



The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking

Now more than ever, trafficking survivors need support. The novel coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the risks of human trafficking and the cost of fighting it. Below are reports from California organizations serving human trafficking survivors on how the pandemic has impacted their ability to provide assistance to clients.

Increased Calls to Hotlines

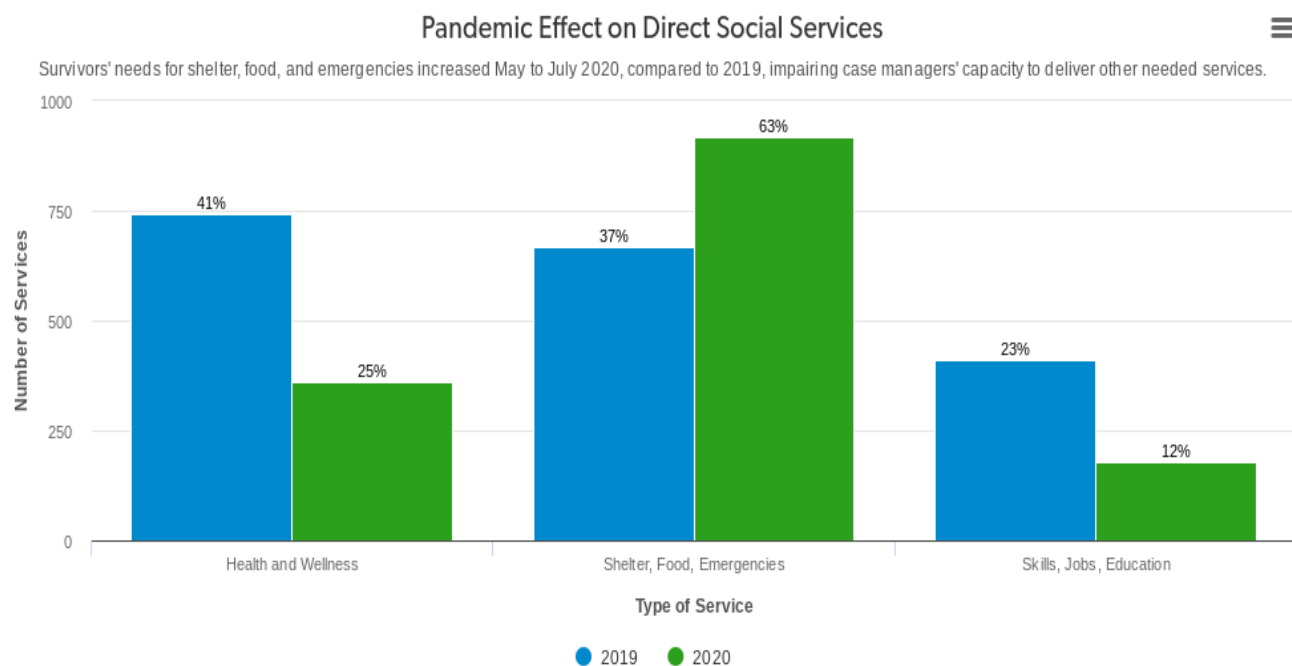
- Women's Transitional Living Center (WTLC): In March 2020, WTLC received a **135% increase** in calls to its 24/7 hotline number compared to last year. July 2020 saw a **76% increase** from calls received in July 2019. This increase of calls to the hotline is directly related to the need of critical services such as shelter, counseling, and legal support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1736 Family Crisis Center: From March to July 2020, 1736 Family Crisis Center has seen a **38% increase in calls** to its hotline for emergency services compared to the same time period in 2019. In May 2020, 1736 Family Crisis Center reported a **233% increase in crisis calls from human trafficking survivors** compared to the same time last year.
- Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST): CAST's 2020 Hotline reported a **111% increase in emergency call responses in 2020**.
- Santa Clarita County Wage Theft Coalition: Santa Clara County has an employer/employment legal advice hotline that is underfunded given the massive call volume it has received in 2020, highlighting the need for increased support for workers who are concerned about wage theft and exploitation during the pandemic.

Increased Demand for Services

- Interface Children & Family Services has experienced a **54% increase in requests for services and referrals during the months when California was impacted by COVID-19 in 2020** (January-August 2020 as compared to January-August 2019).
- North County Lifeline's Project LIFE has experienced a 19% increase in clients served, 15% increase in provision of intensive case management services, and a 35% increase in provision of mental health therapy services. (January-June 2020 as compared to January-June 2019).

#STOP TRAFFICKING IN ITS TRACKS

- International Rescue Committee (IRC) has seen a **dramatic increase in trafficking survivors identified**, with 53 new client referrals in March 2020 alone.
- Journey Out provided services to 176 clients and their families from March 1 through August 19, 2020, a substantial increase from the 148 clients that Journey Out worked with during the same period in 2019. The clients that Journey Out has served over the past few months in 2020 need substantial and long term support, particularly through rental assistance (a key component in client stabilization is keeping clients and their families in permanent housing).
- Ruby's Place reports that the COVID-19 health crisis has increased demand for support services, including food, rental and childcare assistance. Many clients either had a reduction in paid work, or have lost their income as a result of the pandemic. Vulnerable clients include non-English speaking, monolingual populations that may be in dire need of immigration legal resources and those that are at high risk of labor exploitation as essential workers.
- Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking saw an increase in new client needs compared to the same time last year. May saw a **49% increase** in new cases as compared to May 2019; **June increased 68%** compared to June 2019; and **July increased 70%** compared to July 2019. CAST reports increased difficulty in efficiently serving clients due to increased wait



#STOP TRAFFICKING IN ITS TRACKS

times for 1-800 helplines and assistance services through the Department of Public Social Services and Homeless Programs, decreased availability in shelters and clients' fear of COVID-19 in shelters, and the lack of in-person advocacy. Clients with ongoing health conditions face limited ability to schedule medical appointments and are seeking greater assistance with scheduling and accessing COVID-19 testing centers. Clients need technical support and guidance as many programs and benefits (i.e. housing applications, FAFSA and other education forms, childcare, transportation services like Uber and Lyft) require clients to create accounts in online portals or download applications on smartphones.

Greater Cost for Basic Necessities and Increased Expenditures

- Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking has seen a **165% increase in expenditures for necessities** like food, housing and rental assistance, transportation and medical expenses (March–June 2020 as compared to March–June 2019). Additionally, CAST reports that time spent with clients has shifted to emergency response work during the pandemic compared to the same months in 2019, where more time was spent building long-term support.
- International Rescue Committee has seen a steep increase in the needs of survivors as health risks escalate, unemployment continues to rise, immigration is halted, and schools remain closed. **From March–July 2020, IRC Sacramento provided over \$28,000 in direct assistance to trafficking survivors (more than the entire direct assistance spending of the previous year)**, which included coverage for over 1,400 nights of emergency and rental assistance. Even with this level of aid for survivors, the needs of survivors have not diminished--**the needs are increasing and funds are running out.**
- Journey Out reports that direct expenditures have skyrocketed. **There has been a 44.57% increase in the cost to provide rental assistance to trafficking survivors in 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019.**

Survivor Story: In March 2020, at the beginning of the shelter-in-place orders, a 20-year-old human trafficking survivor called the Verity Crisis Line for support. The survivor was able to flee from her trafficker, and wanted to return home to Sonoma County, where she grew up. Verity was able to safely provide the survivor with transportation to a women's shelter in Sonoma County. Verity also provided the survivor with clothing, food, and toiletries. The services were all provided virtually through Verity's 24-hour crisis line. A Verity caseworker is currently working with the survivor on her case-management goals, such as long-term housing, signing up for Medi-Cal, completing a CalFresh application, and searching for a job. Verity is also able to provide the survivor with Telehealth Video therapy. Although all of the services are virtual, the survivor is still able to build a community of support. Providing the services virtually has increased the time and capacity it has taken for Verity to serve this client



COVID-19 Related Job Loss

- 3Strands Global: Since the “shelter at home” orders began, 3Strands Global served 71 survivors in the Employ + Empower program. All clients were either about to start jobs or had maintained employment for a year when COVID-19 hit. 3Strands Global began assisting clients with filing for unemployment and began looking for food and basic necessities to meet their needs. For those who had not started a job, 3Strands Global began accumulating donations such as diapers, formula, food and toilet paper to support the families. Each week 3Strands Global’s social workers and case managers have continued to deliver basic necessities while managing caseloads of clients who are re-traumatized during the pandemic.
- Journey Out: For Journey Out’s clients, COVID-19 has resulted in loss of employment (including the loss of employment of family members whom they may have depended upon for support) and homelessness/housing insecurity, resulting in an increase in vulnerability.

Impact on Mental Health

- ARM of Care: For youth and young adults who have been or are at risk of being exploited, their fears about the future have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Engaging them in programs like those ARM of Care provides (Art, Recreation, and Movement) is necessary for their healing process.
- WEAVE: The impact of COVID-19 and the shutdown across the nation has been detrimental to people of many backgrounds. WEAVE has seen an increase in mental health instability amidst the people whom it serves.

Unique Impact on Women

- Community Against Sexual Harm: Community Against Sexual Harm describes seeing first-hand how devastating the COVID-19 pandemic is for women who do not have the ability to choose a safe place to stay and who are unable to take advantage of stimulus payments or unemployment benefits in order to meet their most basic needs. **Every week during outreach, Community Against Sexual Harm meets women who are being forced to sell sex at even greater personal risk.**
- Journey Out: A large number of Journey Out’s former clients, now at risk of being re-trafficked, are reaching out for continued services. **They were on a path to stabilization**



and social re-integration, which was interrupted by COVID-19 and are now dealing with job loss, loss of income, housing and food insecurity.

More People Vulnerable to Trafficking

- International Rescue Committee: **The global pandemic has increased the risk of vulnerable populations being trafficked**, especially immigrants, temporary workers, homeless persons and at-risk youth and children. Higher rates of trafficking are anticipated to continue during this crisis, both in California and across the world.
- South Bay Coalition: **Law enforcement in the San Francisco Bay Area region are reporting increased online activity, including an increase in grooming of minors online**, and one of the more notorious areas for trafficking, International Blvd., has seen more activity than pre-pandemic.
- Journey Out: Victims have shared, during street outreach and while obtaining basic need supplies and PPE (gloves, masks, thermometers), that traffickers are watching them closely and taking advantage of the “shelter at home” orders, which makes it easier for traffickers to track them, makes it difficult for victims to leave and/or attempt to get assistance and services, and has increased the level of abuse and exploitation that victims experience.

Survivor Story: A survivor who was previously receiving services from WEAVE resurfaced and started to receive services and support from her previous case manager, including groceries, emotional support, safety planning, and facilitating connections with other agencies for services. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, this client was unable to go to any of the agencies or even meet with her case manager. This caused her pain, stress and anxiety. The survivor shared how “social isolation” was very difficult for her. Shortly after the impact of the pandemic on this client’s access to services, this client was placed on a 5150 involuntary psychiatric hold, struggling more than ever before.



The following agencies have submitted individual letters of support and information about the need for increased resources for human trafficking survivors during and after the pandemic:

- 1761 Family Crisis Center, Los Angeles
- AACI, Bay Area
- Alameda County District Attorney's Office, Alameda County
- Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, Bay Area
- Arm of Care, Bay Area
- Bet Tzedek Legal Services, Los Angeles
- Blessed Virgin Mary , Bay Area
- Businesses Ending Slavery, State Wide
- Children's Home of Stockton/ San Joaquin Human Trafficking Taskforce, Stockton
- Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking, Los Angeles
- Community Against Sexual Assault, Sacramento
- Community Solutions, Bay Area
- Daughters of Charity, Bay Area
- Dignity Health, Hospitals State Wide
- Dolores Street Community Services, San Francisco
- Equal Means Equal, Statewide
- Interface Children and Family Services, Ventura County
- International Action Network, Oakland
- International Rescue Committee, Sacramento
- Legal Services for Children, San Francisco
- Los Angeles City Council President, Nury Martinez
- Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice, Los Angeles
- Journey Out, Los Angeles
- MISSEY, Oakland
- Monterrey Rape Crisis Center, Monterrey
- New Day for Children, Alamo
- NCJW, State Wide Advocacy
- NCJW, Longbeach
- North County Life Line, San Diego
- Opening Doors, Sacramento
- Pilipino Workers Center, Los Angeles
- Public Counsel Legal Services, Los Angeles
- Ruby's Place, Alameda County
- Santa Clara County Wage Theft Coalition
- Sisters of Holy Names, Bay Area
- Step Forward Foundation, Bay Area
- STOP: Stop Trafficking, San Diego
- Strength United, Los Angeles
- Three Strands Global, San Diego
- Verity, Santa Rosa
- Women's Transitional Living Center, Orange County
- Waymakers, Santa Ana
- WEAVE, Sacramento
- YWCA Silicon Valley