

Transcript for Podcast 1

Human Traffickers Targeting Youth with Disabilities: What is that all about?

MARGARET POTKAY: We would like to advise our listeners that this podcast discusses topics that include human trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Though we do not discuss graphic details, listener discretion is advised.

Greetings, and welcome to the Trafficking of Youth with Disabilities Education and Outreach Project Podcast. Thank you for joining us. The purpose of this podcast is to spread awareness about the reality of trafficking of youth with disabilities. We talk about what trafficking is, risk factors for youth with disabilities, and how providers and the disability community can support survivors. This podcast was produced and organized by the International Organization for Adolescents and the National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group. I am your host, Margaret Potkay, project consultant with IOFA.

Thank you for joining us for podcast one of our series titled, Human Traffickers Targeting Youth with Disabilities: What is That All About? Today we are speaking with some of the steering committee members of the National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group, or NHTDWG. They collectively have

addressed issues of disability human trafficking, youth services, and trauma. The goal of this conversation is to discuss and raise awareness of the reality of trafficking of youth with disabilities. We will discuss how disability and trafficking intersect, the founding of NHTDWG, and what is being done to support survivors with disabilities. Today, we're going to be speaking with Jody Haskin and Jae Jin Pak. So please do introduce yourself to our podcast, Jody.

JODY HASKIN: Thank you, Margaret. Thank you for having me. My name is Jody Haskin, and I am the anti-trafficking program manager at the International Organization for Adolescence, or IOFA. And IOFA is a United States-based non-profit organization, but we've been working globally since 1999 to address human trafficking and exploitation of young people. And IOFA works with youth-serving organizations across the country and around the world to identify gaps in services for at-risk youth and to address those gaps through training, technical assistance, coordination, and capacity-building.

MARGARET POTKAY: All right. Thank you. And thank you for being on the podcast today. I would like to start by asking, what is human trafficking?

JODY HASKIN: Well, generally speaking, human trafficking is the exploitation of an individual for the purposes of either labor or sex. And that's at the expense of the victim. Since the year 2000,

we've had, in the US, a federal definition from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, or the TVPA. And the TVPA makes the determination of what constitutes trafficking. And this Act states that a trafficker compels a victim to perform some kind of labor or any sex act through the means of force, fraud, or coercion, and that's in exchange for money or some other items of value, or goods and services.

One important clause within this to note is that all youth under the age of 18 who are involved in commercial sex are considered victims of a crime, no matter what. So that means that force, fraud, and coercion, nor a third party are even necessary to be present for this crime to be considered sex trafficking.

MARGARET POTKAY: And could you tell me a little bit about who are the traffickers, and how do they operate?

JODY HASKIN: Sure. The people who can be a trafficker is surprising to most people. Traffickers can be anybody. And they can be any gender, from any background, and in any profession. Traffickers have been coaches, relatives, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, teachers, clergy.

And traffickers operate by gaining the trust of young people through a form that we call grooming. So they do this by exploiting the needs and the perceived needs of young people. We know that many at-risk youth have many vulnerabilities for

being trafficked, and traffickers take advantage of these vulnerabilities.

Young people might feel that they're out of place or misunderstood. They might not have very many friends, or they lack a positive family structure. They might not have a place to live. They may have been kicked out or run away from their home. Traffickers use this to manipulate young people into doing what they want.

So we understand that traffickers seek out and exploit young people and befriend them, either online or in person. And then what happens is that they work to build the youth's trust in them. The trafficker finds out where the youth might be vulnerable and exploit that vulnerability of the youth.

For example, if a young person doesn't have a family or a stable family structure, or even a positive adult in their life, the trafficker provides that for them. They build that position for them. For runaway homeless youth or someone who is thrown out of their home, the trafficker will provide the young person with a place to stay and a sense of family. They manipulate young people into providing commercial sex or labor for the trafficker's benefit, and they all do this under the guise of someone whom they trust.

Now, in family-based trafficking, there's already a structure of power and control that we see in other forms of trafficking of young people. And here we see that a trafficker is a family member and will offer the young person for sexual exploitation in exchange for something like a place to stay, drugs, or money, or money to buy these things. So we know that built-in, almost, there is either a sense of trust or a sense of power and control.

MARGARET POTKAY: All right. And you did mention-- so you spoke a little bit about the vulnerable and at-risk populations. But could you tell me who can be trafficked?

JODY HASKIN: Sure. Any young person can be trafficked, but we know that traffickers seek out young people who have vulnerabilities to exploit. So even young people who might be online and just need to vent about something, like their parents not understanding them, their friends not understanding them-- a trafficker will be there, and will act like they do care and they do understand. And they will trick the young person into believing that they're someone to be trusted. And this is, again, part of the grooming process. And anyone can be trafficked, but again, it's those who are vulnerable and are at-risk who are vulnerable to trafficking.

MARGARET POTKAY: And that does bring me to my next shift. And I'd like to ask about the specific area of trafficking of youth with disabilities. What can you tell us about youth with disabilities

being at greater risk of being targeted by traffickers? We're going to ask Jae Jin for this part of the podcast. Can you please introduce yourself, Jae Jin?

JAE JIN PAK: Sure. Thank you, Margaret. Hi. My name is Jae Jin Pak. I am a person who identifies as a person with a disability raising awareness and prevention of human trafficking, and specifically doing some work around the intersection of disability and human trafficking.

MARGARET POTKAY: OK. And what can you tell us about youth with disabilities being at greater risk of being targeted by traffickers?

JAE JIN PAK: In terms of risk factors for youth with disabilities for human trafficking, things include everything from their disability to societal attitudes around disability and their accommodation needs. So for one, their disabilities. A youth with physical impairments or mobility impairments, and they need to use a walker or wheelchair, for other youth with disabilities that need help with transportation or if they have a communication disorder or other types of chronic health condition where they need more accommodations or assistance to access services to go out to meet people to socialize, to go to school, by nature of their need, traffickers, as Jodie had mentioned, are good at exploiting a person's needs. And youth with disabilities, as much as they want-- as much as their disability has unique accommodation

needs, they still want to make friends, they still want to get out, and they still want to be part of the world. And a trafficker can approach a youth with a disability and say, well, I can help you get services, or the resources to help you get out more.

And that also ties in to societal attitudes. Those of us living with disabilities are living in a world where society still has a lot of negative connotations or a lot of stigma around disability. People with disabilities and youth with disabilities, especially, have received messages that they're not normal. Because of their disability, they're different. Their difference is a bad thing. They don't fit in. They're bullied, they're teased, they're ostracized. And all of that adds to the feeling of being distant, of being separate.

And I can remember myself as being-- when I was a young elementary school and high school kid, wanting to have friends and be part of community, but being bullied and things, and feeling very different and separate. And traffickers will tap into that and become friendly, and say, oh, no one understands you. I understand you. I know that you're smart, that you're capable. I can help you. You know, I'll hang out with you.

And they'll befriend that person. And then as they get to know them and they put on this facade of being friendly and slowly, over time, through these kind of friendly acts, will build up the youth with disability's trust. And so the youth with disability will

start to see the trafficker as somebody they can trust and feel comfortable with. And as the trafficker senses that, they will slowly find ways of maneuvering, manipulating the youth away from family and other support systems to make the youth feel like the trafficker's the only support system, and will use that to slowly introduce them into the trafficking situation, whether that's sex trafficking or labor trafficking, as Jody mentioned earlier.

MARGARET POTKAY: So thank you. And thank you for sharing your some of your personal experience in that way. You mentioned societal attitudes. And of course, our systems do stem from those societal attitudes. So I'd like to ask where have systems failed youth with disabilities, which may have put them at greater risk of being targeted by traffickers?

JAE JIN PAK: That's a that's a good question, and it's a complicated question. Although in the US, both on a state level and especially on the federal level with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, or the ADA, there is a lot of legislation, a lot of systems, that has granted a lot of support for the disabled community in terms of fighting discrimination and access. Having said all that, because of the ongoing stigma and negative expectations, in practice, it's still very hard or very difficult for youth to engage in systems.

I've interacted with a lot of youth, and a lot of my colleagues in the disability community have reminisced about, yes, I can go to

public school or other schools, and I can access other public facilities or whatnot. But more often than not, when we've interacted with teachers, prospective employers, you know, youth camp programs, we run into situations where we've been told, oh, yeah, it's great that you're interested, but maybe our facility isn't as accessible as we would like it. There are parts of our building, parts of our materials that aren't available in braille or large print, or maybe we don't have as many ramps, or our restrooms or other parts of our facility may not be as wide enough to fit your chair or your walker.

And then there are also youth with developmental disabilities, who by nature of their developmental disability, they may not have any visible signs of being disabled, but because their disability is such that it takes them longer to process information or to communicate back or to reply, you know, that creates-- other kids and adults and people may still see them as not as smart, or not as quick. And organizations, because they're not that familiar, don't have the training, or may not have the policies in place to kind of be as welcoming or accommodating to youth with those types of accommodation or disability needs.

MARGARET POTKAY: Right. All right. Well, thank you. And I'd like us to talk a little bit about what is currently being done to raise awareness on this issue, and to enhance supports for survivors of trafficking with disabilities. Could you tell me a little bit about the

National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group? And how did it get started?

JODY HASKIN: Yes. The National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group got started when IOFA and some other human trafficking organizations and disability advocacy organizations across the country collectively started to notice that there were gaps in services when it came to human trafficking of persons with disabilities. Specifically, IOFA's focus was on youth with disabilities, who just didn't seem to be coming up in data and being served, from what we've seen in some of our research. But we know that anecdotally, that young people who have disabilities have been trafficked.

So we, along with some of these other organizations, including the National Disability Rights Network, the HT Legal Center in Washington, DC, and IOFA, worked to put together the Working Group and provided a way for experts from all around the country to come together to tackle this intersection. So the Working Group's mission is to prevent the trafficking of individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals and to advance the health and well-being of trafficking survivors with disabilities and Deaf survivors of trafficking through various forms. So we look at research, policy analysis, technical assistance, training, and other focused areas with, specifically, youth.

MARGARET POTKAY: The data is what drew you to understand that in anti-trafficking work, there was a lack of awareness about the intersection of human trafficking in youth with disabilities. Is that right? Is that what drew you to see that gap?

JODY HASKIN: More that there was a lack of data. We knew anecdotally that it was happening, but we were not seeing it in any of the data that was coming up. So we were looking for data, but we found that it just wasn't there.

MARGARET POTKAY: Right, right. And now, what services and resources are available for survivors with disabilities from anti-trafficking providers? What has been created from this?

JODY HASKIN: Well, now, through the work that we've been doing here, we have created several webinars. We've worked on several trainings. We have these podcasts that you've been hosting. We have public service announcements and brochures, fact sheets. And we've been working together to provide or to look at different things like needs assessments within different areas.

We know that services for young people who have experienced trafficking requires comprehensive services. And for those young people who also have a disability, there are even additional services that young people are eligible for. And we want to make sure that every young person has all of the services to surround

them that they need. So the first part that we're doing in different parts of the country and collectively is looking at the needs and determining what kind of services are available to young people who have experience trafficking with disabilities.

MARGARET POTKAY: It sounds like amazing, amazing work that has been done through this working group. It sounds like a lot of progress has been made. So kudos to the group and the work that has been done. Sounds like an amazing network. And could you tell me a little bit about what is needed in terms of resources to help these anti-trafficking providers to support and respond to these needs of survivors with disabilities?

JODY HASKIN: Well, first of all, we really look at cross-training for both the human trafficking community and the disability community, because we understand that trauma-informed services are necessary across the board. We want to make sure that for those experts and service providers working in human trafficking services, that there are resources available to them and in their communities. We know that we work in silos in many services across various communities. And just to be able to connect these services together will help us to provide more of a comprehensive service care for young people. And just that connection part can be the toughest.

So by bringing everybody together through this working group, we've been connecting people more locally and regionally so that

people can really start to determine what services will be best for the young people that they're serving. And adults, in this case. The Working Group works for the benefit of both adults and youth.

MARGARET POTKAY: Wonderful. Wonderful. Well, thank you. Thank you for the amazing work and for being part of part of the podcast to start doing that awareness-spreading and progress. And you did share a little bit about what currently exists to serve survivors of trafficking with disabilities, what some of the gaps and barriers there are, what is needed. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about what, if any, challenges there are to close these gaps, remove the barriers, and help providers best respond to and meet the needs of these survivors?

JODY HASKIN: Always, it's funding. We know that we need more funding to provide more services. And I think that Jae Jin will agree that there are a lot of necessary services out there for young people with disabilities. And we also know that there's a lot of need for services for young people who have experienced trafficking. And one of those biggest needs is housing, across the board, for everybody. And we've been really determined to make sure that there is more housing for young people who've been trafficked and more appropriate housing for young people with disabilities as well.

JAE JIN PAK: And if I can kind of add to that, as Jody said, it is important for funding. And one of the things that I think it's really important to advocate for, and one suggestion and request that I actually would like to make to those funders who may be listening, is to create opportunities for grants and other funding opportunities to support non-direct services to help organizations who serve human trafficking survivors with housing or employment, to include funding to support them, to fund accommodations for youth and adults with disabilities. So if a youth with disability who's being trafficked contacts a anti-trafficking provider for counseling, for advocacy, for housing, for employment, that that organization, that anti-trafficking provider, also has a funding to provide accommodations that can help them with adapting their materials into different-- into large print, braille, audio, hire an ASL interpreter-- if a youth with disability comes into their shelter, that the organization has funding or the resources to modify their shelter to be accessible to different disability needs.

And I would encourage disability providers, as well as anti-trafficking providers, to start talking with each other and to collaborating on and finding ways of working together on funding requests, on cross-training each other, as Jody mentioned earlier. You know, learning from each other's expertise on what is important to be trauma-informed as a disability service provider. What is important for me, as a anti-trafficking provider, is to

understand what it does it mean for my program to be disability-friendly or welcoming? Aside from the physical aspects of my facility, you know, in terms of attitudes, policy, protocols-- all of that, in terms of kind of making my internal culture more welcoming to someone who has a disability.

MARGARET POTKAY: Yeah. That's wonderful. Wonderful addition. And it will take a lot of collaboration. And hopefully, this podcast and this work can raise the awareness and hopefully get people to be more aware of these issues.

JAE JIN PAK: Oh, I have one other thing.

MARGARET POTKAY: Mm-hmm?

JAE JIN PAK: One other thing. I think another important ask, I think, in addition to funding, is-- well, it's funding for research and data collections and studies, because as Jody mentioned earlier, one of the things that we discovered as the Working Group came together is there is a lack of research that specifically looks at this intersection of human trafficking and survivors with disability. So there is opportunities for funders who fund different types of qualitative and quantitative research to fund studies to look at what a survivor with disability needs for anti-trafficking support and services.

MARGARET POTKAY: Right. And if someone is listening, could you tell us where people can go for more information? And I'd also like to open the question to both of you, please, if there's anything else that you'd like to discuss in closing the podcast.

JODY HASKIN: All right. First of all, I would like to say thank you for allowing this platform for us to bring this issue to light. We know that it's going to be a long road. There are a lot of things that we have in front of us, just in terms of needs assessment. We have an idea of what we think we need, but I think we're going to discover, once we really start breaking down silos and working together, that there's a lot that needs to be done. And I think starting with having a lot of trauma-informed services across the board in all organizations who serve young people is going to be extremely helpful, whether you're serving a young person who's experienced trafficking, whether you're serving a young person with a disability, or a young person with a disability who's been trafficked.

And I would also like to advise anybody who's interested in becoming a part of the Working Group to visit www.iofa.org. And there, you can find more information about applying to be a part of the Working Group. It is free. We welcome anybody who is very interested and committed to furthering and advancing the work within this intersection, and who really care about young people and adults who have a disability, or who experience

trafficking. So thank you so much, Margaret. I appreciate your time.

MARGARET POTKAY: Of course. We appreciate you both. Thank you for joining us on the podcast today. I appreciate your time and the work that you and the Working Group and IOFA has been committed to in making progress in our society. Thank you.

JODY HASKIN: Thank you.

JAE JIN PAK: Thank you very much.

MARGARET POTKAY: Thank you for listening to our podcast. If you have any questions and would like to contact us, please email us at info@iofa.org. You can learn more about IOFA and contact us at our website, www.iofa.org. You can learn more about the National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group and HTDWDG at [http://iofa.org/national trafficking disabilities working group](http://iofa.org/national-trafficking-disabilities-working-group) and find additional resources on the intersection of human trafficking and youth with disabilities. If you are concerned that someone you care about is at risk of or being trafficked, you can get help at the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, text 233733 or live-chat with an advocate at their website, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org>.

This project was produced by the International Organization for Adolescents, under award number 2016XVGXK015, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this project are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the US Department of Justice. Thank you to our partners, National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group and the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims.