



YEAR END Impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking Survivors

Now more than ever, trafficking survivors need support. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risks of human trafficking and the cost of fighting it. At the end of 2020, the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) surveyed organizations across California regarding how the pandemic COVID-19 impacted their services to human trafficking survivors in 2020. Based on the service providers that responded, the survey showed the following:

- **100%** reported an increase in the need for rental assistance for human trafficking survivors.
- **100%** reported an increase in the rate and/or severity of the mental health needs of the human trafficking survivors they serve.
- **90%** reported that their clients have an increased vulnerability to trafficking due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **88%** reported an increase in costs for necessities for the human trafficking survivors they serve (including food, rental assistance, transportation, and basic hygiene items).
- **87%** reported an increase in job loss/economic insecurity of the human trafficking survivors they serve.
- **87%** reported that their clients are experiencing increased wait times for public benefits.
- **84%** reported an increase in technology/internet costs due to trafficking survivors and their families needing to attend school virtually.
- **83%** reported increased difficulty in referring trafficking survivors for housing because shelters and safehouses were not accepting new residents.
- **75%** reported an overall increase in demand for services in 2020.
- **62%** reported an increase in substance abuse among their clients.
- **55%** reported an increased difficulty in securing appointments for medical issues for the trafficking survivors they serve.
- **54%** reported an increase in reports of violent recruitment and/or violence in trafficking among their clients.

These statistics are dire and show a crucial need for increased financial assistance to support the organizations doing this work.

Below are firsthand 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 \(WTLC\) \(Orange County, CA\)](#): 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 \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#): From March to July 2020, 1736 Family Crisis Center saw 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.
- [CAST \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#): CAST received 637 calls to its hotline from March 2020-Dec 2020 from potential clients or current/former clients, compared to 537 calls for the same period in 2019, demonstrating a 19% increase in urgent/emergency response calls from trafficking survivors. **In November 2020, CAST had a 130% increase in urgent hotline calls from current or potential new clients compared to November 2019.** In September 2020, CAST had a 92% increase in potential new clients compared to September 2019, and a similar 58% increase in October 2020. The majority of the increase in calls was from people requesting housing.
- [Santa Clara County Wage Theft Coalition \(San Jose, CA\)](#): 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.

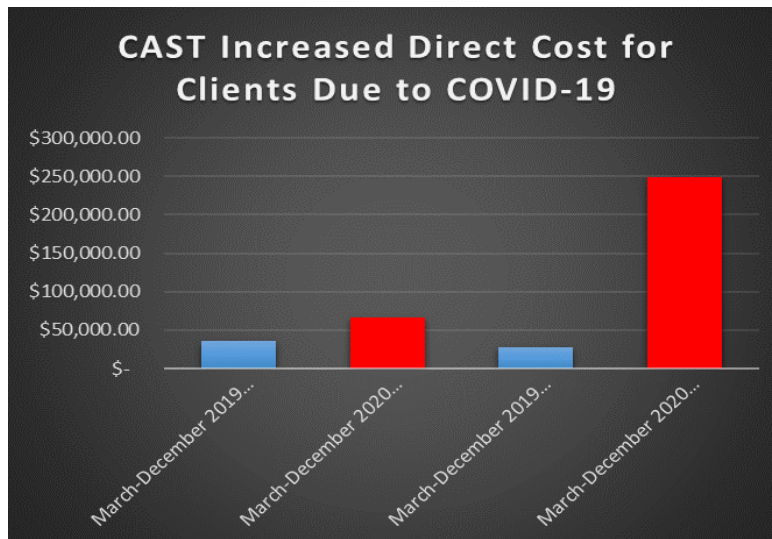
Increased Demand for Services

- [Interface Children & Family Services \(Camarillo, CA\)](#) experienced a **54% increase in requests for services and referrals during months when California was impacted by COVID-19 in 2020** (January-August 2020 as compared to January-August 2019).

- [Community Against Sexual Harm \(Sacramento, CA\)](#) saw a **44% increase in the number of women served through its drop-in center** and a **76% increase in the number of women who have stopped in at least one time in 2020 looking for assistance**.
- [3Strands Global \(El Dorado Hills, CA\)](#) runs an Employ+ Empower program that experienced a 52% increase in clients served in 2020, a **121% increase in employment services in 2020**, and an increase in the need for comprehensive case management services including but not limited to childcare, housing, and mental health services. **3Strands Global also saw an increase in demand for emergency services including food and financial assistance**. The Employ+ Empower team has connected individuals to over 550 services during the pandemic alone.
- [North County Lifeline's Project LIFE \(San Diego County, CA\)](#) 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).
- [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\) \(multiple locations in CA\)](#) saw a **dramatic increase in trafficking survivors identified** during the pandemic, with 53 new client referrals in March 2020 alone.
- [Ruby's Place \(Castro Valley, CA\)](#) 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.
- [CAST \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#) 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 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.

Greater Cost for Basic Necessities and Increased Expenditures

- [International Rescue Committee \(multiple locations in CA\)](#) 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 \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#) 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.**
- [Community Solutions \(Gilroy, CA\)](#) reports seeing a huge increase in requests for financial assistance for rent, bills, food, and other basic needs in 2020. **Among the young adult population it serves (ages 18-24), Community Solutions saw a significant increase in requests for shelter and food.** Community Solutions also saw a **2339% increase in the amount of rental assistance provided to clients in 2020.** For March–December 2019, the organization served 5 clients with \$3,750 in rent, while in March–December 2020, the organization served 34 clients with \$97,478 in rent. **Community Solutions is still receiving requests for ongoing rental support and its funds to support are running low.**
- [Community Against Sexual Harm \(Sacramento, CA\)](#) has seen a **136% increase in expenditures for food, rental assistance, and transportation.** According to the organization: “Women who were stable have returned in need of help and others who have [previously] been able to rely on friends or family have found themselves without any source of support or safe place to stay.”
- [CAST \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#) saw a **165% increase in expenditures for necessities like food, housing and rental assistance, transportation and medical expenses for trafficking survivors** (March–June 2020 as compared to March–June 2019). Time spent with clients has shifted to emergency response work, instead of building long-term support. CAST’s staff reports: “Financial basic necessities are most needed due to loss of income/loss of housing. Case managers are getting requests for this type of funding every week. These requests can be up to \$2,500 a month for some clients. In the past we only had to meet these kind of needs on occasion for clients in crisis, but now these requests for emergency assistance to meet basic needs have increased to on average 3-4 of these requests a week.”



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 (Santa Rosa, CA) 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.

COVID-19 Related Job Loss

- **3Strands Global (El Dorado Hills, CA):** Since the “shelter at home” orders began, 3Strands Global served 71 survivors in the Employ + Empower program. 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. A graphic regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the clients served by 3Strands Global’s Employ + Empower program is below.

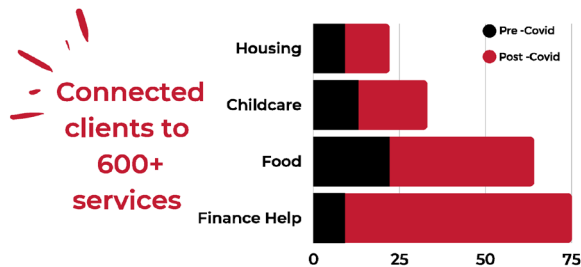


CORONAVIRUS IMPACTS

Impact of COVID on clients:



Employ + Empower Emergency Response:



Connected clients to **600+** services

52%
Increase in Clients Served

121%
Increase in Employment Services



- Connected **60 clients** to direct financial assistance totaling **\$30,0000**
- Emergency Grocery Distribution to over **40 clients**
- Increase in weekly wellness check-ins with over **2,640 client interactions**

Journey Out (Los Angeles, CA): 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 to re-trafficking.

- North County Lifeline’s Project LIFE (San Diego County, CA) reported that approximately **20% of its clients experienced a decrease in hours of employment or job loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic** and added “many unemployed and underemployed clients have continued to have difficulty obtaining work due to the intersection between a limited worker skill set and a current lack of employment opportunities.”

- Community Solutions (Gilroy, CA) reported: “**Many of the clients we serve do not have legal status and are working jobs that pay in cash, such as house cleaning, construction, and hospitality related jobs. With the shelter-in-place orders, these types of jobs were the first to experience cuts.**” Community Solutions supported clients in accessing local resources for food and basic necessities due to job loss.

Survivor Story: A trafficking survivor who was receiving services from [Haven Women's Center \(Stanislaus County, CA\)](#) had escaped her trafficker and worked with Haven Women's Center for two years, but during the pandemic, returned to her trafficker because she lost her job and the room she was renting due to the impacts of COVID-19. She felt that returning to her trafficker was her last and only option

Impact on Mental Health

- [Waymakers \(Santa Ana, CA\)](#): “What we have seen is an increase in clients in crisis, specifically in regards to their mental health. **Clients previously diagnosed with mental health issues, as well as clients without a previous diagnosis, appeared to decline in their daily functioning due to the pandemic.** Clients lost jobs, many already had no source of income and were unable to pursue employment....**Since the pandemic, access to therapists and other mental health providers has been limited, leaving mental health issues unaddressed for longer periods of time.** Community clinics have moved to remote services, and clients are unable to engage via phone or teleconferencing for a variety of reasons.”
- [WEAVE \(Sacramento, CA\)](#): “The pandemic has led in an increase with stress, anxiety and put extreme duress on mental wellbeing. Panic and fear of the unknown with when will the pandemic will be over has led to shortages of items at stores, which increases the stress and anxiety in our survivors**With social distancing, survivors may feel exceedingly isolated and trapped, much like they have felt due to exploitation, leading to severe depression, anxiety, and stress, and feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and emptiness.** Many survivors have had a mental health diagnosis, and feelings of isolation, sadness and hopeless--their existing PTSD, can be more severe leading to suicidal thoughts.”
- [North County Lifeline's Project LIFE \(San Diego County, CA\)](#): “**Every client in the Project LIFE program has reported an increase in mental health needs,** including increases in symptomology and severity of anxiety, depression, PTSD, panic attacks, psychosis, disordered eating, and substance abuse. This has resulted in staff providing additional emotional support outside of scheduled appointments as well as more frequent appointments.”

Unique Impact on Women

- [Community Against Sexual Harm \(Sacramento, CA\)](#): 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 \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#): 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.**
- [3Strands Global \(El Dorado Hills, CA\)](#): The Employ + Empower team identified a gap in services for single mothers with children. **With no partner to assist in childcare, many survivors did not have the option to work because they had to remain home and watch their children and engage in homeschooling tasks. With no way of attaining economic security and no time or energy to spend in accessing resources, single mothers were made much more vulnerable to engaging in unsafe work.**

More People Vulnerable to Trafficking

- [North County Lifeline's Project LIFE \(San Diego County, CA\)](#): **A dramatic increase in minor recruitment via online platforms like social media and gaming apps continues to occur in San Diego County.** The San Diego Human Trafficking Taskforce reports that the majority of their cases since April 2020 have been minor victims. In this past week, an eleven-year-old girl was recruited via the Roblox gaming app.
- [International Rescue Committee \(locations across CA\)](#): **The global pandemic has increased the risk of vulnerable populations being trafficked,** especially immigrants, temporary workers, homeless persons and at-risk youth and children.
- [South Bay Coalition \(Gilroy, CA\)](#): **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 \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#): 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.

- Haven Women's Center (Stanislaus County, CA): We have noticed an **increase in children's sexual exploitation during the pandemic**, due to the fact of the demand. Many traffickers are taking videos and photos and exploiting children more than ever online.

Survivor Story: A survivor who was previously receiving services from WEAVE (Sacramento, CA) 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 service providers surveyed by CAST also reported the following pandemic-related needs for their organizations:

Higher needs for PPE and cleaning supplies due to COVID-19:

- Waymakers (Santa Ana, CA) - high need for N95 Masks.
- North County Lifeline (Oceanside, CA) - need for small size hand sanitizer in large quantities to distribute on outreach.
- Haven Women's Center (Stanislaus County, CA) - need for cleaning supplies and face masks.
- Restoration Diversion Services (Compton, CA) - need for gloves and sanitizer.
- WEAVE (Sacramento, CA) - need for disinfecting wipes in bulk.

Higher needs for basic necessities for trafficking survivors:

- Food, clothing, diapers, and baby items (Fresno EOC - Fresno, CA).
- Hotel vouchers and transportation vouchers for clients (Haven Women's Center - Stanislaus County, CA).
- Deodorant, condoms, toothpaste, and toothbrushes (Restoration Diversion Services - Compton, CA).
- Child support payments, student loan debt relief, access to critical and family counseling, counseling fees, car payment, gas and transportation assistance, moving expenses, and grocery gift cards (WEAVE - Sacramento, CA).

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:

I761 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
Fresno EOC, Fresno
Haven Women's Center, Stanislaus County
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 City Attorney's Office, Los Angeles
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
Restoration Diversion Services, Compton
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
South Bay Coalition, Gilroy
Three Strands Global, San Diego
Verity, Santa Rosa
Women's Transitional Living Center, Orange County
Waymakers, Santa Ana
WEAVE, Sacramento
YWCA Silicon Valle