

# Cast

COALITION TO  
ABOLISH SLAVERY  
& TRAFFICKING



## Survivor Leaders: *From Victim to Advocate to Changemaker*

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) is one of the pioneers of the US anti-trafficking movement. Founded in 1998 in response to the discovery of 72 Thai workers that had been kept for years in slavery and debt bondage in Los Angeles County, the organization has been at the forefront of the issue in Los Angeles, California, and across the U.S., including opening the first-ever shelter exclusively for trafficking victims. Today, through partnerships with over 100 cultural and faith-based community groups, healthcare organizations, government agencies and law enforcement, CAST provides support at every phase of a human trafficking victim's journey to becoming an empowered survivor.

### *A Survivor Leadership Approach*

The organization's most important innovation has been to break down the barriers between practice and policy, connecting service provision to a broader systemic change strategy. This strategy empowers survivors to play a leading role in advocacy efforts, based on four ideas:

- Trafficking is a misunderstood and stigmatized crime. When survivors tell their own stories, they are able to replace stereotypes with the honest complexities of the issue.

At the same time, survivors are authentic and compelling spokespeople, making trafficking far more difficult to ignore by lawmakers and the public. However, currently survivors report being re-victimized by the media and well-intentioned policy-makers. CAST's leadership model ensures that survivor leaders are seen as more than their stories and are unique advocates for social change.

- Trafficking is also a complex and unique crime, and the process of recovery is long and arduous. Only survivors themselves can fully understand what victims need, or how services are working in practice. Specifically, many solutions that make intuitive sense to lawmakers and law enforcement actually exacerbate trafficking. For example, after the California Attorney General's office developed an outreach poster designed to highlight a 24-hour hotline for trafficking survivors to reach out for help, survivors provided feedback that the images used were unwelcoming and actually "scared victims." CAST then worked with community partners to develop different poster ideas, vetted by CAST survivor leaders. These new posters are now used across Los Angeles County.
- Trafficking is a crime that robs people of their power and self-determination. While shelters and services are essential to helping victims escape trafficking and heal from it, positioning survivors to become advocates for change presents a more complete opportunity to reclaim that lost power and right to self-determination. Empowered survivors are also less likely to be exploited in new relationships and places of work.

This work has taken on elevated importance in the current political climate in which human trafficking will almost certainly become more widespread as a result of draconian immigration enforcement and decreased resources available for community supports.

In February 2011, the Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) launched the National Survivor Network (NSN) to build a national anti-trafficking movement in which survivors are at the forefront and recognized as leaders. The 178 members of the NSN include survivors with various backgrounds and origins spanning 22 countries, including Ghana, India, Indonesia, Colombia, Cameroon, and the United States, and active members currently reside in 32 U.S. states.

The NSN's diverse membership makes it uniquely representative of the myriad of situations and dynamics experienced by survivors of human trafficking. By connecting survivors across the country, the NSN helps survivors find their voices and develop their confidence as leaders and experts in the anti-slavery movement.

### *Launching the Survivor Leadership Program*

In response to the success of the NSN, CAST is seeking funding to expand the program model through two new projects:

- **Pro Bono Law Firm & Survivor Partnerships for Policy Change:** At the state and local level, survivors are too often brought in by politicians and advocacy groups to "close the deal," but their stories are used to advocate for policies the survivors do not understand

or do not believe would be effective to combat trafficking. CAST has long pushed the movement to work more ethically with survivors, and this strategy represents the natural culmination of that push. CAST proposes to partner 3-5 survivor leaders in up to five different states with pro bono law firms, with survivors' ideas guiding firms as they develop background advocacy materials, legislative language, and deep political understanding of how to make real change happen together. CAST will guide these survivor-firm partnerships, provide subject matter expertise on trafficking and policy issues to law firms, and ensure the accommodation of survivors' mental health, financial needs, and institutional support. This targeted survivor leadership development model will, ideally, result in tangible policy changes at the state and local level, will strengthen and expand CAST's National Survivor Network, and will demonstrate to advocacy organizations and lawmakers a new survivor-centered model in how to more effectively work with survivors and create impactful change.

- **Expanding Survivor Policy Voices in Washington DC Through Survivor Fellowships:** To complement the state- and local-level partnerships, CAST seeks to launch a national survivor fellowship program for 2-3 survivor leaders, working in tandem on a single federal policy change over a two-year period. The goal of the fellowship is to encourage the survivor participants to develop an area of policy expertise that will serve as the foundation to effect change upon returning home. During the fellowship these survivors will be compensated for their work as fellows and receive support for related travel expenses. CAST will support the fellowship program by designing and directing the fellowship curriculum, utilize long-standing relationships in Washington D.C. to give survivors access to change-makers, and provide the mental health and institutional support needed by survivors.

The cost of these two new programs will be \$250,000 - \$350,000 annually depending on the number of fellowships offered. Though this work is vital, it tends to fall outside of the scope of government grants, and for that reason CAST is turning to forward-thinking institutional and individual donors to launch it.