

## COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT

*The following document contains questions that can be used to assess a client for potential signs that she/he has been a victim of human trafficking. The suggestions and indicators below are not exhaustive or cumulative in nature and each question taken alone may not indicate a potential trafficking situation. Assessment questions should be tailored to your program and client's specific needs.*

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### GENERAL TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT TIPS

As with any assessment of a victim of crime, there are some general points to be aware of when evaluating a client's needs. Listed below are general tips for conducting an assessment with a potential victim of trafficking.

Please note that throughout this assessment the term "controller" is used generally to describe the potential trafficker or the person(s) who maintain(s) control over the potential victim(s).

### ASSESSMENT ENVIRONMENT AND TONE

- Conduct the assessment in a comfortable and safe environment. If you are in a police station or in a place where the physical space/conditions are limiting, attempt to create an environment that is as calming and positive as possible.
- Provide the individual with space when speaking with them.
- Be relaxed and use an approachable tone, demeanor, and body language. Ask yourself the question "To what degree does my present posture communicate openness and availability to the client"?
- Use empathic listening. Empathic listening centers on being attentive, observing, and listening in order to understand the client's situation without making judgments.
- While you engage in empathic and reflective listening make sure you are maintaining good eye contact with the client. Good eye contact is another way of conveying "I want to hear what you have to say".
- If at all possible, try not to take notes and instead engage in active listening and write your notes immediately following the meeting with the client. If note taking is necessary, let the individual know why you need to write notes and for what purposes they may be used.
- Be clear about your role and goals, and about the services that your agency can and cannot provide.

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- Explain why you care about the individual’s situation and that you have worked with and assisted other individuals in situations that may be similar to his/her own. Explaining who you are and why you are there is particularly important to correct any misperceptions of your role.

## ASSESSMENT LANGUAGE AND QUESTIONS

- When appropriate, attempt to engage in casual conversation about lighter topics and ask questions to try to get the individual to open up, even if it’s not about their trafficking situation or service needs. Although the client might be confused, scared and/or distracted, engaging in casual conversation before the assessment helps to build trust and set the tone for effective, non-defensive communication.
- In your initial assessment, try to focus predominantly on assessments of their service needs, but weave in other questions naturally and when appropriate.
- It is often useful to start with questions that ascertain the lesser degrees of control before moving onto the more severe methods of control.
  - Example: Inquiring about living or working conditions may be an easier topic to tackle initially than directly inquiring about physical or sexual abuse that the victim may have sustained.
- Be conscious of the language that you use when speaking with a potential victim of trafficking. Mirroring the language that the potential victim uses can be a helpful first step.
  - Example: If the potential victim refers to her controller as her boyfriend, referring to that person as a “pimp” or a “sex trafficker” may have a negative impact. Although these are terms that can be used for controllers in the commercial sex industry, the potential victim may not identify this person in this way.
  - The phrasing of all questions included in this assessment should be changed, amended or revised to fit the client and context you are in.
- It is also important to conduct assessments in a potential victim’s native language whenever possible.
  - Use trained interpreters sensitive to the nature of the crime and who are not in any way tied to the potential victim or the potential trafficker’s community of origin.
  - Ensure that the interpreter is introduced and their role is fully explained.

## IMPORTANT DYNAMICS FOR YOUR ASSESSMENT

- Keep in mind that many victims do not self-identify as “human trafficking victims” due to a lack of knowledge about the crime itself and the power and control dynamics typically involved in human trafficking situations.
- Be conscious of the fact that an individual in a trafficking situation has typically been conditioned by their trafficker not to trust law enforcement and/or service providers.
- Be aware of power dynamics when a third party is accompanying or interpreting for a potential victim. Try to speak to the potential victim alone or secure an outside interpreter.

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- Be aware that canned stories are common and that the true story may not emerge until trust has been built with the potential victim after multiple meetings.
- Each client is going to tell his/her story differently and no client will present all of the elements of their trafficking situation in a neat package.
- It is imperative that the assessor remain flexible and prioritize the client's needs and safety as the primary reason for the assessment.

## **SAFETY CHECK**

Be sure to conduct a safety check if the individual has recently exited the situation or if they are still in the situation.

- Is it safe for you to talk with me right now? How safe do you feel right now? Are there times when you don't feel safe?
- Do you feel like you are in any kind of danger while speaking with me at this location?
- Is there anything that would help you to feel safer while we talk?

If speaking with the individual over the phone:

- Are you in a safe place? Can you tell me where you are?
- Are you injured? Would you like for me to call 911/an ambulance?
- If someone comes on the line, what would you like for me to do? Hang up? Identify myself as someone else, a certain company/person/friend?
- Also remind the individual to feel free to hang up at any point during the conversation if they believe that someone may be listening in.
- How can we communicate if we get disconnected? Would I be able to call you back/leave a message?
- Would you prefer to call me back when you are in a safe place?

## **GENERAL TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

The following questions could be applicable to both situations of sex and labor trafficking. Please note that the order listed is not intended to indicate the order in which the questions should be asked. The type and order of questions should be tailored to a given situation and should be amended to react effectively and supportively to the client.

## **FRAUD QUESTIONS**

- How did you meet this person/find out about your job?
- What were you told about the job before you started/what promises were made about the relationship?
- Did your experience meet your expectations?

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- Do you feel you were ever deceived about anything related to your job/your relationship?
- Did anything surprise you about this job/relationship?
- Did conditions of your job/relationship change over time?
- Were you ever forced to sign a contract that you didn't understand or didn't want to sign? Were the contents of this contract used as a threat against you?
- Did you feel like you understood your rights in this job/situation? Did you ever feel like anyone kept you from accessing information about your rights?

### **COERCION QUESTIONS**

- Did you ever feel pressured to do something that you didn't want to do or felt uncomfortable doing?
- What were your expectations of what would happen if you left this person/situation or if you didn't do what this person told you to do?
- Did anyone ever take/keep your legal papers or identification for you, such as your passport, visa, driver's license, etc.?
- Did anyone ever threaten you or intimidate you?
- What did this person tell you about what would happen if you were arrested/encountered an immigration official?
- Did you ever see something bad happen to someone else who didn't do something that was expected of them? What happened to them? How did that make you feel?
- Did you ever feel that if you left the situation, your life would become more difficult?

### **DEBT-MONETARY QUESTIONS**

- Did you have access to any money/the money you earn? Did anyone take your money or a portion of your money? Did anyone hold your money for "safe keeping"?
- If the money you earned was kept in a bank account, who set up this bank account? Did anyone else beside you have access to the account?
- Were you required to make a certain amount of money every day/ week? Why did you feel that you had to meet that amount? What did you think would happen if you didn't make that much money?
- Did you have fees that you had to pay to someone? How much money did you have left after you paid everything you needed to pay? Could you spend the money the way you wanted to?
- Did you owe any money to anyone in the situation? If so, who did you owe money to and why?
- How did you incur this debt? How long have you had the debt? Did your debt increase overtime?
- Did you feel that it was difficult to pay off your debt? Why?

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- What did you think would happen to you or other people in your life if you didn't pay off your debt?

### FORCE QUESTIONS

- Did someone control, supervise or monitor your work/your actions?
- Was your communication ever restricted or monitored?
- Were you able to access medical care?
- Were you ever allowed to leave the place that you were living/working? Under what conditions?
- Was your movement outside of you residence/workplace ever monitored or controlled?
- What did you think would have happened if you left the situation? Was there ever a time when you wanted to leave, but felt that you couldn't? What do you think would have happened if you left without telling anyone?
- Did you feel that it was your only option to stay in the situation?
- Did anyone ever force you to do something physically or sexually that you didn't feel comfortable doing?
- Were you ever physically abused (shoved, slapped, hit, kicked, scratched, punched, burned, etc.) by anyone?
- Were you ever sexually abused (sexual assault/unwanted touching, rape, sexual exploitation, etc.) by anyone?
- Did anyone ever introduce you to drugs, medications as a method of control?

### SEX TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions could be applicable in sex trafficking situations in general and are not specific to a certain type of network or controller.

- Did anyone ever pressure you to engage in any sexual acts against your will?
- Did anyone ever take photos of you and if so, what did they use them for? Were these photos ever sent to other people or posted on an online forum (Craigslist, Backpage, Myspace)?
- Did anyone ever force you to engage in sexual acts with friends or business associates for favors/money?
- Did anyone ever force you to engage in commercial sex through online websites, escort services, street prostitution, informal arrangements, brothels, fake massage businesses or strip clubs? [See network specific questions at end of document]
- Were you required to earn a certain amount of money/meet a nightly quota by engaging in commercial sex for someone? What happened if you did not meet this quota?
- [For women only] Did anyone force you to continue to engage in commercial sex when you were on your period? Were you ever asked or told to use anything that would prevent the flow of menstruation?

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- How old were you when you were in this situation? Did you ever see any minors (under 18 years old) involved in commercial sex?
- Were you ever transported to different locations to engage in commercial sex? Where were you taken and who transported you?
- Who decided whether or not you used a condom during sex acts?

### **LABOR TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- How did you feel about where you worked? How did you feel about your employer/supervisor/crew leader/or other controller?
- Did you feel that you were paid fairly at this job?
- What were your normal work hours? How many hours did you have to work each day?
- What happened if you worked fewer hours or took breaks?
- Did anyone ever threaten you if you indicated you did not want to work the hours expected of you?
- Did you have to live in housing provided by the controller? What were the conditions like in this housing?
- Did you have to pay a fee to the controller in order to stay in this housing?
- Did the controller ever promise to secure, renew or pay for your legal documents or work visa?
- What were your weekly/monthly expenses to the controller?
- Did the controller provide transportation to the work site? What did this look like?

### **NETWORK/CONTROLLER SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

The assessment questions below may be used to supplement the general trafficking questions where a particular type of trafficking has already been identified. These questions are not comprehensive and should be included as a part of the general trafficking assessment above.

### **DOMESTIC SERVITUDE**

- Did you have days off? Were you able to leave the house on your days off? Were you ever expected to complete work on your days off (still provide childcare, complete household chores before leaving, etc.)?
- Were you ever able to leave the home to run errands, transport children to school or go to church? Were you monitored or timed when you left the home for these things?
- Did you have your own room in the home? Where did you sleep?
- Did you have consistent access to food? Were you ever made to go without food?

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- Did you have access to medical care while you lived in the home?
- What were your tasks in the home (childcare, cleaning, cooking, etc.)? How many hours did you work during the day or night?
- Were you allowed to communicate with your family/friends while you lived in the home?
- Are you afraid that your controller might harm your family back in your hometown?
- Did the controller ever force you to engage in sexual acts against your will at any time they requested it? What did you think would happen if you refused to do this? [Personal Sexual Servitude]

### **PIMP-CONTROLLED SEX TRAFFICKING (STREET, TRUCK STOPS, ONLINE ESCORTS, ETC.)**

- How did you meet your [boyfriend/pimp/controller]?
- Did the controller have a nickname, street name or alias?
- Did the controller insist that you adopt a street name, nickname or alias?
- Did the controller move you around to different locations? If so, how did you travel? How often?
- Did the controller make you get a tattoo with his name, a phrase or symbol or mark you in any other way (branding, etc.)? What did the tattoo or other mark mean to you/the controller?
- How were the commercial sexual services advertised? Where did it take place?
- Were you ever physically hit or slapped by the controller or anybody else? Can you tell me about a time when that happened?
- Did you ever see any other person being physically hit by the controller or anybody else? Can you tell me about a time when that happened?
- Did the controller compel multiple people to engage in commercial sex? What were their ages?
- How were others recruited? Through the controller or through other victims? Were there specific locations (bus-stops, shelters, etc.) that individuals were recruited from? Were you ever asked to recruit other people?
- Was there any other criminal activity present (gangs, drugs, theft, money laundering etc.)?

### **INTIMATE PARTNER AND INTER-FAMILIAL TRAFFICKING**

In the following questions, the term “partner” refers to an intimate partner which could be a dating relationship, domestic partnership and/or marital relationship. The term “family member” refers to any relative, whether immediate family or extended family member.

#### **Sex Trafficking**

- Did your partner/family member ever ask you to engage in commercial sexual acts in order to “help the relationship/the family”?

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- Did your partner/family member ever force you to engage in commercial sexual acts with friends or business associates for favors/money?
- Did your partner/family member ever force you to engage in commercial sex through online sites, escort services, street prostitution, strip clubs, truck stops, fake massage businesses or residential brothels?
- Did your partner/family member ever threaten you or abuse you if you indicated that you did not want to engage in commercial sex or did not do what this person asked of you?
- Did your partner/family member ever withhold financial support or restrict access to your children?

### **Labor Trafficking**

- Did your partner/family member ever force you to work inside or outside of the home for excessive amounts of time?
- Were you able to access the money that you earned from working outside the home?
- Did your partner/family member ever force you to engage in sexual acts against your will at any time they requested it? What did you think would happen if you refused to do this? [Personal Sexual Servitude]
- Were you ever able to leave the home to run errands, transport children to school or go to church? Did your partner/family member monitor or time you when you left the home for these things?
- What were your tasks in the home (childcare, cleaning, cooking, etc.)? How many hours did you work during the day or night?
- Did your partner/family member ever punish you for not working or not completing domestic work? For example, have your meals restricted?
- Did your partner/family member ever threaten you or abuse you if you indicated that you did not want to work or did not do what this person asked of you?

### **COMMERCIAL FRONT BROTHELS (FAKE MASSAGE BUSINESSES, NAIL SALONS, BARS, STRIP CLUBS)**

- Did you live in the establishment where you worked?
  - If yes - Were you ever allowed to leave without being monitored?
  - If no - Were you transported to and from the place that you lived and the residence? Were you monitored at the place that you lived?
- Were you rotated to different establishments? How often were you moved?
- What type of commercial front did the establishment have? How did they advertise their services? What were their hours of operation?
- Were there multiple controllers or was there one central controller?
- How many individuals were compelled to engage in commercial sex at the establishment? What were their ages?

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- How many times a day were you and these other individuals made to engage in commercial sex?
- Where did the commercial sex take place? In the establishment itself, in a back room, or in an off-site location?
- What were the demographics of the customers/Johns at the establishment?
- Did customers/Johns of the establishment pay you directly or pay a controller? Was there a token system?
- Did you receive tips directly from customers/Johns of the establishment? Were you able to keep these tips? Could you spend the money the way you wanted to?
- Did you have to pay a fee for your housing, management, food or transportation to anyone?
- Did the establishment have a security camera or monitoring device? Did this make you feel like you couldn't leave?
- Were the windows or doors of the establishment covered or blacked out?
- Was there any other criminal activity present at the establishment (gangs, drugs, money laundering etc.)?

#### **RESIDENTIAL BROTHELS**

- Did you live in the residence where you worked?
  - If yes, were you ever allowed to leave without being monitored?
  - If no, were you transported to and from the place that you lived and the residence? Were you monitored at the place that you lived?
- Were you rotated to different residences? How often were you moved?
- Were there multiple controllers or was there one central controller?
- How many individuals were compelled to engage in commercial sex at the establishment? What were their ages?
- How many times a day were you and these other individuals made to engage in commercial sex?
- What were the demographics of the customers/Johns at the establishment?
- Where did the commercial sex take place? Did it take place in the same place where you and others were made to sleep?
- Did customers/Johns of the establishment pay you directly or pay a controller? Was there a token system?
- Did you receive tips directly from customers/Johns that came to the residence? Were you able to keep these tips? Could you spend the money the way you wanted to?
- How did the controllers advertise the commercial sexual services?

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- If through cards, what do the cards say? How do people get the cards? Are cards only given to certain types of people (males versus females, only certain nationalities, etc.)?
- Was there a specific procedure for entering the establishment (e.g. calling a number from outside)?
- Did the residence have a security camera or someone watching the door? Did this make you feel like you couldn't leave the residence?
- Was there any other criminal activity present at the establishment (gangs, drugs, money laundering etc.)?

### **LABOR TRAFFICKING IN AGRICULTURE**

- Did you have a crew leader? What kind of role did she/he play in your day-to-day work activities?
- Did you have the appropriate tools needed for the job you are doing? Were the tools in good condition? Did you have to pay a fee in order to use these tools?
- Were you exposed to pesticides or other chemicals while on the job?
  - Did you work in fields while they were being sprayed with pesticides or soon after the spraying took place?
  - Were you provided with gloves/masks as necessary when working with such chemicals?
- Did you ever get injured at work? If so, were you permitted to seek medical attention?
- Were you paid on a piece-rate basis depending on how much crop you harvest each day, or were you paid a fixed sum of money?
- How did you get to the work-sites? Were the vehicles safe and in good condition? Were the drivers safe or reckless? Did you have to pay a fee for this transportation?
- If you traveled with the company/employer/crew, were you always made aware of each location you would be going to and how long you would be there?
- Did you get paid for related tasks such as clearing land, loading, time traveled to work sites, spraying fields with pesticides?
- Did you have access to basic facilities at the work-sites?
- Did you have to purchase your basic necessities directly from the employer? Did the prices of these items seem unusually high? Did this create additional debt to your employer?
- Did anyone ever say verbally abusive things to you (such as calling you names, making inappropriate or sexual remarks to you)?

### **LABOR TRAFFICKING IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY (HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, RESORTS)**

- What were your hours like at your job?
- Did you live on-site or with any of the other people you worked with?

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- Were you able to take regular breaks to eat, use the bathroom, or drink water?
- Were you told you could only eat left-over food from the meals being prepared in your workplace?

#### LABOR TRAFFICKING IN SALES CREWS

- If you traveled with a sales crew, were you made aware of each location you would be going to and how long you would be there?
- Where did you sleep while traveling with the sales crew? Did you have your own space or did you have to share with others in the crew?
- Did you have to meet a daily quota for your sales? Were there consequences or threats of consequences if you did not meet the quota?
- Were your meals ever restricted if you didn't meet this daily sales quota? How often did you eat and how did you pay for your meals?
- Were you provided a daily stipend by anyone while selling the items? Were you allowed to spend this however you wanted to?
- Did the crew always ensure that you had a valid sales permit? Were you ever arrested for soliciting without a permit?
- Was there other illegal activity (drug use, alcohol use by minors, scams involving product sales, etc.) occurring? Were you ever pressured to participate?
- Did the crew leaders/managers ever sexually assault or harass individuals working on the sales crew?
- Did anyone ever threaten to abandon you if you did not do what was expected of you?

Polaris Project works to empower and mobilize people from diverse backgrounds and of all ages to take meaningful action against human trafficking. Register with [www.polarisproject.org/signup](http://www.polarisproject.org/signup) to receive regular updates on human trafficking in the United States.

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