

**Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 Training Event**  
**Understanding Victims of Human Trafficking**  
**October 30, 2015**  
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The session reviewed identification of potential human trafficking victims. Typical signs that identify potential victims include: Over-sexualized behavior, a controlling older companion or “boyfriend”, a highly-controlled schedule, bruises or other signs of physical abuse, unidentifiable sources of income and personal items, homelessness or inability to provide the address of a permanent residence, and the use of lingo associated with “The Life”. Victims might bear a tattoo that they are reluctant to explain, the result of being “branded” with an exploiter’s name or symbol.

Screening questions that might identify a victim include asking if the victim is paid for any type of work performed, asking if their working conditions are safe, asking if they are being forced to do anything that they do not want to do, and asking if they are being forced to make money for someone else. Additional questions can be posed around safety, such as if they have been hurt or if they or their family have been threatened with violence. Having had their identification documents taken from them is another sign of potential victimization.

Juvenile trafficking victims suffer a myriad of negative impacts, including physical, social, psychological, legal, and emotional losses and suffering. Physical abuse—including rape and gang rape—can result in contracting STD’s, pregnancy, sterility, tattooing, substance addiction, facial and dental disfiguration, cutting and self-mutilation, and suicide attempts. Cases have documented organic brain damage from beatings. Social impact can include isolation from peer groups, homelessness, incarceration or criminal record, lack of life skills and education, obstacles to vocations or access to legal employment, and an inability to trust and maintain healthy relationships. Psychological and emotional impacts include PTSD, anger and rage, deep emotional pain, shame, self-blame and self-loathing, and disruption of healthy development of self-concept, intimacy, beliefs, and goals.

Victims have immediate, ongoing, and long-term needs. Immediate needs include safety, shelter, and possible emergency medical care. Ongoing needs include physical and mental health treatment, vocational training, and possibly child-care and/or substance abuse treatment. Long-term needs include education and job training, including life skills training, permanent housing, legal advocacy, and possibly language skills education and family reunification.

Challenges to successful treatment and intervention of victims are immense at all stages in the recovery process, and present unique challenges to the courts, law enforcement, and social services and treatment workers. The magnitude of the impact of being trafficked is often so great that the victim pushes back against treatment, often believing that only the trafficker understands and accepts them. Traditional tools used to help delinquents, such as foster care, residential facilities, in-patient treatment, and psychiatric hospitalization are viewed by victims as punishment. Stages of recovery for victims are:

- Pre-contemplation; not ready to talk, defending the trafficker, refusing help

- Contemplation; acknowledges the pain of being in The Life, more willing to talk
- Preparation; makes commitment to leave, takes small steps, researches alternatives
- Action; leaving The Life
- Maintenance; remains free, develops new skills, avoids triggers

If a victim relapses and returns to the life, the intervention response is to address the grief from the failure, re-visit progress and examine the triggers that led to the relapse, and increase coping skills.