

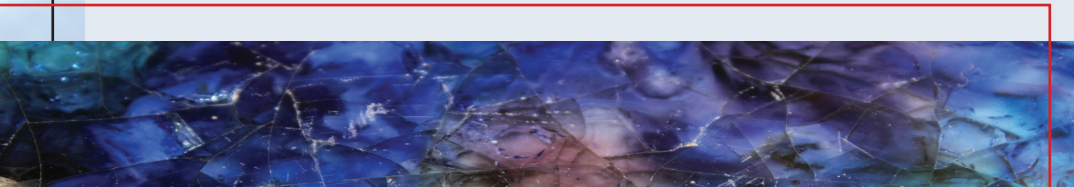
## ***VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE IN THE SEX INDUSTRY: STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE PROVIDER COLLABORATION***

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking (NORAHT) conducted a multi-year (2013-2020) community-based research project to learn how service providers are equipped to support persons who experience violence, exploitation, and abuse in the sex industry, including human trafficking. NORAHT hosted community engagement sessions in eight northeastern Ontario communities, which were attended by persons with lived experience and service providers across various sectors. NORAHT also conducted interviews with persons with lived experience and gained feedback via surveys. The research participants identified significant gaps in resources and northern-specific barriers to service in our region. This policy brief provides recommendations for community and regional service provider collaboration in order to develop (more) comprehensive, wrap-around supports for persons seeking assistance. In particular, it emphasizes the need for service provider responses that respect the agency and self-determination of persons experiencing violence in the sex industry. This policy brief further highlights the importance of decolonial responses grounded in Indigenous culture, where appropriate, and the involvement of experiential persons in the paid circle of care.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Policy makers and service providers should take a **critical anti-trafficking approach** that recognizes the distinction between sex work and human trafficking, while ensuring access to services for anyone who seeks support, regardless of how they identify their experience. Rather than fixating on the “rescue” of trafficking victims, policy and service provision needs to encompass work against **racialized and/or gender-based violence and marginalization** in the **sex industry as a whole**.
2. Service providers should respect the **agency and self-determination** of individuals, rather than presuming to know what is best for clients. We therefore recommend the adoption of **Indigenous-centric and decolonial** approaches, **harm reduction**, and **violence and trauma informed** approaches in order to address violence from its root causes, the oppressions and exploitations imposed by colonization, institutionalized racism and heteropatriarchy.
3. It is imperative to **include experiential persons** – trafficking survivors, sex workers, and family members – in the design and delivery of the circle of care as the paid staff.
4. The development of **collaborative networks** is an important way to pool resources, skills, and knowledges in order to provide comprehensive, wrap-around supports in our communities and regions as an enabling environment for the exercise of self-determination. **NORAHT’s Service Mapping Toolkit** and **7 Principles for Collaboration** can assist with this process.
5. While service provider collaboration can increase efficiencies, there is still an especially urgent need for **increased funding for capacity building**, and **community-based supports, including transitional housing**, and **long-term, safer affordable housing** in northeastern Ontario.



## BACKGROUND

NORAHT takes a critical **anti-trafficking approach** that respects the agency and self-determination of persons involved in the sex industry, whether by choice, circumstance or coercion. A critical anti-trafficking approach rejects “rescue narratives” and insists that service providers cannot presume to know better than clients what are their unique needs and risks. For instance, trafficked women may not desire strategies to “exit” from the sex industry per se, but only from their abusive situation. It is also necessary to recognize that there is a clear distinction between sex work and human trafficking, and that women engaged in sex work may also experience violence, exploitation and abuse.<sup>1</sup> We should not be asking women to fit their experiences into human trafficking checklists in order to access resources and services. Rather, it is imperative to help create an enabling environment for the exercise of self-determination including the provision of comprehensive, wrap-around supports to anyone, regardless of how they identify their experience (i.e., intimate partner violence, labour exploitation, sexual assault, human trafficking). By accepting the framework through which people identify their primary issues and needs, we are working from a position that promotes agency and self-determination.

## GAPS AND BARRIERS TO SERVICE PROVISION IN NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO

There are significant resource gaps in northeastern Ontario, and this was a foremost theme of discussion during NORAHT’s community engagement workshops. **Lack of long-term, sustainable funding** is a chronic challenge. With regard to specific resources, there is especially a **lack of transitional housing** and a **shortage of long-term safer, affordable housing**. Participants further noted that shelters have long waitlists are often at or over capacity and may be unsuitable for trafficked persons due to requirements for sobriety and/or verification of identity (traffickers often take identity cards). Moreover, participants indicated that shelters may serve as recruitment sites for trafficking. Other resource gaps include **lack of safer spaces and transitional supports, lack of research and data**, lack of service provider toolkits, and **lack of Indigenous-specific resources**.

**Northern-specific barriers** to service include **“huge geographical areas”** including remote communities that under-resourced agencies are expected to serve. Research participants highlighted the inadequacy of putting someone on a bus to head “down south” away from family and community supports. At the same time, providing supports within small communities is challenged by “everyone knowing what is going on,” which makes people reluctant to share or reach out for help; or lack of security because “everyone knows where the safe house is.” Other barriers include **racism, lack of cultural supports** for Indigenous and francophone clients, **stigma and shame**, and **long waiting lists** for services or limited time periods in which to access services. Finally, we heard that the current public policy fixation on human trafficking has diverted resources and attention away from other forms of abuse and marginalization experienced in the sex industry; participants warned that women then have to try to fit their stories into the human trafficking framework in order to access services. Or, people may have to prompt one system in order to access others (e.g., “catch a charge” in order to access mental health and addictions supports).

## PRINCIPLES FOR SERVICE PROVIDER COLLABORATION

People experiencing human trafficking or other forms of abuse in the sex industry have complex needs that cannot be met by any single agency. Furthermore, folks may move quickly between communities. Thus, there is a demonstrated need for service provider collaboration within communities and across the region. Many of our participants noted that they are “working in silos” and they did not know what other relevant services existed in their communities/regions. There is a clear need to pool our resources, knowledges, and skills to respond to the complexities of human trafficking and other forms of violence and abuse experienced in the sex industry.

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<sup>1</sup>We use “sex work” in reference to an explicit position that identifies an occupation whose workers are entitled to make a living and human rights. However, not everyone in the sex industry will identify as “workers.” Thus, we use “sex industry” to refer to commercial and survival sex that may be forced, voluntary, or anywhere in between. Human trafficking is one form of exploitation or abuse that might incur in the sex industry, and it involves coercion, force, deception and/or loss of control.

We suggest the seven following principles that might guide the building of collaborative networks or coalitions:

1. Focus on supporting those who have experienced harms and violence and ask for help. **Don't assume to know better** than trafficked persons what their unique needs are at any given time.
2. **Involve persons with lived experiences** (trafficking survivors, their families, sex workers) in the paid circle of care. This includes in the design, management, and evaluation of programs, as well as community outreach and peer support.
3. Employ **holistic, non-judgmental, trauma and violence-informed approaches**, and **harm reduction**.
4. Provide **culturally relevant supports** that draw on **Indigenous and experiential knowledges**.
5. Maintain **open communication** and **common referral protocols**, and the **tracking of data** within the collaborative network.
6. Commit to **providing 24/7, flexible, and individually tailored** support for several years for each trafficked person.
7. Provide support that is **relational and holistic**. Building healthy relationships within families, communities, and between service providers and trafficked persons is key to support and healing.

## Service Mapping:

This policy brief is accompanied by a [Service Mapping Toolkit](#) and an hour-long webinar titled, "Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration." These resources are designed to guide organizations and communities in identifying existing strengths and gaps for the development of collaborative responses.

Following the concept of an Indigenous medicine wheel, it is important recognize **physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual harms** of human trafficking and to facilitate **holistic responses**, including through collaboration. Experiences of violence and abuse in the sex industry are born out of complex intersections between structural factors (i.e. colonialism, poverty, racism) and personal circumstance (i.e., involvement with child welfare, addictions, homelessness). Thus, it is key to provide **individually tailored supports**.

NORAHT recommends assessing service provision within organizations and across communities/the region in terms of Approaches, Knowledges and Programming:

- *Approaches*: **Relational approaches** focus on building positive relationships that replace negative relationships. Service providers should act as allies in achieving self-determined change, rather than imposing "expert" solutions. Relational approaches include **(decolonial) violence and trauma-informed** approaches, **Indigenous-centric** approaches, and **harm reduction**. Approaches should be **sex work-informed** in order to avoid anti-trafficking practices that harm sex workers through harassment, surveillance, and stigmatization.<sup>2</sup> Other relevant approaches include **2SLGBTQ+ friendly** and **feminist intersectional**.
- *Knowledges*: **Indigenous knowledges** are crucial for envisioning physical, mental, psychological, spiritual and social well-being, not in isolation but in an enabling structural environment. We emphasize the importance of having **experiential knowledges** in the design and delivery of your programming. We recommend **culturally sensitive training**, and **decolonial trauma and violence-informed training**, as well as the **collection of data** for research and information-sharing within the collaborative network in a manner that respects privacy and confidentiality.
- *Programming*: A wide array of programming is required to support persons who have been trafficked or abused in the sex industry. Programming priorities include having a **dedicated case worker** so that clients do not have to repeat traumatic stories, **Indigenous healing and wellness, mental health and addictions, peer outreach and support**, and **safer shelter and affordable housing**. We further note the importance of supports for helping women get their children back, for "aging out" youth, and for children who have witnessed violence and/or are being left behind due to MMIWG2S.

These three categories – Approaches, Knowledges, Programs – must be integrated together; it is insufficient to simply check off specific programs which may in fact be inappropriate for trafficked persons if programs do not embody specific approaches or incorporate appropriate knowledges. We note also that the lists under these three categories are not exhaustive.

<sup>2</sup> See Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, "Moving Backwards in the Fight against Human Trafficking in Canada," (2018); Kamala Kempadoo and Nicole McFadyen, "Challenging Trafficking in Canada: Policy Brief," (Centre for Feminist Research, York University, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

The core principles required in providing services to persons experiencing violence, exploitation or abuse in the sex industry is to support them in ways that uphold self-determination and human dignity. Importantly, we emphasize that individuals must be able to choose their own pathways, with service providers delivering support and tools. Local and regional collaboration based on these principles serves to redress some of the gaps and barriers, to streamline and coordinate responses, and to develop and provide more comprehensive supports that empower and respect the self-determination of those seeking support, their families (including “families of choice”), and communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Nagy, Rosemary, Gina Snooks, Brenda Quenneville, Lanyan Chen, Sydnee Wiggins, Donna Debassige, Kathleen Jodouin, and Rebecca Timms. “Violence, Exploitation and Abuse in the Sex industry: Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration,” Policy Brief No. 1, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking.

## FURTHER NORAHT RESOURCES

### Website:

Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking (NORAHT) website: <https://noraht.nipissingu.ca/noraht-research/webinars/>.

### Webinars:

Quenneville, Brenda and Gina Snooks. [“Intersectional Trauma-Informed Approaches to Human Trafficking in Northeastern Ontario.”](#) Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Learning Network. Webinar, 2019.

Nagy Rosemary and Kathleen Jodouin. [“Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration.”](#) Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. Webinar. 2020.

Jodouin, Kathleen. [“Safer Places: Harm Reduction Strategies to Address Human Trafficking.”](#) Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. Webinar. 2020.

### Toolkits:

[“Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Human Trafficking: A Critical Reflection Workbook for Service Providers.”](#) North Bay: Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking, 2020.

[“Service Mapping Toolkit”](#). North Bay: Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking, 2020.

## **Policy Briefs:**

“Violence, Exploitation and Abuse in the Sex Trade: Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration,” Policy Brief No. 1, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

“Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Service Provision,” Policy Brief No. 2, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

“Decolonize Our Actions! Providing Services to Indigenous Persons involved in the Sex Industry,” Policy Brief No. 3, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

“Safer Spaces: Harm Reduction Strategies to Address Human Trafficking,” Policy Brief No. 4, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

## GLASS IMAGE

Images by Brenda Quenneville

The image of one of Brenda's potted bowls is fused glass encased in pottery. It was chosen to represent not only the complexities associated with human trafficking, but highlights the possibility of transformation and resilience. In this pottery technique, coloured pieces of broken glass are layered on the bottom of a thick walled clay form. When the glass goes through the kiln within the pottery, the glass melts, fusing together in beautiful swirls of colour and texture resembling crystals. There is no absolute control in this process, it is up to the materials to transform and choose to revitalize. The resulting glass is stronger than it was before, as this new shape embedded in pottery asserts its identity. Through resiliency it is able to maintain its core purpose and integrity even in the face of dramatically changed pressures and circumstances.



## WAVES IMAGE

The image of the waves is another piece of Brenda's pottery, this time a plate. The imprint of the waves are rolled onto a flattened piece of clay. The clay is then stretched to size and placed on a mould to shape it as it dries. The imprint is very delicate, and can be flattened easily. However, once it goes through the firing process, and glaze is added, the subtleties of the transformation emerge. When Brenda works with this motif, she often thinks how "Happiness comes in waves."

