

Prevention and Intervention to Eliminate Human Trafficking and Gender-Based Violence in Ontario



THIS REPORT IS RELEASED ON BEHALF OF ANCFSAO 's THIRTEEN (13)
INDIGENOUS CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING AGENCIES (ICFWBA)

PRODUCED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF
NATIVE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCIES OF ONTARIO (ANCFSAO)



Artist Contributions

We would like to thank the artists who created the artwork found in this report.

Zakkary Joseph designed the intricate borders found on each page of the report. *Hadi. Siy sozi Zakkarry Witset hazdli. Hello my name is Zakkarry I am from Witset first nation. My pronouns are They/He and I am a self taught 2 spirit artist and activist. I have so many stories and lived experiences from my life thus far and I use my art as an expression of my past, present, and future. My art is an extension of me. Every piece is made with something connected to me one way or another and I try my best to represent my communities as an intersectional person within my art pieces.*

Artie K. Martin (Owner of Redwhip + Design Illustration Photography) designed the poster for the symposia, featured on the cover page of this report.

Together, these artistic components ground us in this work and remind us of our values as a collective people. Thank you for these beautiful contributions to this work.





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“The sacredness of our women, our life givers”

I first want to acknowledge all our families who have lost their loved ones through human trafficking, MMIWG and for our men who also are victims through this horrible experience.

These losses take a long time to heal from and for many families to put some closure is extremely difficult when the women and men are never found. This is so traumatic and affects not only the current generation but the next generations, especially for the children who lost their parents through a traumatic way.

We can support our families and communities with our collective prayers during these difficult times past and present and with our compassion and make a commitment to stand united on a collective fight through educating and by increasing awareness, become more knowledgeable about the topic and through stories from survivors and their families for better understanding.

Together we honor the sacredness of our women and protect our life givers. We have beautiful teachings about the sacredness of women, they are our life givers, they have the gift to bring life into the world, they are procreators, and if it wasn't for our mothers we won't be here.

Right from the beginning in our mother's womb we are nurtured and provided with all that we need until we are ready to enter the physical world. It is important to understand how special and sacred she is and provide those teachings of the ceremonies, the rites of passages to understand how important it is to care for and honor themselves.

These teachings are shared by our aunts and grandmothers and honor our grandmother moon that comes to visit us once a month that provides the cleansing for our vessel where our babies start their journey and our relationship and bond begins right here.

We also acknowledge our mother, the earth and the many beautiful gifts she provides for all of us every day unconditionally. Her gifts make it possible for all living humans, animals, trees and water, plants to name a few, to exist.

Danette Restoule, Elder in Residence ANCFSAO



Letter from Director of Family Well-Being at ANCFSAO

The Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) is grateful for having had the opportunity to oversee and conduct all three Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking symposia. Human Trafficking within the child welfare sector is a rising concern which profoundly impacts our Indigenous children, youth and families.

Research demonstrates that Indigenous Peoples are at a greater risk of experiencing all forms of human trafficking. Astoundingly, there is a strong correlation between young people involved in child welfare and human trafficking, which is predominantly due to their vulnerability and reasons for involvement. Simultaneously, gender-based violence is an identified precursor to human trafficking where women, girls, and children experience a much more elevated risk of being trafficked due to gender.

The purpose of these symposia that were held in late February and early March permitted not only space to shed light on the seriousness of human trafficking but also to raise awareness on its significance, particularly within the context of child welfare. These spaces of learning presented an opportunity to hear from lived experts who courageously shared their personal stories and experiences as a channel to transfer knowledge while building awareness to combat and demystify the stigma that encompasses human trafficking. We also heard from various scholars and professionals who tirelessly dedicate their time, efforts, and who are wholeheartedly committed to addressing this dire social issue.

By incorporating a multifaceted approach, it permits a window of opportunity for all of us to learn, unlearn, and relearn meaningful ways to work with and wholistically support victims and survivors of human trafficking. Ultimately, we cannot do this work alone, we must work collectively through concerted efforts and partnerships to fight human trafficking.

Anne Iserhoff , Director, Family Wellbeing, ANCFSAO





Preamble

The Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) is pleased to release this report summarizing activities conducted during Phase 1 of the Ontario Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence initiative. This report serves to update our partners, stakeholders and communities across the child welfare and Indigenous child and family wellbeing sectors and act as a knowledge mobilization resource. Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), this initiative comprised several key components carried out between 2024 and 2025. These included a two-phase environmental scan, expanded research and data collection and the delivery of three hybrid symposia in February and March 2025 offering both in-person and virtual attendance as well as table discussion groups. Following the symposia, three additional engagement sessions were held in April 2025 to gather further insights for the development of a provincial training curriculum focused on prevention, intervention and postvention. Finally, the initiative concluded with a consultation with the Provincial Elders Advisory Council in May 2025.

ANCFSAO would like to thank everyone who took the time to present at and attend the Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking symposia in Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay. We would also like to acknowledge ANCFSAO's thirteen member agencies who are tirelessly working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, families and communities to deliver wraparound, integrated protection and prevention services.

We want to express our gratitude to Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Carriers for their love, kindness and wisdom. We also wish to thank our Elders and Knowledge Carriers as well as the singers and drummers who sat with us, made offerings by way of ceremony and medicines to guide us in doing this work with a good heart and clear mind.



Chi Miigwetch and Nia:weh to the learned and lived experts, their families and communities, youth and other human services providers who are working in the field and sharing their personal stories to improve the ability of the child welfare sector to prevent, combat and end human trafficking and gender-based violence in all of its forms. Your experiences, impassioned contributions to spread awareness and advocate, and diligent work delivering supports will improve safety and equity for all that come after you. We are grateful to you and are committed to ensuring that your voices will be heard and inform decision-making.

Finally, Chi Miigwetch and Nia:weh to the Ontario Government and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for their commitment and efforts to bringing these critical issues to the forefront of its strategic priorities by financially supporting the Anti-Human Trafficking / Gender-Based Violence symposia and the curriculum development to evolve through subsequent funding cycles.

About ANCFSAO


ANCFSAO is a membership association made up of thirteen Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies (ICFWBAs), twelve of which are fully mandated and one agency that is pre-mandated to provide child protection services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) people. All our member agencies have multi-service functions as delegated within the respective First Nations communities they serve and are integrated service providers offering wholistic, wraparound prevention-focused supports. Collectively, our membership provides services to over 90% of all First Nations Communities in Ontario as well as to the urban Indigenous populations within their jurisdictions.

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Background





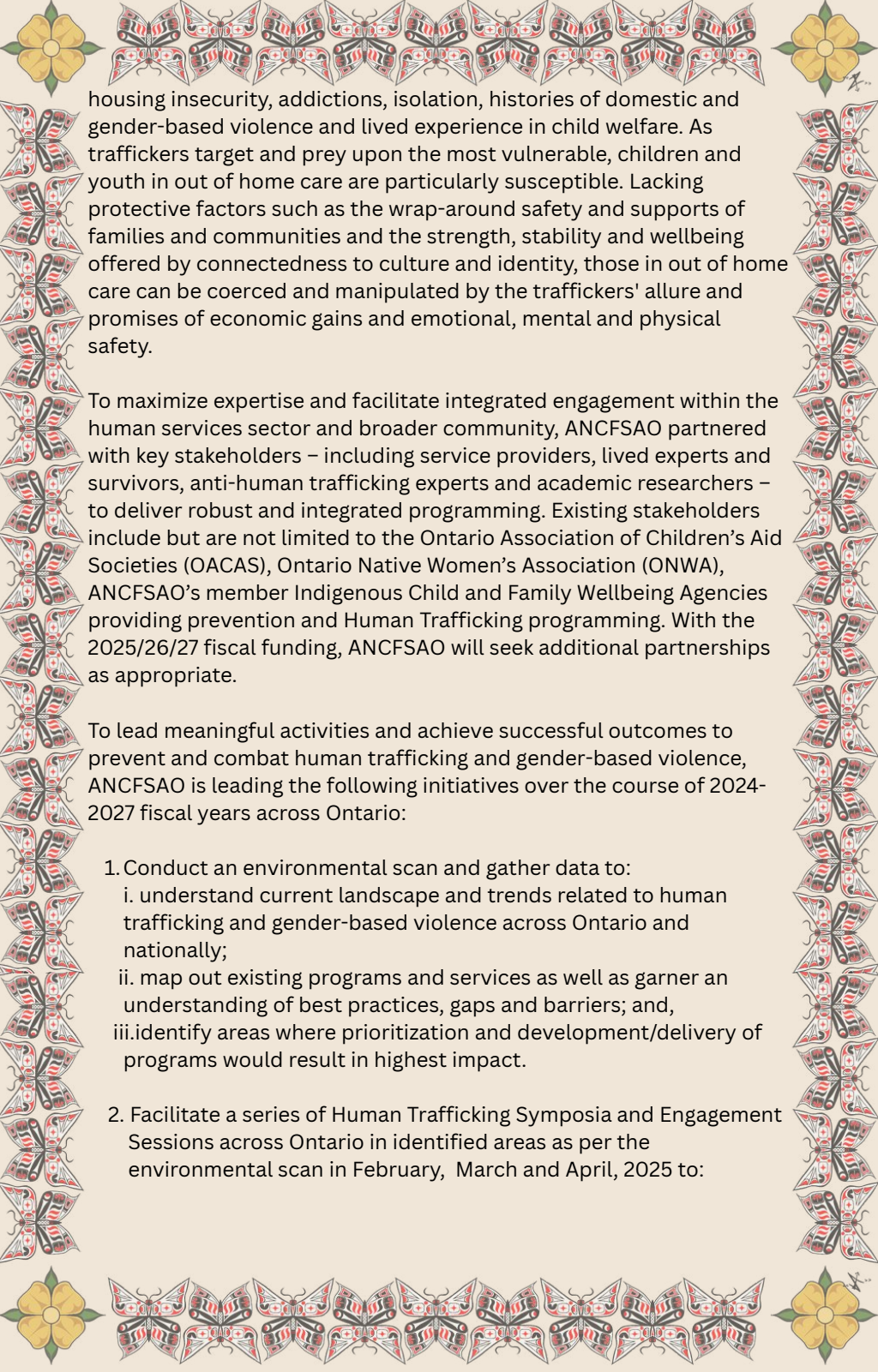
In February 2025, the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) received funding from Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to lead province-wide activities designed to equip Ontario's human services providers (with a primary focus on child welfare staff) as well as children, youth and caregivers/communities with essential skills to recognize, prevent and combat human trafficking (HT), exploitation and gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms. The funding sought to educate and raise awareness as well as build capacity and establish comprehensive localized support frameworks to increase sustainability of long-term prevention and intervention measures and break the long-standing cycles of violence.

While this report addresses human trafficking and gender-based violence as pressing and related issues, it is important to recognize the efforts of trafficking survivors to ensure these terms are not conflated. Making this distinction is crucial to ensure trafficking cases are properly investigated, prosecuted and resourced under anti-trafficking laws—not treated solely as matters of gender-based violence, which may not trigger the same legal protections. Recognizing this difference also helps ensure that survivors have access to the necessary services and supports, tailored to their distinct situations and needs. Ultimately, we must center the voices, experiences and insights of survivors to develop effective policies, trainings, and services.

Disproportionately and severely impacting Indigenous individuals, human trafficking in all its multi-faceted forms has lifelong impacts on survivors as well as those around them. It is important to note that while the impact of such forms of violence is higher for girls and women, it is also significant for boys and men, who may be underrepresented in statistics due to challenges they face in reporting.

In addition, vulnerable groups such as 2SLGBTQIA+ people, remote and Northern communities, immigrants and other racialized groups experience intersecting forms of oppression that increase their vulnerability to gender-based violence, exploitation and trafficking. Rates of human trafficking and gender-based violence are also higher among those experiencing multiple stressors, such as poverty,



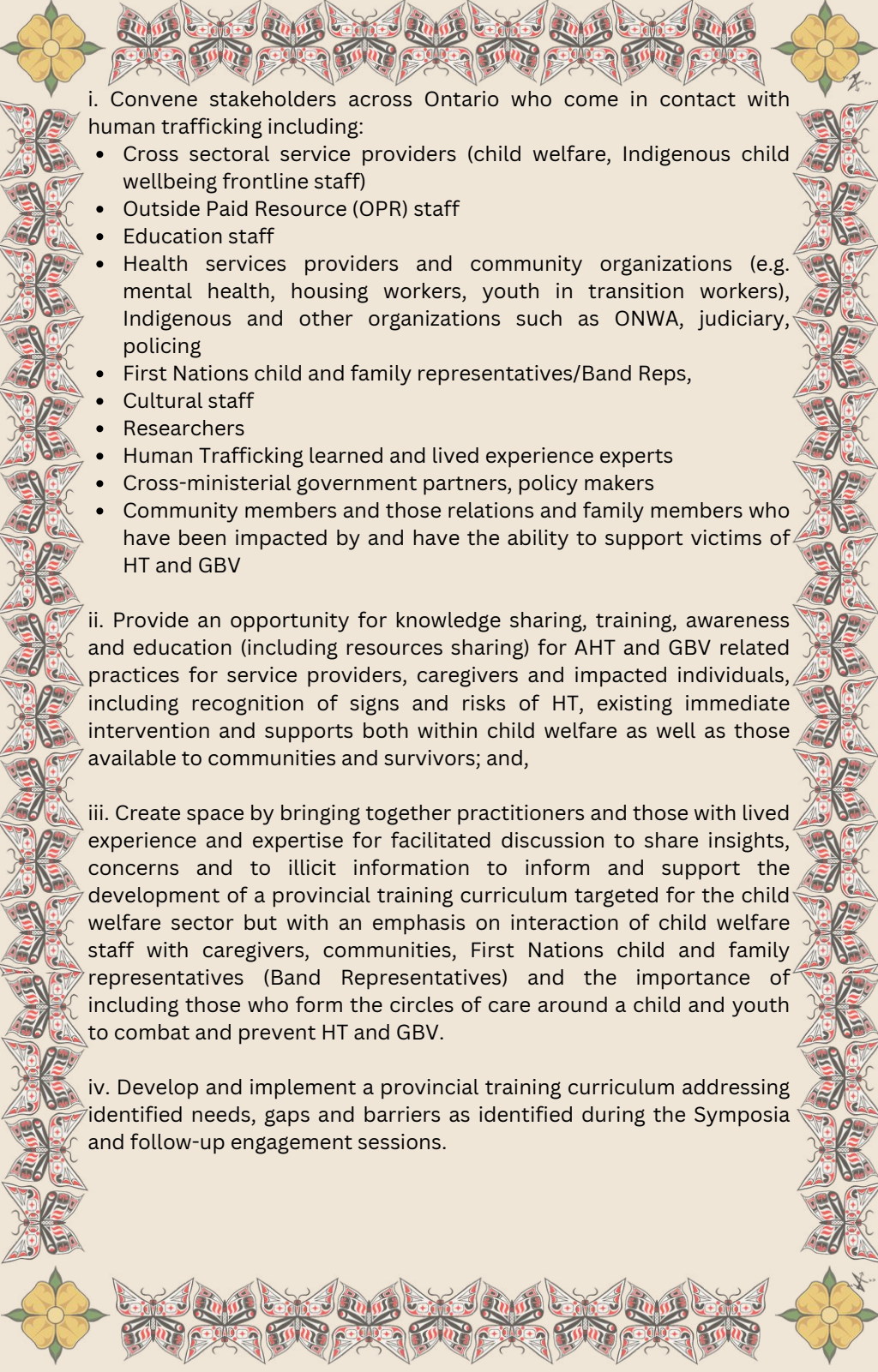


housing insecurity, addictions, isolation, histories of domestic and gender-based violence and lived experience in child welfare. As traffickers target and prey upon the most vulnerable, children and youth in out of home care are particularly susceptible. Lacking protective factors such as the wrap-around safety and supports of families and communities and the strength, stability and wellbeing offered by connectedness to culture and identity, those in out of home care can be coerced and manipulated by the traffickers' allure and promises of economic gains and emotional, mental and physical safety.

To maximize expertise and facilitate integrated engagement within the human services sector and broader community, ANCFSAO partnered with key stakeholders – including service providers, lived experts and survivors, anti-human trafficking experts and academic researchers – to deliver robust and integrated programming. Existing stakeholders include but are not limited to the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS), Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), ANCFSAO's member Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies providing prevention and Human Trafficking programming. With the 2025/26/27 fiscal funding, ANCFSAO will seek additional partnerships as appropriate.

To lead meaningful activities and achieve successful outcomes to prevent and combat human trafficking and gender-based violence, ANCFSAO is leading the following initiatives over the course of 2024-2027 fiscal years across Ontario:

1. Conduct an environmental scan and gather data to:
 - i. understand current landscape and trends related to human trafficking and gender-based violence across Ontario and nationally;
 - ii. map out existing programs and services as well as garner an understanding of best practices, gaps and barriers; and,
 - iii. identify areas where prioritization and development/delivery of programs would result in highest impact.
2. Facilitate a series of Human Trafficking Symposia and Engagement Sessions across Ontario in identified areas as per the environmental scan in February, March and April, 2025 to:



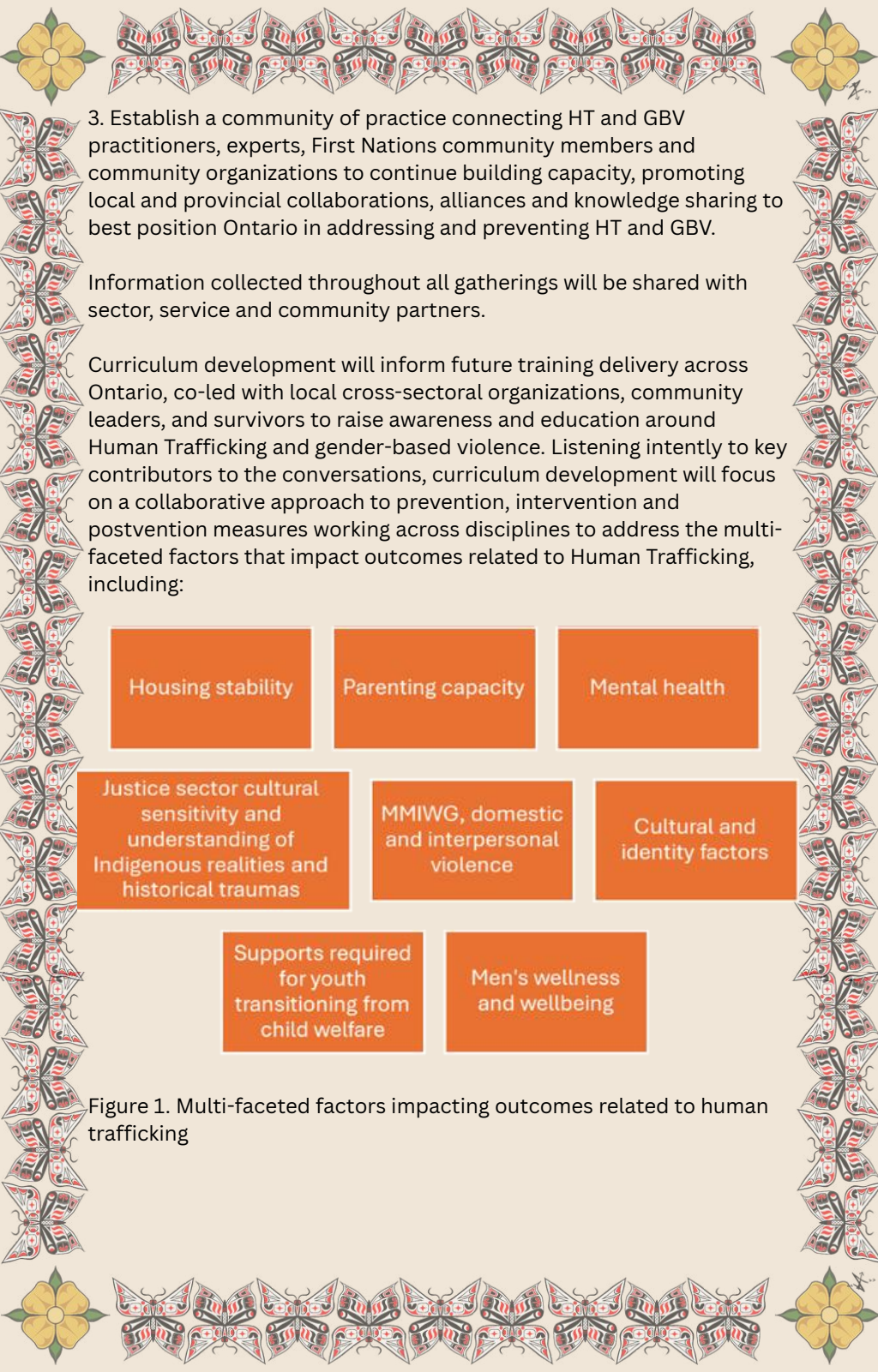
i. Convene stakeholders across Ontario who come in contact with human trafficking including:

- Cross sectoral service providers (child welfare, Indigenous child wellbeing frontline staff)
- Outside Paid Resource (OPR) staff
- Education staff
- Health services providers and community organizations (e.g. mental health, housing workers, youth in transition workers), Indigenous and other organizations such as ONWA, judiciary, policing
- First Nations child and family representatives/Band Reps,
- Cultural staff
- Researchers
- Human Trafficking learned and lived experience experts
- Cross-ministerial government partners, policy makers
- Community members and those relations and family members who have been impacted by and have the ability to support victims of HT and GBV

ii. Provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing, training, awareness and education (including resources sharing) for AHT and GBV related practices for service providers, caregivers and impacted individuals, including recognition of signs and risks of HT, existing immediate intervention and supports both within child welfare as well as those available to communities and survivors; and,

iii. Create space by bringing together practitioners and those with lived experience and expertise for facilitated discussion to share insights, concerns and to illicit information to inform and support the development of a provincial training curriculum targeted for the child welfare sector but with an emphasis on interaction of child welfare staff with caregivers, communities, First Nations child and family representatives (Band Representatives) and the importance of including those who form the circles of care around a child and youth to combat and prevent HT and GBV.

iv. Develop and implement a provincial training curriculum addressing identified needs, gaps and barriers as identified during the Symposia and follow-up engagement sessions.



3. Establish a community of practice connecting HT and GBV practitioners, experts, First Nations community members and community organizations to continue building capacity, promoting local and provincial collaborations, alliances and knowledge sharing to best position Ontario in addressing and preventing HT and GBV.

Information collected throughout all gatherings will be shared with sector, service and community partners.

Curriculum development will inform future training delivery across Ontario, co-led with local cross-sectoral organizations, community leaders, and survivors to raise awareness and education around Human Trafficking and gender-based violence. Listening intently to key contributors to the conversations, curriculum development will focus on a collaborative approach to prevention, intervention and postvention measures working across disciplines to address the multi-faceted factors that impact outcomes related to Human Trafficking, including:

Housing stability

Parenting capacity

Mental health

Justice sector cultural
sensitivity and
understanding of
Indigenous realities and
historical traumas

MMIWG, domestic
and interpersonal
violence

Cultural and
identity factors

Supports required
for youth
transitioning from
child welfare

Men's wellness
and wellbeing

Figure 1. Multi-faceted factors impacting outcomes related to human trafficking



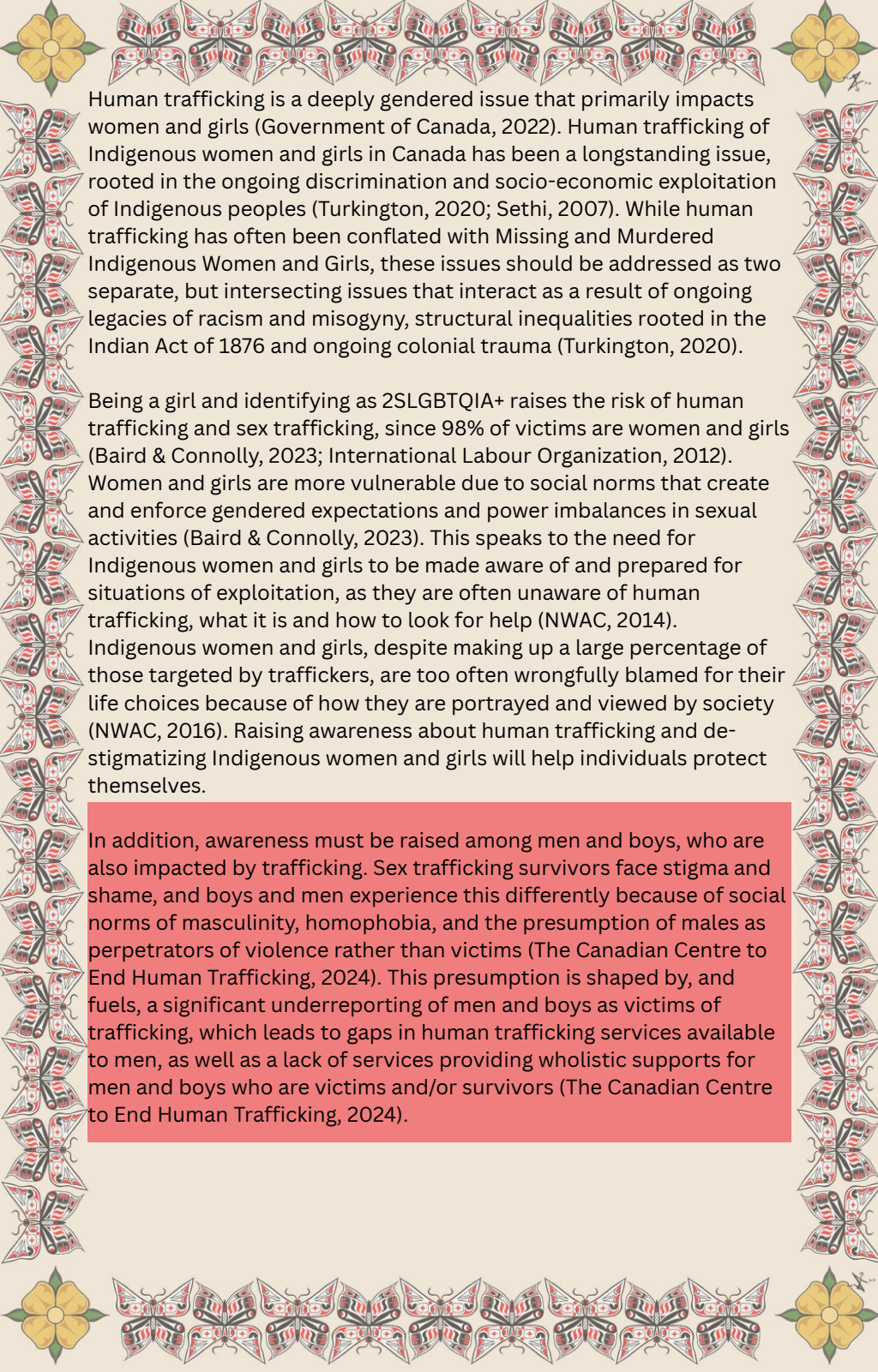
Introduction to Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation or harbouring of persons for the purpose of exploitation, generally for sexual exploitation or forced labour” (Government of Canada, 2022). The definition of human trafficking suggests the use of threat, force, deception, fraud, abduction, use of authority and giving payment to achieve consent (Sethi, 2007). There is a lack of consensus across disciplines as to what constitutes human trafficking, which poses a barrier to understanding and addressing it (Turkington, 2020). This confusion may be due to the problematic understanding of consent in human trafficking and sexual exploitation, where there are discrepancies in awareness and understanding. It is important to note that people do not consent to sex trafficking and human trafficking; rather, they are coerced (Hodgins et al., 2023).

Due to the historic and continued impacts of colonial trauma, Indigenous communities are more vulnerable than non-Indigenous children and families to higher rates of violence, abuse, trauma, poverty, substance use, mental health issues, precarious housing and several other debilitating factors that increase their risk of exploitation (Sethi, 2007). In addition, First Nations, Inuit and Métis women are vulnerable to sexual violence due to colonialism and residential schools where sexual abuse was common. The Indian Act of 1876 led to poor outcomes including health services and education deficits on reserve, as well as safety issues with housing, employment, water, and social services. Risk is further compounded when these factors overlap with the identity of being a woman or girl, as Indigenous women and girls make up 4% of Canada’s population, yet account for half of all reported trafficking cases and survivors in Canada (Grant, 2016).

Colonialism has created vulnerabilities that are not inherent to communities. At the same time, the underreporting of cases may lead people to believe that the issue is not as prevalent. This may be due, in part, to the fact that trafficking occurs underground within criminal networks that are often invisible to law enforcement (Baird & Connolly, 2023). Underreporting can also occur due to entrenched mistrust of policing services, lack of awareness around human trafficking leading to misidentification of signs of trafficking, as well as other factors such as familial trafficking (children trafficked by parents and/or family members).

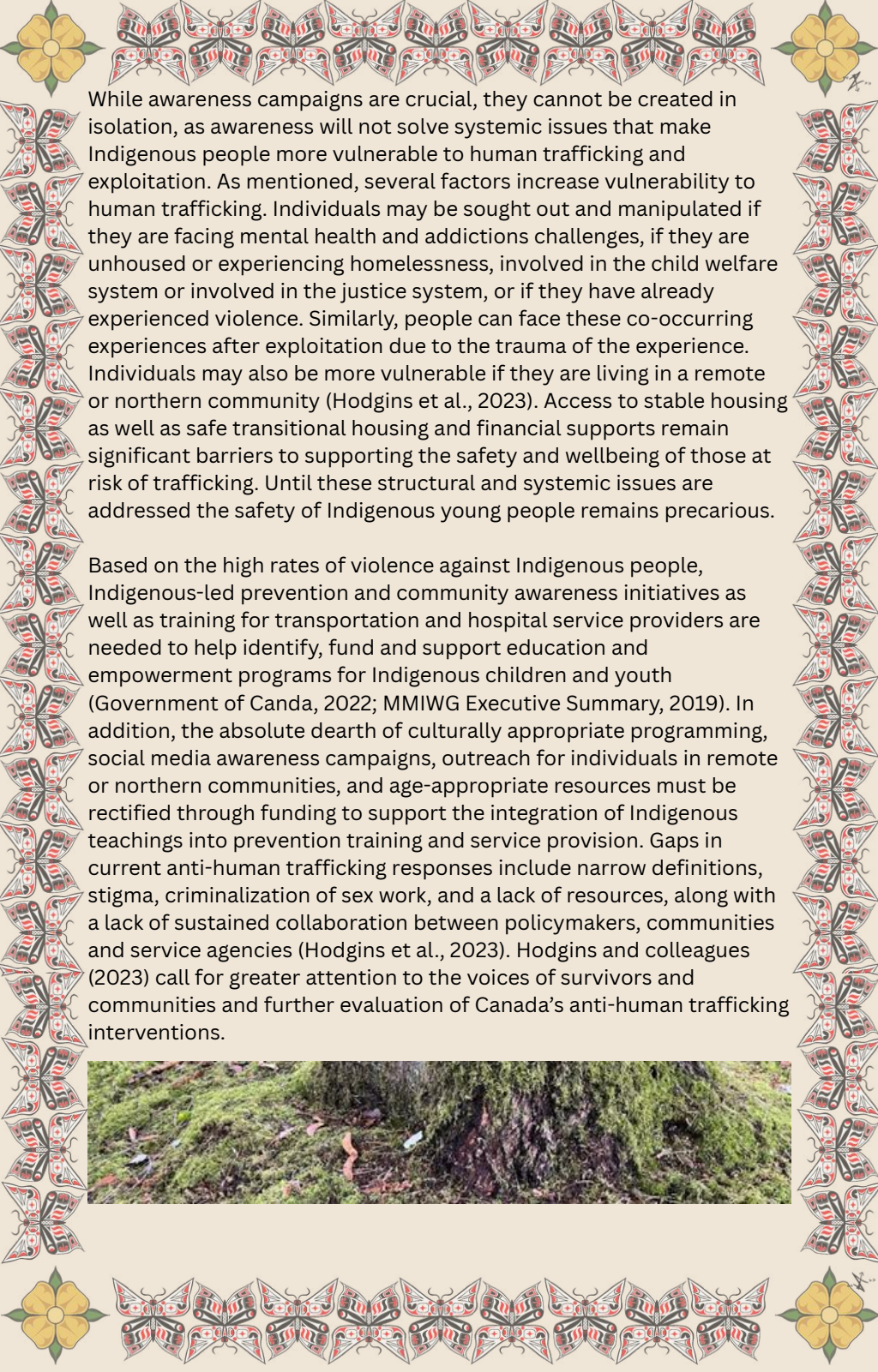




Human trafficking is a deeply gendered issue that primarily impacts women and girls (Government of Canada, 2022). Human trafficking of Indigenous women and girls in Canada has been a longstanding issue, rooted in the ongoing discrimination and socio-economic exploitation of Indigenous peoples (Turkington, 2020; Sethi, 2007). While human trafficking has often been conflated with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, these issues should be addressed as two separate, but intersecting issues that interact as a result of ongoing legacies of racism and misogyny, structural inequalities rooted in the Indian Act of 1876 and ongoing colonial trauma (Turkington, 2020).

Being a girl and identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ raises the risk of human trafficking and sex trafficking, since 98% of victims are women and girls (Baird & Connolly, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2012). Women and girls are more vulnerable due to social norms that create and enforce gendered expectations and power imbalances in sexual activities (Baird & Connolly, 2023). This speaks to the need for Indigenous women and girls to be made aware of and prepared for situations of exploitation, as they are often unaware of human trafficking, what it is and how to look for help (NWAC, 2014). Indigenous women and girls, despite making up a large percentage of those targeted by traffickers, are too often wrongfully blamed for their life choices because of how they are portrayed and viewed by society (NWAC, 2016). Raising awareness about human trafficking and destigmatizing Indigenous women and girls will help individuals protect themselves.

In addition, awareness must be raised among men and boys, who are also impacted by trafficking. Sex trafficking survivors face stigma and shame, and boys and men experience this differently because of social norms of masculinity, homophobia, and the presumption of males as perpetrators of violence rather than victims (The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2024). This presumption is shaped by, and fuels, a significant underreporting of men and boys as victims of trafficking, which leads to gaps in human trafficking services available to men, as well as a lack of services providing wholistic supports for men and boys who are victims and/or survivors (The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2024).



While awareness campaigns are crucial, they cannot be created in isolation, as awareness will not solve systemic issues that make Indigenous people more vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. As mentioned, several factors increase vulnerability to human trafficking. Individuals may be sought out and manipulated if they are facing mental health and addictions challenges, if they are unhoused or experiencing homelessness, involved in the child welfare system or involved in the justice system, or if they have already experienced violence. Similarly, people can face these co-occurring experiences after exploitation due to the trauma of the experience. Individuals may also be more vulnerable if they are living in a remote or northern community (Hodgins et al., 2023). Access to stable housing as well as safe transitional housing and financial supports remain significant barriers to supporting the safety and wellbeing of those at risk of trafficking. Until these structural and systemic issues are addressed the safety of Indigenous young people remains precarious.

Based on the high rates of violence against Indigenous people, Indigenous-led prevention and community awareness initiatives as well as training for transportation and hospital service providers are needed to help identify, fund and support education and empowerment programs for Indigenous children and youth (Government of Canada, 2022; MMIWG Executive Summary, 2019). In addition, the absolute dearth of culturally appropriate programming, social media awareness campaigns, outreach for individuals in remote or northern communities, and age-appropriate resources must be rectified through funding to support the integration of Indigenous teachings into prevention training and service provision. Gaps in current anti-human trafficking responses include narrow definitions, stigma, criminalization of sex work, and a lack of resources, along with a lack of sustained collaboration between policymakers, communities and service agencies (Hodgins et al., 2023). Hodgins and colleagues (2023) call for greater attention to the voices of survivors and communities and further evaluation of Canada's anti-human trafficking interventions.






Turkington (2020) identifies social media as a crucial tool for preventing human trafficking and emphasizes the importance of educating young people on social media as a key strategy to prevent exploitation. Thakor and Boyd (2013) also speak to the role of technology in the sexual exploitation of children. Social media influences the flow of information and can direct individuals toward trafficking networks – especially for Indigenous people in Northern communities who may be compelled to move to larger cities due to lack of locally available resources. It is important to institute culturally based, community-led initiatives to educate about healthy relationships, the signs and dangers of love bombing, and the risks associated with social media.

Given the multiple, complex factors contributing to human trafficking, an interdisciplinary, intersectional and systemic approach is required to target the roots of this issue. The concept of red intersectionality, which draws on Crenshaw's 1989 intersectional framework, offers a "holistic approach to all social justice work by, with and for First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples" (Clark, 2016, p. 51). According to this approach, all actions and outcomes must both hold on to traditions while simultaneously "making meaning of modern Indigenous struggles" (Clark, 2016, p. 51). An Indigenous gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) can address colonialism, state policies and lived experience (Clark, 2016). In line with this approach, it is imperative to decolonize existing colonial psychology (Garoutte, 2018) to improve anti-human trafficking services, including prevention, intervention, and postvention supports (Baird & Connolly, 2023).

Statistics: Layout of Human Trafficking in Canada and Ontario

As mentioned above, rates of human trafficking are underreported and underrepresented due to stigma, definitional dilemmas, lack of awareness and culturally safe resources, and insufficient collaboration across sectors. Human trafficking has also been referred to as trafficking in persons, which is a human rights violation that can occur domestically and transnationally. Trafficking of persons involves the recruitment, transport or harbouring of a person, or the control or influence of their movements with the goal of exploiting that person or facilitating the exploitation of that person.





It is also important to note that grooming and coercive behaviour, which are precursors to trafficking, can often begin years before actual trafficking activities may start. Too often these behaviours are not recognized as pre-trafficking risks.

Several sources have tried to measure how many people are affected by human trafficking in Canada; however, the current statistics only provide a partial understanding of the crisis because of the hidden nature of human trafficking (Hodgins et al., 2023). According to Statistics Canada's (2023) "The Daily: Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2023":

- 570 human trafficking incidents were reported to the police in 2023, which was a decrease from reports in 2022.
- There was a decrease in the rate of reported human trafficking, where 1.4 incidents were reported per 100,000 population in 2023 versus 1.5 per 100,000 in 2022.
- From 2013-2023, more than 4,500 cases of human trafficking were reported by the police.
- The highest rates of reported cases within Canada were in Nova Scotia and Ontario, both above the national average of 1.4 incidents per 100,000 population. Nova Scotia reported 6.3 cases per 100,000 and Ontario reported 2.1 cases per 100,000.
- In 2023, 85% of those incidents were reported in census metropolitan areas (CMAs). There were five CMAs that had the most incidents in Canada: Toronto (highest, with 20% of all incidents in Canada), Ottawa, Halifax, Montreal, and London. However, these statistics may not clearly account for victim mobility, where individuals are moved from one area to another.
- 93% of victims were women and girls, and 8 out of 10 accused persons were men and boys.
- 58% of cases were not solved by the police.
- Of the 330 cases of human trafficking that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police identified, 94% were domestic cases, and of those domestic cases, Indigenous women were overrepresented.

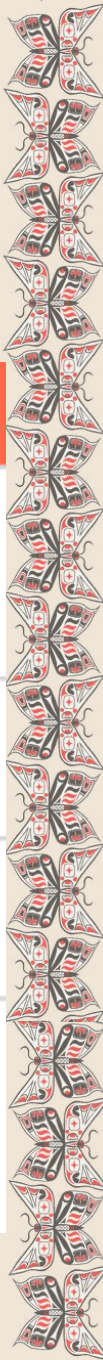


Human Trafficking Corridors

Human trafficking can happen locally, nationally and across international borders. The movement of persons in trafficking takes place along human trafficking corridors, or routes that connect major trafficking hubs. This movement can be a significant aspect of exploitation and is important to understand because it impacts the types of interventions available, what laws apply and how law enforcement can intervene, and the experiences of survivors when they attempt to leave (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021). Research conducted by The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (The Centre, 2021), which Executive Director Julia Drydyk presented during ANCFSAO's Provincial AHT Symposia, defines human trafficking corridors as "strips of land or transportation routes that include two or more major cities, that are used by traffickers to move individuals between sites of commercial exploitation" (p. 5). The Centre goes on to note that "In the context of sex trafficking, victims are transported between commercial sex markets. In addition to connecting multiple population centres, human trafficking corridors may extend across large geographic areas" (The Centre, 2021, p. 5). According to the study, human trafficking corridors intersect with municipal and provincial jurisdictions, Indigenous territories, and/or other countries.



Figure 2. Human Trafficking Corridors in Canada (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021, p. 28)



According to the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, traffickers use these corridors for multiple reasons: (1) to maximize profit; (2) to lower risks since movement makes it difficult for law enforcement to investigate cases; and (3) to continue to control the people they are exploiting by isolating them further. These corridors also serve to transport people and goods to other markets. Traffickers handle all aspects of the exchange: they post ads online, and coordinate what sexual services will be provided by the person being trafficked, at what price, and how many buyers a victim must see. The study reported examples of both intra-provincial corridors and inter-provincial corridors.

Examples of inter-provincial corridors (The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021):

Canada's West Coast Circuit	The Quebec-Alberta corridor was the most cited/discussed by those affected, with trends of trafficking young women from Quebec, largely due to the language barrier and ability to control those who do not speak English.
The Trans-Canada Highway	Trafficking tends to occur where there is a highway and internet access. This highway functions as a corridor within all provinces and across the country.
Highways 11 & 17 Northern Ontario	Traffickers use these highways to move victims from Sudbury and Thunder Bay through Northern Ontario and to connect to the market in Winnipeg.
Halifax, Nova Scotia – Moncton, New Brunswick	The stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway between Halifax and Moncton was also frequently mentioned as well-known. Traffickers use this route to access commercial markets in strip clubs that operate in New Brunswick but are not legally permitted in Nova Scotia.



Examples of intra-provincial corridors (The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021):

Ontario's Highway 401

Corridor that connects Montreal, Quebec and Windsor. Traffickers capitalize on movement through densely populated areas, especially along the corridor where a status card is not required to pass, such as Winnipeg and Six Nations.

Calgary-Edmonton-Fort McMurray/Grande Prairie

Alberta's human trafficking corridor that connects the province's largest online commercial sex markets and extraction work camps. It is used by traffickers local to Alberta but also Ontario and Quebec.

Table 1. Examples of human trafficking corridors in Canada (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021)

It is important to identify these corridors and understand how those who are trafficked may be transported so law enforcement can better respond to the ever-changing nature of this issue. It is also important to understand so that the relevant actors across various disciplines can come together to prevent and end human trafficking. These corridors present additional barriers to escaping and exiting human trafficking, as victims remain dependent upon their trafficker.

Key Legislation on Human Trafficking

The 2000 Palermo Protocol Agreement, from the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, states that human trafficking is a human rights violation and criminal offense (Baird and Connolly, 2023). Sex trafficking became criminalized in Canada in 2005 when human trafficking entered the Criminal Code, Section 279.1 (Baird & Connolly, 2023). Canada and the United States of America have made changes to their laws so that anyone under the age of 18 is considered a minor and is unable to consent to commercial sex, changing the view from criminalizing youth to calling them victims – or from teen prostitutes to victims of sex trafficking of minors (Baird & Connolly, 2023).

Ontario is the first province in Canada to have a legislated strategy to address human trafficking, called the Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act, 2021. The Government of Ontario invested \$307 million from 2020 to 2025 for the purposes of raising awareness about the issue through training and public awareness campaigns, empowering frontline workers and service providers to prevent human trafficking and act early, supporting survivors through specialized services, and giving law enforcement tools to hold offenders accountable, including Indigenous-specific services and supports. These include supports for Indigenous children and youth in care and leaving care, and Indigenous-led supports for survivors and at-risk youth. The Ontario Government has now announced the renewal of the Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy from 2025-2030, totalling more than \$345 million investment (Government of Ontario, 2025). The renewal of this strategy includes increased access to in-person anti-human trafficking education and awareness events, expanding training to build capacity, and knowledge sharing sessions (Government of Ontario, 2025).



Figure 3. Ontario's Legislated Strategy to Address Human Trafficking



The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was launched to explore, from an Indigenous focus, the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including sexual violence and Indigenous women and girls' vulnerability to higher levels of violence based on underlying historical, social, economic, institutional and cultural factors (MMIWG, 2019). The National Inquiry's final report, [Reclaiming Power and Place](#), calls for transformative social change to address the human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses against Indigenous peoples by Canada ([Final Report | MMIWG](#)). MMIWG is closely related to the issue of human trafficking as many of these women and girls may have been trafficked, experienced exploitation and/or gender-based violence. 2SLGBTQIA+ people are also impacted by violence, which prompted the 2023-2024 horizontal initiative by the Government of Canada to end violence, especially against Indigenous women and girls.

In response to the MMIWG final report, the Government of Canada collaborated with Indigenous survivors and communities to launch the 2021 National Action Plan ([National Action Plan](#)). This Action Plan seeks to ensure a Canada where Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people live free from violence and are celebrated, honoured, respected, valued, treated equitably, safe and secure. For its specific contribution to the National Action Plan, the Government of Canada released the Federal Pathway, which outlines a set of commitments for federal departments and agencies to support systemic change to address MMIWG and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

As previously mentioned, the Government of Ontario enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act in 2021. The Act requires the Government of Ontario to maintain an anti-human trafficking strategy that aims to end human trafficking in Ontario and support persons who have experienced it. The Act requires that the strategy be reviewed at least every five years while considering the following principles: human rights-based, survivor-centered, recognizing collective responsibility, integrating intersectionality, cultural responsiveness, prevention-focused, trauma-informed, informed by evidence, and sustainability and agility.






In addition to this legislation, the Government of Ontario amended the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) to address child sex trafficking ([Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1](#) section 74 (1.1); [SO 2021, c 21 | Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021 | CanLII](#)). The amended CYFSA allows a worker or peace officer to take a 16- or 17-year-old child to a different location if there is reason to believe that they are being trafficked.

A civil process for obtaining human trafficking restraining orders exists under the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act, 2017. The orders can quickly be put in place to protect both those who have been trafficked and those at risk of being trafficked, in addition to others who may be at risk of harm such as family members. No criminal process needs to be initiated to obtain an order. Free legal representation is available on a province-wide basis for obtaining these orders. This legislation points to the urgent need for persons who are being trafficked to be supported through a multi-disciplinary approach, requiring the involvement of many stakeholders.

ANCFSAO Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia: Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay

To address the multi-faceted and growing issue of human trafficking, ANCFSAO convened three Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia, each consisting of two days of knowledge transfer and sharing, coupled with facilitated discussions. A total of 345 people participated across three Ontario locations: Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay. Out of the total registrants, 65 people attended the sessions virtually. The symposia sought to meet a dual objective: a. increase awareness and knowledge concerning human trafficking and equip service providers and communities with tools to combat violence and exploitation, particularly in the child welfare sector; and, b. provide space for sharing of information around identified gaps and areas of opportunity to inform the development of a wholistic anti-human trafficking curriculum. Presentations shared best practices and discussed existing programs and legislation designed to support survivors.





Three engagement sessions were held following the symposia to gather additional insight to inform the development of a provincial training curriculum. These were attended by approximately 120 individuals and will be discussed later in the report.

The Symposia brought together attendees from:

- Thirteen (13) Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies
- Fifteen (15) Ontario Children's Aid Societies
- 50+ unique First Nations and First Nations child and family services organizations across Ontario
- Community organizations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous

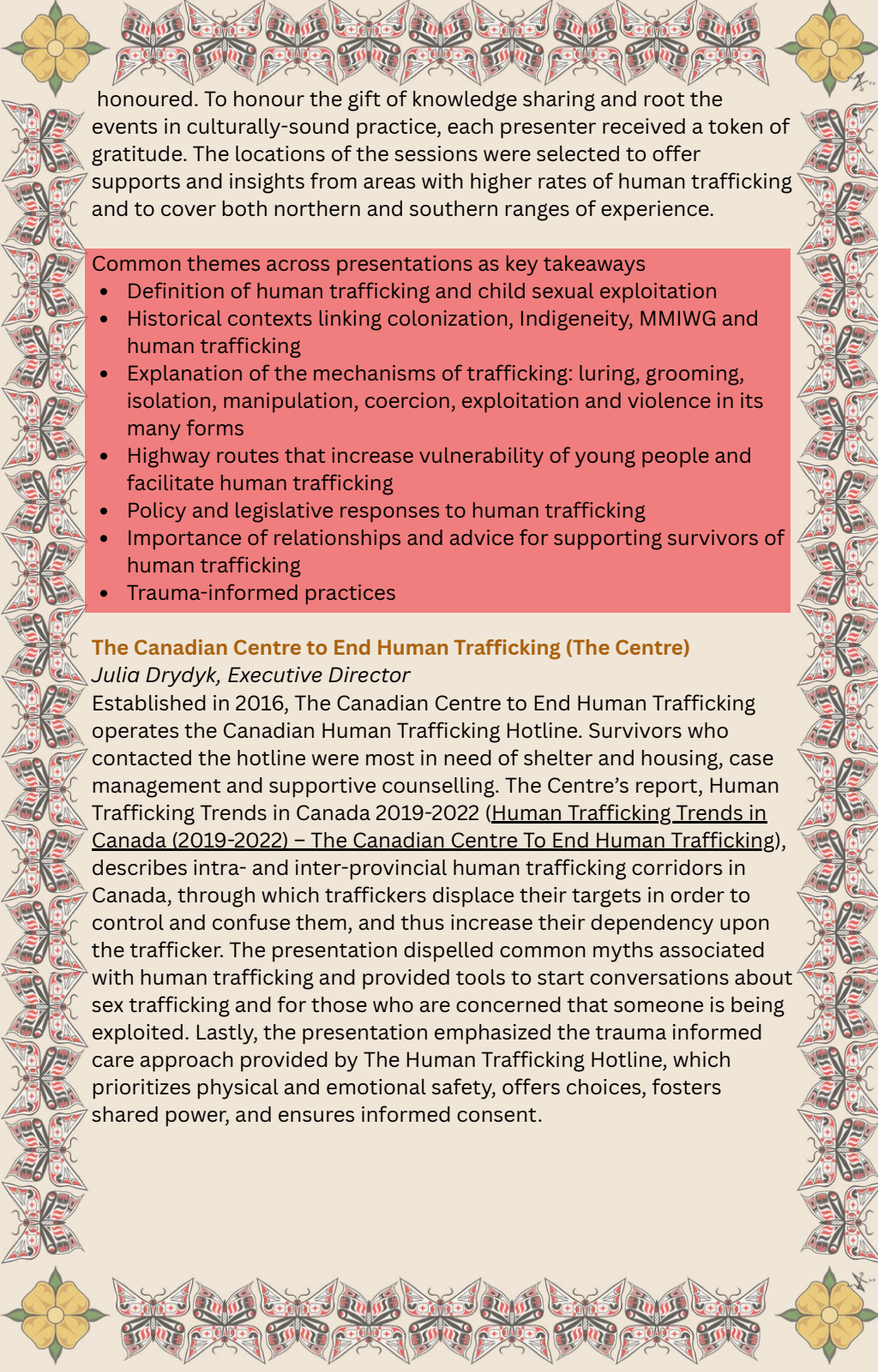
Attendees represented a broad variety of those coming in contact with human trafficking, including:

- Youths transitioning out of care
- Lived experience and survivors of human trafficking
- 50+ roles targeted to human trafficking, MMIWG, sexual violence, domestic violence
- Staff trainers
- 40+ Child Welfare specific roles (including child protection worker, child and family advocacy, child wellbeing worker, child and youth service worker, child and youth family helper, childcare worker)
- 30+ Family Worker roles (including family findings, supports and services, family and intimate partner violence prevention, family counsellor, family well-being, family mediator, family helper)
- 15+ Community worker roles (including community services, community reintegration, community engagement and outreach, community support, community justice, community navigator)
- Mental Health roles (including adult, youth and child MH and Addictions; Client Records Clerk; Indigenous MH and Addictions Counsellor; Family services clinician)
- Academic and government partners

The Presentations

This section provides an overview of the Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia presentations and offers insights related to program and service gaps and recommendations. Rooted in culture, each day of the Symposia opened with ceremony with Elders present and





honoured. To honour the gift of knowledge sharing and root the events in culturally-sound practice, each presenter received a token of gratitude. The locations of the sessions were selected to offer supports and insights from areas with higher rates of human trafficking and to cover both northern and southern ranges of experience.

Common themes across presentations as key takeaways

- Definition of human trafficking and child sexual exploitation
- Historical contexts linking colonization, Indigeneity, MMIWG and human trafficking
- Explanation of the mechanisms of trafficking: luring, grooming, isolation, manipulation, coercion, exploitation and violence in its many forms
- Highway routes that increase vulnerability of young people and facilitate human trafficking
- Policy and legislative responses to human trafficking
- Importance of relationships and advice for supporting survivors of human trafficking
- Trauma-informed practices

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (The Centre)

Julia Drydyk, Executive Director

Established in 2016, The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking operates the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline. Survivors who contacted the hotline were most in need of shelter and housing, case management and supportive counselling. The Centre's report, Human Trafficking Trends in Canada 2019-2022 (Human Trafficking Trends in Canada (2019-2022) – The Canadian Centre To End Human Trafficking), describes intra- and inter-provincial human trafficking corridors in Canada, through which traffickers displace their targets in order to control and confuse them, and thus increase their dependency upon the trafficker. The presentation dispelled common myths associated with human trafficking and provided tools to start conversations about sex trafficking and for those who are concerned that someone is being exploited. Lastly, the presentation emphasized the trauma informed care approach provided by The Human Trafficking Hotline, which prioritizes physical and emotional safety, offers choices, fosters shared power, and ensures informed consent.



Figure 4. Human trafficking trends in Canada (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2023)

Policy and Legislative Responses for Human Trafficking


Jennifer Richardson, Government of Canada's Chief Advisor to Combat Human Trafficking

Jennifer Richardson explained the links between child victims of sexual exploitation and co-occurring experiences across sectors. Co-occurring experiences, such as mental health and addictions, homelessness, child welfare, the justice system and violence against women/intimate partner violence, may worsen, or be caused by forms of exploitation. Often, individuals may be targeted by traffickers when they are experiencing these challenges; conversely, they may face these challenges because of the trauma of being trafficked or exploited. When services do not address co-occurring experiences, they are not aligned with the complex and intersecting needs of child victims. This presentation also spoke to legislative and policy responses across diverse sectors: political, justice, child welfare, housing, education, survivor leadership, and coordinated responses in terms of public awareness, transport, child welfare, youth services, survivor supports, and police.

York University LaMarsh Centre for Child & Youth Research, York Region Children's Aid Society, Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions, and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child & Family Services

Jennifer Connolly, Samantha Orr, Katherine Benvenuto

The York University LaMarsh Center for Child & Youth Research team presented their work on the York Sex Trafficking Screening Tool, developed in collaboration with York CAS, Simcoe CAS and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child and Family Services. The



purpose of the high-risk screening tool is to help guide the worker in determining the appropriate next steps if a youth is flagged at risk of HT. The efficiency of the tool was tested throughout the study by consulting 37 frontline workers experienced with assisting sex trafficked youth. The team asked questions on item content and usability, application of the tool, language and sensitivity to equity-deserving groups. Findings revealed that workers find it hard to determine sex trafficking risk, and that the tool can help the worker feel more confident in their assessment. Factors contributing to the difficulty experienced by workers in their ability to make a judgement about a trafficking situation include how much the youth tells the worker, their relationship with the youth, how comfortable workers feel screening for sex trafficking and the age of the youth.

A Journey of Resilience and Healing


Jasmine De Fina

Human Trafficking survivor, Jasmine De Fina shared a personal story about her journey as a Métis child navigating the Ontario child welfare system and the vulnerabilities that led to her being trafficked as a young adult. These vulnerabilities were caused by systemic gaps, intergenerational trauma and the loss of identity faced by many Indigenous children in care. Through her lived experience, Jasmine spoke to the importance of reclaiming one's voice and heritage in order to heal. She called for culturally grounded supports that protect and empower Indigenous youth, emphasizing the critical importance of educating children early about the issue -- including recognizing harmful behaviours and equipping them with preventive skills.

Speck of Sand Counselling

Kendra Lee Mills

Representing Speck of Sand Counselling, Kendra Mills discussed the importance of building relationships and support networks within CAS as well as with community organizations to support children who are being sexually exploited. She provided examples of how she achieved this as an intake worker with CAS and how she continues this work after having left the child welfare sector. Kendra highlighted existing gaps within the established age range



for youth identified as eligible for protection and the needs of Transitional Age youth (ages 16-17) who are affected by sexual exploitation but often go unnoticed until they exit care. The presentation addressed legislative obligations, strategies for working with children who experience exploitation, the whole circle of supports required to respond and mitigate harm, and guidance on navigating systems and advocating from both within and outside those systems.

Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)

Lindsey Lickers (Toronto and Sudbury) and Hannah Buck (Thunder Bay)

Presenters from the Ontario Native Women's Association offered a comprehensive overview of various aspects of human trafficking and the complex considerations and supports required. This included: a discussion of the nuanced differences between the terms "victim" and "survivor"; the complexities of 'exiting' human trafficking, where survivors can require an average of seven attempts to successfully exit or escape from their trafficker; and an overview of primary risk factors such as gang involvement, poverty, disruption of family and community, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, involvement in the child welfare system, and living in an abusive household. Each of these factors significantly increases the risk of exposure to human trafficking. ONWA released the Journey to Safe Spaces Report (Journey to Safe Spaces Report | [ONWA](#)), which includes a detailed description of ONWA's Strategy and Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Service Delivery Framework and recommendations to address human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Aakode'ewin - Courage for Change Program is for Indigenous survivors to exit human trafficking and offers 24/7 crisis response, harm reduction, safety planning, support with referrals to healthcare, counselling and addictions, programming focused on capacity building, empowerment and culturally specific healing. ONWA has an Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison Program that offers educational material, awareness raising, advocacy and prevention supports to community members.





Ontario's Human Trafficking Legal Support Program

Kelly Beale and Rachelle Pearce, Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG)

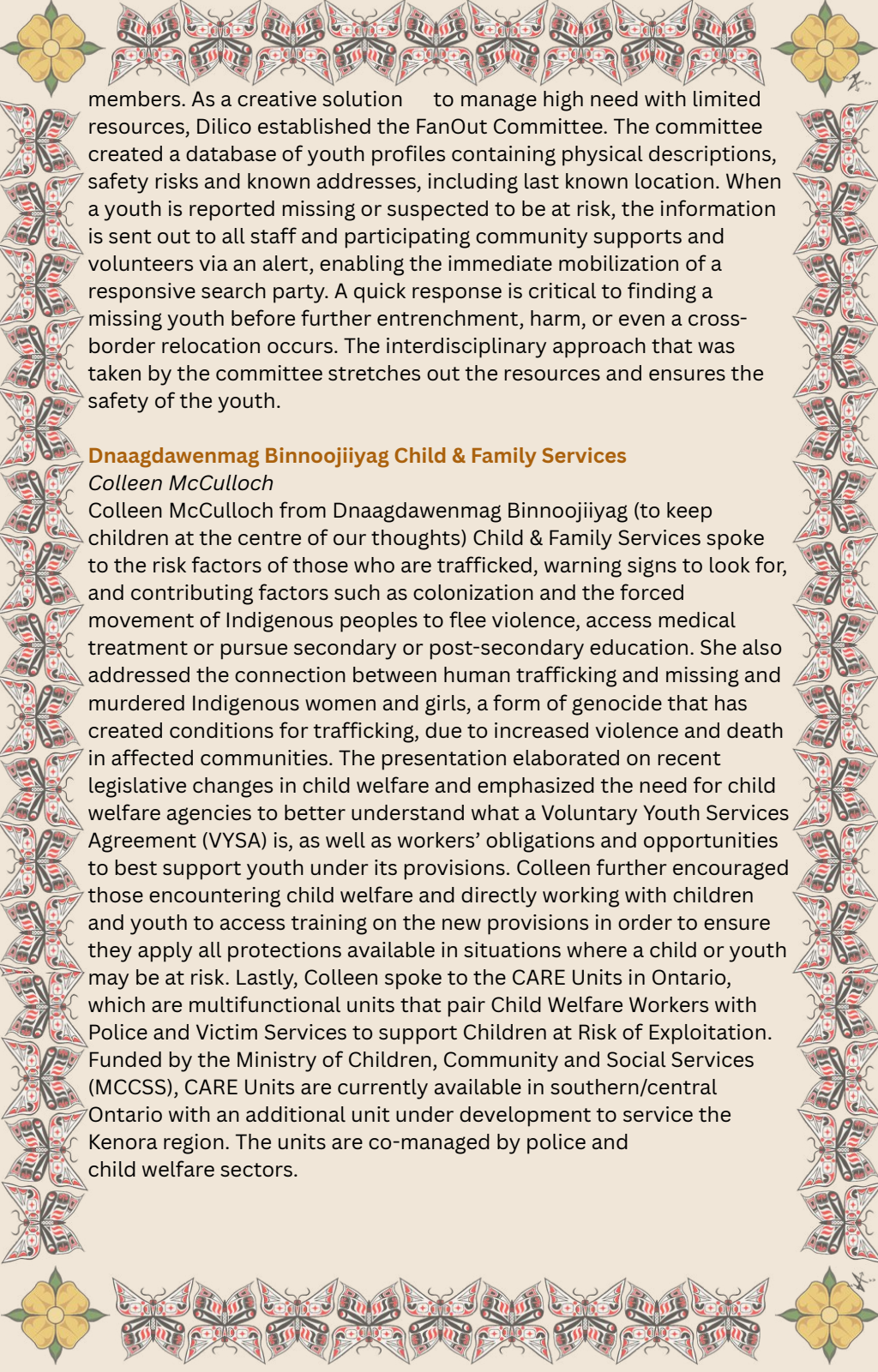
The Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General delivers the province-wide human trafficking legal support program. The program is free to victims and survivors of human trafficking of all ages and those at risk of being trafficked, as well as parents, guardians and customary caregivers accessing the program to protect a child under the age of 18. Among other services, the program provides legal information and advice on options for protection against a trafficker, including representation in applications for human trafficking restraining orders. These orders can include a comprehensive list of conditions, and failure by the trafficker to comply may result in arrest for breaching a court order under the Criminal Code. This program is the first of its kind in North America. The presenters work alongside community and legal organizations, Children's Aid Societies, Indigenous communities and organizations, victim services, education and health services, justice sector agencies and many others.

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care

Lori Schmidt, Nicolas Kowalzuk and Samantha Richard (Thunder Bay only)

Lori Schmidt, the Program Manager of the Ojichaagwan Ani-mino-aya Program, developed by Dilico Anishinabek Family Care, offered an overview of the program and its development, key objectives and admission criteria. The voluntary eight week live-in, land-based treatment program offers services to youth aged 12-17 who are vulnerable to or are exiting human trafficking and exploitation. All clients are required to go through a pre-treatment assessment before entering the program, involving group therapy sessions and trauma-focused interventions and life skills to support independence and safety. Dilico, whose service area covers the Robinson Superior Treaty which includes the northern City and District of Thunder Bay and a portion of Algoma, provides services to children and many high-risk youth and families with histories of complex traumas. Faced with frequent occurrences of high-risk youths going missing, Dilico's staff would organize high intensity search parties, which were a heavy burden on staff and community.



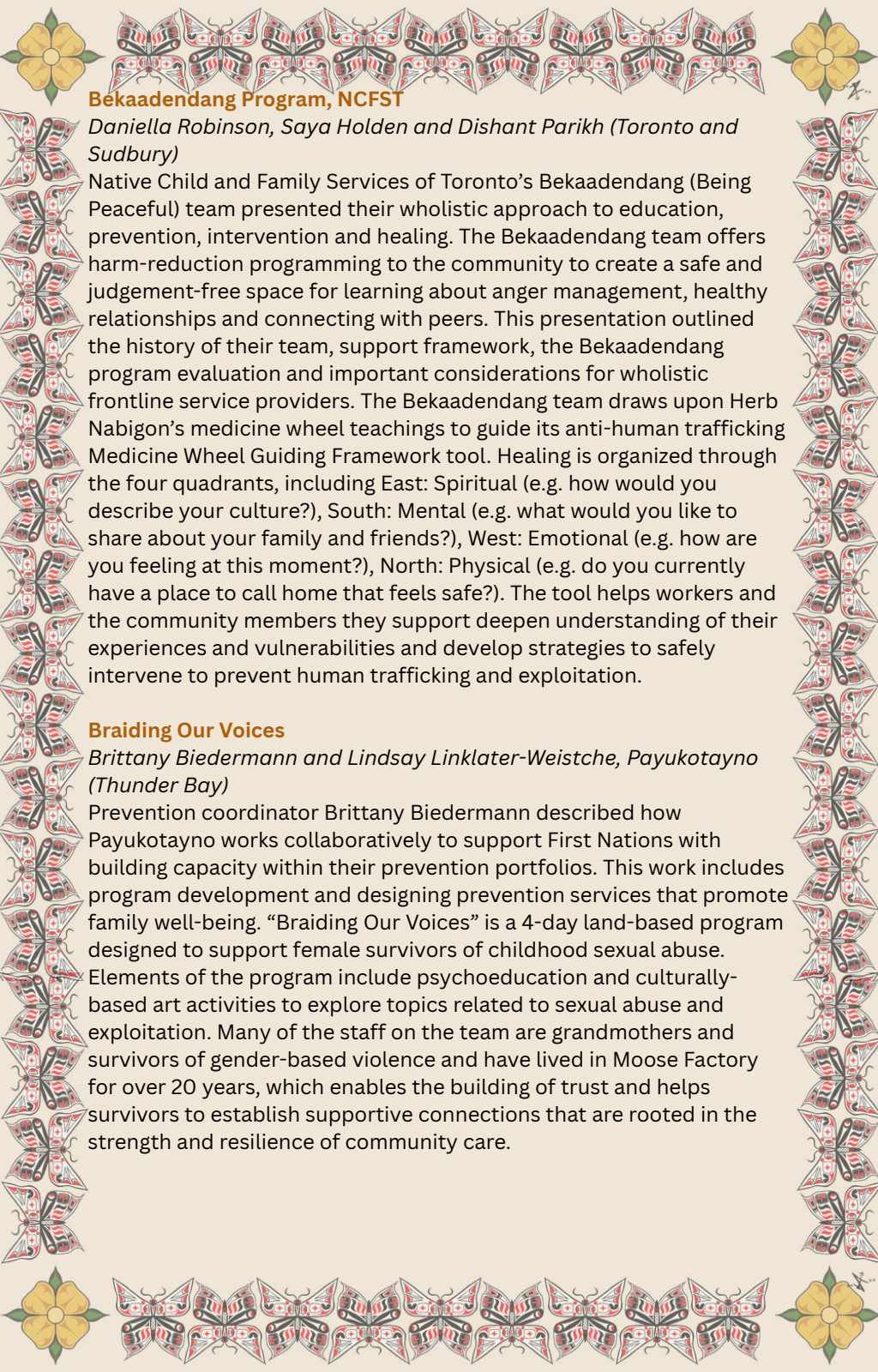


members. As a creative solution to manage high need with limited resources, Dilico established the FanOut Committee. The committee created a database of youth profiles containing physical descriptions, safety risks and known addresses, including last known location. When a youth is reported missing or suspected to be at risk, the information is sent out to all staff and participating community supports and volunteers via an alert, enabling the immediate mobilization of a responsive search party. A quick response is critical to finding a missing youth before further entrenchment, harm, or even a cross-border relocation occurs. The interdisciplinary approach that was taken by the committee stretches out the resources and ensures the safety of the youth.

Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child & Family Services

Colleen McCulloch

Colleen McCulloch from Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag (to keep children at the centre of our thoughts) Child & Family Services spoke to the risk factors of those who are trafficked, warning signs to look for, and contributing factors such as colonization and the forced movement of Indigenous peoples to flee violence, access medical treatment or pursue secondary or post-secondary education. She also addressed the connection between human trafficking and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, a form of genocide that has created conditions for trafficking, due to increased violence and death in affected communities. The presentation elaborated on recent legislative changes in child welfare and emphasized the need for child welfare agencies to better understand what a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) is, as well as workers' obligations and opportunities to best support youth under its provisions. Colleen further encouraged those encountering child welfare and directly working with children and youth to access training on the new provisions in order to ensure they apply all protections available in situations where a child or youth may be at risk. Lastly, Colleen spoke to the CARE Units in Ontario, which are multifunctional units that pair Child Welfare Workers with Police and Victim Services to support Children at Risk of Exploitation. Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), CARE Units are currently available in southern/central Ontario with an additional unit under development to service the Kenora region. The units are co-managed by police and child welfare sectors.



Bekaadendang Program, NCFST

Daniella Robinson, Saya Holden and Dishant Parikh (Toronto and Sudbury)

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto's Bekaadendang (Being Peaceful) team presented their wholistic approach to education, prevention, intervention and healing. The Bekaadendang team offers harm-reduction programming to the community to create a safe and judgement-free space for learning about anger management, healthy relationships and connecting with peers. This presentation outlined the history of their team, support framework, the Bekaadendang program evaluation and important considerations for wholistic frontline service providers. The Bekaadendang team draws upon Herb Nabigon's medicine wheel teachings to guide its anti-human trafficking Medicine Wheel Guiding Framework tool. Healing is organized through the four quadrants, including East: Spiritual (e.g. how would you describe your culture?), South: Mental (e.g. what would you like to share about your family and friends?), West: Emotional (e.g. how are you feeling at this moment?), North: Physical (e.g. do you currently have a place to call home that feels safe?). The tool helps workers and the community members they support deepen understanding of their experiences and vulnerabilities and develop strategies to safely intervene to prevent human trafficking and exploitation.

Braiding Our Voices

Brittany Biedermann and Lindsay Linklater-Weistche, Payukotayno (Thunder Bay)

Prevention coordinator Brittany Biedermann described how Payukotayno works collaboratively to support First Nations with building capacity within their prevention portfolios. This work includes program development and designing prevention services that promote family well-being. "Braiding Our Voices" is a 4-day land-based program designed to support female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Elements of the program include psychoeducation and culturally-based art activities to explore topics related to sexual abuse and exploitation. Many of the staff on the team are grandmothers and survivors of gender-based violence and have lived in Moose Factory for over 20 years, which enables the building of trust and helps survivors to establish supportive connections that are rooted in the strength and resilience of community care.



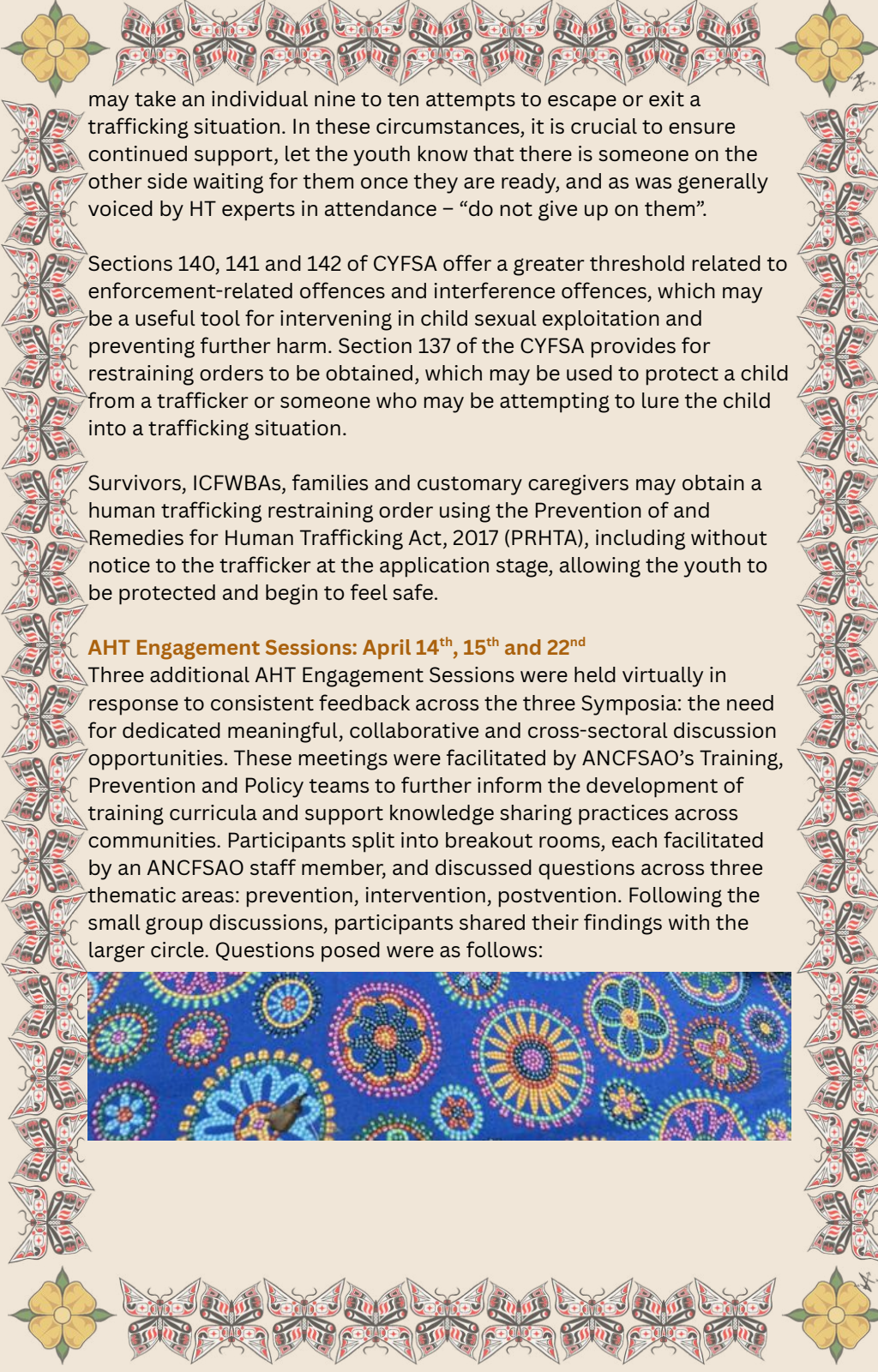
Discussion Groups from the Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia

Discussions were held in small breakout groups, both in person and online, throughout the symposia. Facilitated by ANCFSAO staff, these conversations sought to inform the development of a provincial anti-human trafficking training curriculum. Discussions explored diverse experiences and needs across Ontario's vast geographic areas, including between the North and South, rural and remote areas, urban hubs and across borders. Participants were encouraged to discuss ways to address training needs specific to their communities and demographics and to consider how ANCFSAO trainings could support staff, caregivers and community members where appropriate. Breakout group discussions created fruitful space for participants to collectively explore interdisciplinary interventions and training approaches to address human trafficking, gender-based violence and exploitation.

Policy Takeaways

Presenters throughout the symposia mentioned legislation that would be pertinent to improve and expand upon. Section 74 (1.1) of the CYFSA defines child sex trafficking. CYFSA Section 74 (2) sets out how a "child is in need of protection" in relation to child sex trafficking. Section 77.1 of the CYFSA allows a worker or peace officer to take a child aged 16 or 17 to a different location for up to 12-hours if there is reason to believe that they are being trafficked. This allows workers to speak to children and youth in a neutral area, such as a coffee shop, to build trust and understand their situation. While a 12-hour hold may not be sufficient time to build a strong enough relationship for the youth to trust the worker, it is important for workers to know that they can hold the youth for additional 12 hours cycles if they believe the youth remains at a risk of harm. It is also important to remember that it





may take an individual nine to ten attempts to escape or exit a trafficking situation. In these circumstances, it is crucial to ensure continued support, let the youth know that there is someone on the other side waiting for them once they are ready, and as was generally voiced by HT experts in attendance – “do not give up on them”.

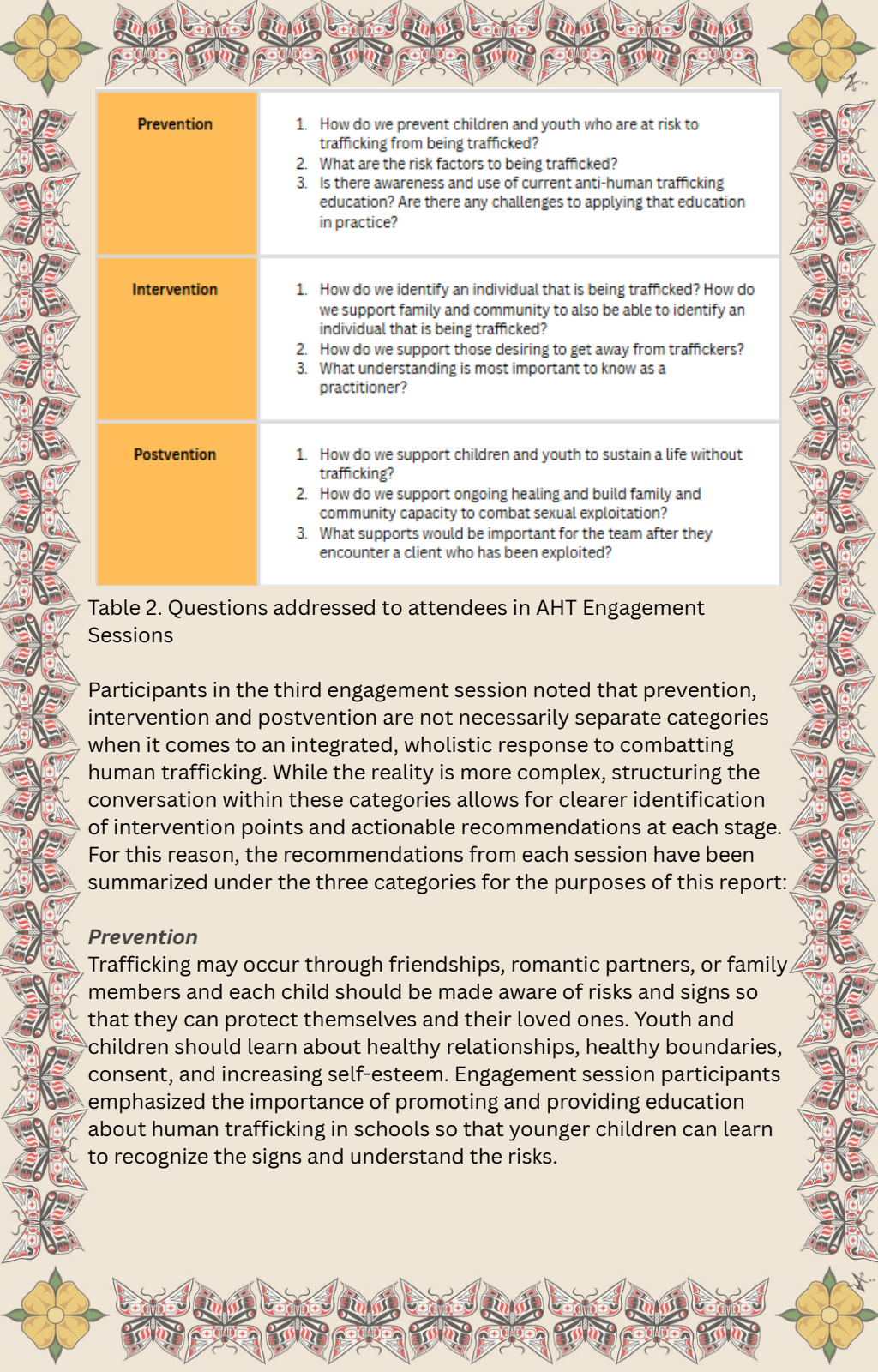
Sections 140, 141 and 142 of CYFSA offer a greater threshold related to enforcement-related offences and interference offences, which may be a useful tool for intervening in child sexual exploitation and preventing further harm. Section 137 of the CYFSA provides for restraining orders to be obtained, which may be used to protect a child from a trafficker or someone who may be attempting to lure the child into a trafficking situation.

Survivors, ICFWBAs, families and customary caregivers may obtain a human trafficking restraining order using the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act, 2017 (PRHTA), including without notice to the trafficker at the application stage, allowing the youth to be protected and begin to feel safe.

AHT Engagement Sessions: April 14th, 15th and 22nd

Three additional AHT Engagement Sessions were held virtually in response to consistent feedback across the three Symposia: the need for dedicated meaningful, collaborative and cross-sectoral discussion opportunities. These meetings were facilitated by ANCFSAO’s Training, Prevention and Policy teams to further inform the development of training curricula and support knowledge sharing practices across communities. Participants split into breakout rooms, each facilitated by an ANCFSAO staff member, and discussed questions across three thematic areas: prevention, intervention, postvention. Following the small group discussions, participants shared their findings with the larger circle. Questions posed were as follows:





Prevention	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do we prevent children and youth who are at risk to trafficking from being trafficked?2. What are the risk factors to being trafficked?3. Is there awareness and use of current anti-human trafficking education? Are there any challenges to applying that education in practice?
Intervention	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do we identify an individual that is being trafficked? How do we support family and community to also be able to identify an individual that is being trafficked?2. How do we support those desiring to get away from traffickers?3. What understanding is most important to know as a practitioner?
Postvention	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do we support children and youth to sustain a life without trafficking?2. How do we support ongoing healing and build family and community capacity to combat sexual exploitation?3. What supports would be important for the team after they encounter a client who has been exploited?

Table 2. Questions addressed to attendees in AHT Engagement Sessions

Participants in the third engagement session noted that prevention, intervention and postvention are not necessarily separate categories when it comes to an integrated, wholistic response to combatting human trafficking. While the reality is more complex, structuring the conversation within these categories allows for clearer identification of intervention points and actionable recommendations at each stage. For this reason, the recommendations from each session have been summarized under the three categories for the purposes of this report:

Prevention

Trafficking may occur through friendships, romantic partners, or family members and each child should be made aware of risks and signs so that they can protect themselves and their loved ones. Youth and children should learn about healthy relationships, healthy boundaries, consent, and increasing self-esteem. Engagement session participants emphasized the importance of promoting and providing education about human trafficking in schools so that younger children can learn to recognize the signs and understand the risks.



Parents need education to effectively recognize the signs of human trafficking and to learn safe online engagement practices so that they can best protect their children and youth. Similarly, all caregivers and community members, especially those in a customary care model, should be educated on the signs of human trafficking and available supports they can access if they believe a child or youth is being trafficked. This will also help build and strengthen family and community capacity.

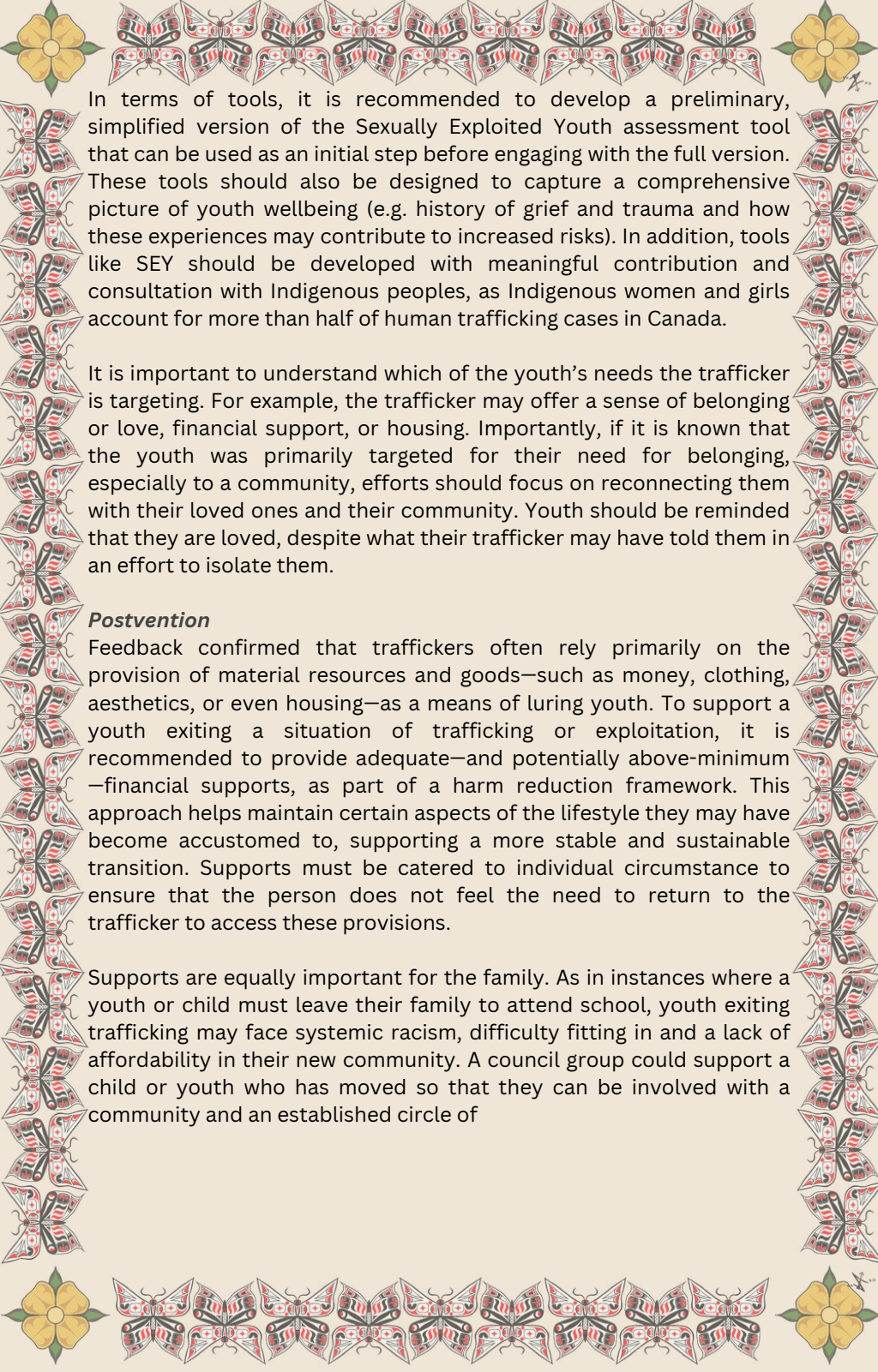
It is equally important for teachers to be educated on the signs of trafficking so that they can protect their students and detect any changes that may reflect a lack of safety. In some cases, traffickers may be the child's own parent, which means that solely targeting parents with prevention efforts is not sufficient. In addition, children may have different relationships of trust with their teachers, who are well-positioned to observe interactions and note changes in their behaviour and academic performance. Education efforts must include comprehensive information on all forms of trafficking and the various ways it can occur.

While child welfare workers might have general understanding of the Child and Youth Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA), further education on policy and legislative responses in child welfare can help them to leverage different sections of the Act to protect vulnerable children and youth. In addition, trainings focused on legislative enhancements may yield suggestions from the field on how to amend or update policy and programs to better meet the needs of youth and children.

Intervention

Situation tables or knowledge circles should be set up in towns and communities to bring together multiple stakeholders in coordinated efforts to locate missing children and youth. This approach enables a streamlined and collaborative response, particularly when youth are being moved across jurisdictions. In addition, these circles can develop and implement a safety plan to support individuals who come to realize they are being trafficked or decide to exit. Knowing there is a safe space to go to and that resources are in place during the exit window can be critical to successfully leaving a trafficking situation.





In terms of tools, it is recommended to develop a preliminary, simplified version of the Sexually Exploited Youth assessment tool that can be used as an initial step before engaging with the full version. These tools should also be designed to capture a comprehensive picture of youth wellbeing (e.g. history of grief and trauma and how these experiences may contribute to increased risks). In addition, tools like SEY should be developed with meaningful contribution and consultation with Indigenous peoples, as Indigenous women and girls account for more than half of human trafficking cases in Canada.

It is important to understand which of the youth's needs the trafficker is targeting. For example, the trafficker may offer a sense of belonging or love, financial support, or housing. Importantly, if it is known that the youth was primarily targeted for their need for belonging, especially to a community, efforts should focus on reconnecting them with their loved ones and their community. Youth should be reminded that they are loved, despite what their trafficker may have told them in an effort to isolate them.

Postvention

Feedback confirmed that traffickers often rely primarily on the provision of material resources and goods—such as money, clothing, aesthetics, or even housing—as a means of luring youth. To support a youth exiting a situation of trafficking or exploitation, it is recommended to provide adequate—and potentially above-minimum—financial supports, as part of a harm reduction framework. This approach helps maintain certain aspects of the lifestyle they may have become accustomed to, supporting a more stable and sustainable transition. Supports must be catered to individual circumstance to ensure that the person does not feel the need to return to the trafficker to access these provisions.

Supports are equally important for the family. As in instances where a youth or child must leave their family to attend school, youth exiting trafficking may face systemic racism, difficulty fitting in and a lack of affordability in their new community. A council group could support a child or youth who has moved so that they can be involved with a community and an established circle of



support. Youth are more vulnerable when they lack a sense of belonging. Workers should continue supporting vulnerable families by offering training and skills to navigate these complex situations, as well as financial assistance, ensuring a collective and wholistic approach to breaking the cycle of trafficking.

It is recommended that training be made mandatory across all human services sectors to ensure everyone can recognize the signs of trafficking and effectively support individuals in exiting or leaving their trafficker. These trainings should be ongoing and continuously updated as trafficking trends evolve, fostering increased awareness and a more integrated approach.

Wraparound services and supports are sorely needed at the agency level. After-hours support for youth and children is essential, as these needs do not end when offices close for the business day. Survivors require immediate access to services upon exiting a trafficking situation to ensure they receive timely support. Workers should be able to provide safety to youth as they exit a trafficking situation and have time and space to develop the relationship and understand what safety means for that individual youth (e.g. housing may equal safety). Remote areas need increased access to services and resources so that children, youth, families, victims and survivors do not have to go far to find prevention, intervention, and postvention supports.

Elders Advisory Council

In May of 2025 ANCFSAO staff presented a summary of the Human Trafficking and Gender-Based Violence prevention project activities to members of its Elders Advisory Council (EAC), comprised of Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Carriers and Cultural Staff from its thirteen member agencies. In addition to the update, ANCFSAO sought the Elders' reflections and feedback. This is summarized at a high level below:

- Trafficking is a colonial construct which did not exist in Indigenous communities prior to arrival of settlers and is a result of systemic traumas. It is critical that trafficking and GBV is addressed via culturally and trauma informed approaches to effectively reconnect Indigenous youth to their families and communities, which are the resilience networks they require to rebuild themselves.





- Many if not most communities do not currently have sufficient awareness and understanding of human trafficking, its signs, how it progresses and those who are involved. Due to this gap in knowledge communities do not have the tools necessary to prevent and intervene. A request was made for ANCFSAO, in collaboration with the Indigenous child and family wellbeing agencies and CAS where appropriate, to deliver localized training to leadership and local staff.
- Due to mistrust of police and justice institutions communities wish to work with Indigenous organizations. There is need to work collaboratively with police services to build relationships of trust.



Recommendations

All presenters at ANCFSAO's Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia shared that we need to build partnerships across sectors to:



Figure 5. Infographic of overarching needs to combat human trafficking

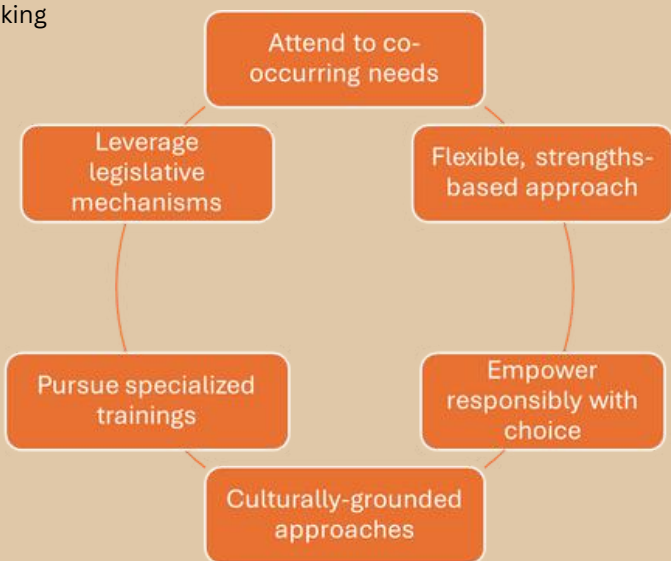


Figure 6. Infographic of recommendations for caregivers and workers



Individuals with lived experience should be integral to decision-making, and all work with survivors must be meaningful, impactful and reciprocal. This work cannot be tokenizing or re-exploitative; survivors must be invested with the capacity to move into leadership roles. The expertise of survivors must influence real change in policies and programs. It is also important to hire staff that represent the community, use the CYFSA updates to support advocacy within community organizations, expand services to address vulnerabilities, and listen to and believe children and families.

Symposia presenters and attendees identified several knowledge, service and program gaps, mainly focusing on prominent themes, which included:

- Lack of tools available for family, friends, service providers and community to know how to respond when they suspect someone is being trafficked, or what to do after they have identified the situation.
- Need for training of child welfare workers and other service providers regarding interpreting legislation, such as Part X of the CYFSA.
- Need for emergency housing for those who have been trafficked. All support should be trauma informed.
- Geographic distance between services in the North undermines supports infrastructure, which overlaps with prevalence of co-occurring experiences including:
 - mental health and addictions,
 - homelessness,
 - child welfare,
 - justice system,
 - violence against women.

In addition, the conflation of trafficking with related issues such as gender-based violence and intimate partner violence may lead to misreporting of cases. Misreporting of human trafficking can hinder the proper allocation of funding, resources and programming for those affected. It is important to acknowledge that gender-based violence can occur in instances of trafficking and conversely, can also occur in the absence of trafficking. It is recommended that anti human-trafficking training includes training on gender-based violence and intimate partner violence to help workers identify cases earlier, taking





into consideration the connections across these issues. An interdisciplinary approach to trafficking may be helpful in exploring misreported cases with law enforcement and other stakeholders.

Individuals, organizations and communities need to know where and how to access resources. While resources may exist, barriers to accessing them and a lack of knowledge regarding their application result in service gaps and increased challenges across all sectors for prevention, intervention and postvention programming. Support infrastructures are insufficient to address co-occurring experiences with exploitation, such as mental health and homelessness.

Despite the pressing need for a wholistic government response to expand prevention programs and provide intervention and postvention supports to survivors, an increasingly competitive funding environment generates service silos that fail to address root and structural causes.

Training Recommendations

Key insights from the symposia, discussion groups and engagement sessions highlight the need to develop a provincial curriculum that brings a wholistic approach to the issue of human trafficking. The curriculum must be grounded in an analysis of the impacts of colonization that make Indigenous people vulnerable to human trafficking. Trainings should be rooted in connection to culture, land, and family, to build strong connections in young people's lives, as isolation plays a key role in human trafficking. Building community capacity promotes the safety of all children to ensure the vulnerabilities traffickers prey upon are identified and addressed through work with community, family, Elders and within themselves. To facilitate an integrated approach to this complex issue, trainings should be co-led with local cross-sectoral organizations, community leaders and survivors.

Key components of a wholistic curriculum should include the following:

- **Harm Reduction Training:** where a youth is self-harming, using drugs, or is in a toxic relationship, caregivers and community members need to be equipped with the skills to divert and set them up with safer alternatives.





- **Anti-racism Training:** trainings that foster understanding of the deep-rooted, intergenerational traumas specific to Indigenous and Black people in Canada and how the colonial legacy impacts ways in which families and caregivers navigate their lives.
- **Building Community Capacity Training:** creating cohesive learning opportunities to build community capacity to identify and support those impacted including parents, caregivers, extended family members, Elders, community, leadership and frontline workers, understanding of risks and skills for the mitigation of harms.
- **Anti-Human Trafficking Training** in the education system: Education workers across the sector need to learn to recognize the signs of human trafficking and gender-based violence and strategies to support young people at risk of trafficking and/or exploitation. In addition, those working within the education system need to be better prepared for conversations with children and youth.
- **Child/Youth Training on Consent and Healthy Relationships:** Children and youth should be offered regular, child-focused and age-appropriate conversations around consent, healthy relationships and friendships. These conversations are crucial to fostering self-awareness of the risks they may face as well as skills to identify and seek help or safely respond to identified concerns.
- **Training for Parents and Caregivers:** Parents and caregivers should be educated on safety related to the use of social media and online platforms. Families should also be trained on how to engage in safe and effective conversations with youth at risk of trafficking.
- **Training for Frontline Workers:** Frontline workers must be equipped to support youth who are vulnerable due to isolation, stemming from their move to the South and urban centres owing to a lack of job supports, housing in remote communities, and for educational opportunities.
- **Training for Men and Boys:** Trainings must address the central role of boys and men in violence prevention efforts, as well as recognizing the need for healing for those who are targets and/or perpetrators of violence or exploitation.



ANCFSAO Priority Recommendations

- **Human trafficking is a complex, multi-faceted issue that requires a coordinated response across various stakeholders.** It is therefore crucial to ensure that anti-human trafficking work does not operate in siloes. It is vital for Indigenous communities, government, law enforcement, education, health care, child protection, social work, transportation and judicial systems to work together. This coordinated and interdisciplinary response, consisting of information sharing between sector partners, will aid in anti-human trafficking efforts.
- **Acknowledging the structural inequities that place individuals at greater risk of being trafficked is critical to ensure that intervention and prevention efforts meet the needs of those individuals.** Focusing on the colonial and systemic roots of this issue and integrating these considerations into programming and training works towards addressing the traumas that exacerbate risk. Examples of systemic issues include socioeconomic conditions of poverty; a lack of belonging and disconnect from one's community and circles of care; placement in the foster care system; intergenerational traumas that result in interrupted parenting skills and disrupted healthy familial relations. Meeting these needs requires not only addressing knowledge/training gaps but also providing material and financial resources to support sustained transitions out of trafficking.
- **Provincial training curriculum must be rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and trauma-informed practice led by Indigenous partners and survivors.** This is crucial to the building of trusting relationships with Indigenous partners, organizations and communities.
- **Insights from the AHT sessions should be used to develop a provincial training curriculum for workers that is accessible to all.** Curriculum development should inform future training delivery across Ontario, co-led with local cross-sectoral organizations, community leaders, and survivors.
- **Anti-human trafficking training should incorporate a stronger focus on gender-based violence.** While trafficking cannot be conflated with gender-based violence, the two issues are closely linked. It is important to equip workers and communities with the knowledge and skill to recognize these distinct but related issues, and to acknowledge that grooming activities and many forms of violence can be precursors to trafficking.





- **It is imperative to increase availability and accessibility of services within Northern, rural and remote communities.**

Conclusion

The Anti-Human Trafficking Symposia and follow up consultations hosted by ANCFSAO provided a platform for education and awareness, networking, relationship-building and resource sharing. The sessions sought to increase discussion around the unique needs of the various communities in Ontario, including geographic and cultural elements required for an effective response to human trafficking, while raising awareness of key legislation and programs in place to address trafficking and survivor experiences. The online discussion platform and chats at tables allowed for participants to discuss improvements to training programs and curriculum, as well as identify needs for training in the context of their own professional expertise. Participants advocated for an interdisciplinary approach involving multiple sectors to address human trafficking in a more effective way. Further work is needed to support the implementation of these recommendations in policy, programs, care and trainings. The voices of people with lived experience must be meaningfully integrated into decisions regarding policy, programs and care.

Next Steps

Based on feedback provided across the AHT symposia and consultations, ANCFSAO has committed to the following initiatives to support its member agencies, communities and partners:

- ANCFSAO will develop Anti-Human Trafficking and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Intervention training modules which will be made available as standalone modules and incorporated into existing training offerings (these include Prevention Training, Indigenous Authorized Worker Training, Customary Care Training, Becoming an Ally Training, Youth in Transition Training). The review and synthesis of the cumulative feedback, along with the writing of content, has begun.
- ANCFSAO will create a shared space where resources and a networking tool will be available to connect those who work with human trafficking, enabling them to share insights, exchange best practices and seek local supports. This has been initiated and is in progress.





3. ANCFSAO will develop a Community of Practice for child welfare, Indigenous child and family wellbeing and interested community partners to meet at regular intervals to share best practices, discuss needs and gaps, and advance collective efforts in HT and GBV prevention.

4. ANCFSAO is actively collaborating with sector partners to identify solutions to some of the identified barriers, including those to early identification of signs of trafficking by provincially mandated child welfare workers and the skill building to turn from circumstantial neglect to robust evaluation of symptoms; system capacity to effectively capture information once identification initiated and inconsistent and often inaccurate coding following identification; review gaps in legislation and propose amendments to strengthen the CYFSA.

5. ANCFSAO will work collaboratively with MCCSS to determine funding availability for the following two fiscal years to develop and deliver localized education and training to agency workers, community members, families and others who come in contact with individuals affected by human trafficking. These efforts aim to strengthen prevention and intervention outcomes for children and youth.



"[The answers are] in our communities, in our stories, in our lived environments and in our blood memory. So we all know, as First Nations Inuit, Métis, urban Indigenous people, what we need. We have it still." - Dr. Janet Smylie, a Cree/Métis physician and Knowledge Keeper.

From "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Volume 1a," page 132



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