
- Shine The Light (LAWC) – yearly public awareness campaign that honours 2 women each year who have either survived men’s violence or who have lost their lives to men’s violence. Survivors have an opportunity to publicly speak about their experience and family speaks for the woman (and in one case child) who lost their life.
- Survivor Consultant’s/Advisory Committees
- Peer mentor training
- Focus groups



Healing

Healing: Connecting with Supports

When building the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool, Survivors identified that the Healing Column was sometimes the most impactful column of them all and was actually essential to their journey. No matter what decision a survivor makes when determining if or where they are going to enter the justice system, stabilizing their lives, building knowledge to understand their experience, and building a foundation of internal and external support was key. Survivors indicated that they not only needed the foundation they were creating through Healing to be able to actually survive the traditional justice system but that it was also integral to them being able to rebuild their lives.

“I wouldn’t even be able to function going through the other aspects (criminal justice system) if healing and self-empowerment didn’t come first. I still don’t know if I’ll ever be able to get to that point.” - Survivor

“Healing and self-empowerment, connecting to supports, allowed me to understand my experience. The manipulation and threats I experienced from my trafficker had kept me stuck and not understanding my experience.” -Survivor

*“I am still building my foundation.
I still struggle with the voice in my head that questions my safety and abilities.”
-Survivor*

Members of the Journey to Justice Survivors’ Advisory Committee were asked for their insights as to how to best support them on their healing journey.

They responded:

“The pandemic has caused a lot of negatives in our lives, but a benefit of it has been that we have learned that counselling and support is accessible and can be successful via phone or online. Sometimes, survivors’ lives can be really busy and chaotic, but we still need time to debrief, to have someone in our corner and be reminded why we are taking these important steps and that what happened to us matters. For me, having my appointments moved to phone call appointments has made them so much more convenient and accessible. In my opinion, this should be an ongoing available service for as many organizations in which it would be possible to do so.”

“Another factor is to meet us where we are at. Not everyone will be ready to press charges right away, if ever. Everyone is going to have a different lens of how trauma has affected them, and no two survivors’ stories are going to be the same.”

“If you don’t understand our experience, ask from a place of genuine interest and care. Don’t try to fake your way through or not be present with us because you then make comments or miss saying something that may end up hurting us.”

A Survivor shared that she told a support worker that she felt “like a prostitute”. The worker’s response was “you’re not on the streets”, totally negating that Survivor’s experience. From the Survivor’s perspective, if the worker, from a place of non-judgement and respect, had asked a few more questions, the worker would have gathered more information. In the Survivor’s words “There was so much more going on that I didn’t understand myself.” Asking a few more questions to better understand the Survivor’s experiences and needs “could have saved me/her so many years.” This Survivor didn’t get the help she needed until she had a mental health event that was too big to hide or miss.

Survivors want you to know that when you are helping a survivor of trafficking:

- You need to look past the mental health, the junkie, the addict. You must show respect to the survivor like you would with any other human being
- Be aware of your own biases.
- Don’t just go off a checklist. If you use a checklist, use it as a place to start, not as a diagnostic or assessment tool. We are more than tick marks in boxes.
- If we are not expressing ourselves in a way that you prefer, don’t shut us down. Be patient with us. Trauma is not linear, and neither is how we express it. It takes us time.
- Create a safe space for us to talk and that really means having no judgement and bias. Be kind, compassionate and supportive. Treat us how you or someone you care about would want to be treated.
- Try to understand. Ask us questions and be willing to hear honest answers.
- Don’t make assumptions.
- Give us choice and control.
- Listen. Reflect back what you hear. No shame, blame, pressure, or judgment. Always our choice without guilt. Ask what we need and/or make offers. Offer support, compassion, empathy, validation.
- Recognize that we all have our own unique healing journey.

The Evolution of the Journey to Justice Navigation Tool

As the Journey to Justice Project progressed, new thoughts and challenges about the original navigation tool became evident. What became especially problematic was the realization by the Journey to Justice Survivors' Advisory Committee that parts of the navigation tool were not accessible to a lot of survivors, especially around accessing traditional forms of justice.

When it came to disclosures and/or reporting to Police or other supports, many survivors identified that they did not feel this was an option for them. Reasons included: not knowing who their trafficker or sex purchasers were; some survivors were sexually exploited in childhood and their trafficker had died; they were too afraid; and/or survivors wanted to leave it behind them and focus on healing. Reporting to Police was not every survivor's priority and for many, this meant that their journey did not involve the criminal justice system.

When it came to Victim Compensation, many survivors identified that they were unable to access those resources; for some, the timeframe to access compensation (ie. VQRP+) had passed or was not available at that time, and for others, they did not meet all the criteria required to apply.

When it came to taking Social Justice Action, many survivors identified that these opportunities were not options for them. For some, there were risks to safety if they spoke out, but largely, some of the opportunities were based on grants that had ended and were no longer available, or opportunities were contingent upon requests that we could not plan for.

With these realizations, the Journey to Justice Survivors' Advisory Committee began to take a closer look at what justice meant to them and alternatives to justice. The Committee determined that there are other avenues to justice, determined by each survivor, and agreed that bringing into their lives things and experiences that they felt empowered by are also forms of personal justice.

“What is the real journey?”

The Journey to Justice Survivors’ Advisory Committee determined that the Navigation Tool needed to be updated to reflect what had been learned throughout the implementation of the project. A core principle of Journey to Justice has been creating survivor-informed and survivor-centered practices and, in consultation with Survivors, the tool was amended to better reflect their needs and feedback. The updated Journey to Justice Navigation Tool reflects many survivors’ experience that they have found more justice for themselves through what they have personal control over, which has been primarily their own healing.

Self-Empowerment

Reframing Justice

“Anything that a survivor feels empowered by is a journey to justice.” -Survivor

Survivors explored the question “What does empowerment mean to me?” and identified empowerment as:

- Being supported in exiting
- People (supports) meet you where you are at (no judgements or expectations on what you do or don't do)
- Feeling a sense of personal control over the situation and over what happens to you
- Having strength and confidence to ask for and do what you need, regardless of what anyone else thinks about it
- Being able to share my story, use my voice, without judgment from others
- Tell my story
- Make my own decisions on my own journey (self-determination)
- Being strong, emotionally strong (and knowing I don't have to feel this way all the time)
- Learning to live again – not just surviving, living again
- Having opinions and being able to express them
- Having likes and dislikes and knowing that my preferences matter
- Stepping outside of comfort zones

When Survivors come from a place of self-empowerment, they notice:

- Confidence/Confidence in decision-making
- Unwavering about decisions
- Energetic shifts
- *“We glow differently”* – self-esteem, self-worth, and how we carry ourselves.
- What you felt defeated about before, you don't today
- What you seek out shifts
- Being able to ask for what you need
- Having a healthy sense of self-esteem - sense of self-worth
- Being better at setting personal boundaries and not feeling guilty about it – I know I am protecting my mental health, my self-care, my healing journey
- I'm able to say no, even if the other person doesn't hear it. I will say it over and over if I have to
- We try new things, even if we're scared.
- We give ourselves grace and self-compassion.

AND LASTLY, THE JOURNEY TO JUSTICE SURVIVORS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE WANTS YOU TO UNDERSTAND THOUGHTS ON STRENGTH

As Survivors, we are told how strong we are, and what strength we must possess in order to have gone through what we did and remain alive, never mind moving forward. However, being told how strong you are isn't always appropriate - much less helpful - and can actually be damaging to hear. It can cause a survivor to question themselves: Does this mean I have to be strong all the time? Does it mean I'm weak if I can't live up to your definition of strong? If I don't feel strong, is there something wrong with me?

"A strong woman is one who cries, sheds tears for a time and then gets up and fights again." -Survivor

Survivors have determined that strength means:

- Giving yourself grace, kindness, and self-compassion
- Being able to speak my truth and tell my story
- Setting boundaries and saying no
- Building on your sense of self-worth
- Giving yourself permission to ask the question "What do I need?"
- Being willing to be vulnerable
- Caring well for yourself and others
- Doing the work on your healing journey and sticking with it, even when it is uncomfortable
- Being willing to step outside of your comfort zones, take risks, and trust
- Allowing others to help you and asking for help or whatever you need
- Staying alive even when you don't want to

"Strength is being brave enough to talk about what is killing you on the inside before it kills you in other ways." -Survivor

Please be aware that we might end up sabotaging ourselves. We can sometimes begin to feel good about life, ourselves, and others as we move forward on our healing journey and we can, in turn, feel threatened by that – because even though it is good, it is unfamiliar and can feel unsafe. Often, when you have experienced trafficking and abuse, when things go well, it always ends – and when it ends, we get hurt. We can sometimes live in the place of waiting for something good to end and that place becomes incredibly stressful and triggering. To try to manage the stress and triggers, without our conscious awareness, we may sabotage relationships and healing. Please try to understand that this is not our intention or desire.

Please don't give up on us.