



C/O BROWNBACK, MASON & ASSOCIATES  
1702 WEST WALNUT STREET  
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 18104  
E-MAIL: INFO@THEVAST.ORG  
WEB: THEVAST.ORG

# BEST VAST PRACTICES



The Villanova Law Institute to Address  
Commercial Sexual Exploitation

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## Introduction

In May 2011, co-founders Heather Evans and Beck Sullivan formed the Valley Against Sex Trafficking, VAST, after realizing the need for a human trafficking coalition to network and communicate among other organizations, victims' service providers, law enforcement, and community members. VAST is a collaborative effort aimed at uniting and empowering individuals to eradicate sex trafficking and exploitation within the Lehigh Valley. Until 2016, VAST has been wholly volunteer-run and utilizes a strategic prevention plan focused on eliminating human trafficking. The prevention plan involves three approaches: awareness, action, and aftercare efforts.

The Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation ("CSE Institute") educates and provides technical assistance to those who respond to commercial sexual exploitation in Pennsylvania by promoting a victim-centered and collaborative approach. The CSE Institute worked with VAST to capture and put together this Best Practices Guide.

## Purpose

This Best Practices Guide identifies a series of guidelines and protocols utilized by VAST for developing positive working relationships with other victims' service organizations and law enforcement in order to establish a successful collaborative effort and best serve sex trafficking survivors. This Best Practices Guide is intended to serve as an example for organizations wishing to establish a similar collaborative effort to eradicate human trafficking. Part I of this Guide provides information and guidelines on establishing effective collaboration. Part II continues by setting forth prevention guidelines, using VAST's strategic prevention plan. Part III includes steps for providing effective victims' services.

## I. START UP/COLLABORATION:

### Why Utilize a Collaborative Effort?

- Collaboration provides a complete cross-systems support network.
- Collaboration connects already established services, response teams, and protocols.
- Collaboration effectively addresses a wide range of victims' needs.

### Who to Engage in Collaboration?

- Other Anti-Human Trafficking Organizations (local, regional, statewide)
- Social Service Organizations
- Victims' Service Providers
- Law Enforcement
- County Children and Youth Services
- Faith-Based Communities
- Government Officials and Policymakers
- Community Members

### How to Start a Collaborative Effort?

- Make introductions and connections with other organizations, victims' service providers, law enforcement, county services, faith-based communities, and community members through telephone calls, emails, and at networking events and educational opportunities.
- **Practice Tip: Reach out purposefully and build a networking relationship with others in the anti-trafficking field.**
- **Practice Tip: Reach out purposefully and build a networking relationship with any key individuals or entities that will interact with identification, prosecution, or restoration of human trafficking victims and human traffickers.**
- Engagement with Law Enforcement:
  - Locate the "champions" of law enforcement, including those with personal connections and those who are focused on investigating human trafficking, prostitution, and related crimes.
  - Offer support to law enforcement by having a database of key resources. When law enforcement encounters a victim of human trafficking or a woman desiring to leave the commercial sex industry, law enforcement will have available resources to provide necessary referrals.
  - Supply business cards with the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline number and organization contact information for law enforcement officers to hand directly to victims, when appropriate.
  - Provide emergency care bags to law enforcement (created by volunteers or local community groups, which include personal hygiene items, nonperishable food items, basic necessities) to give to victims they encounter.
  - Offer to law enforcement to accompany or be on standby to assist with victim engagement during prostitution stings.

- Start an email database to maintain communication and connections with other organizations and groups in the community.
- Conduct a Community Assessment in order to gather information about the current resources in the area. Assessment questions should include identifying current awareness level of prevalence of human trafficking in the region, training and understanding of human trafficking within that organization, and services provided by that organization. The Community Assessment also provides the opportunity to introduce them to your organization and its mission, offering additional information, meetings, or presentations to their organization.
- Create a shared database of the resources in the area.
- Host Community Meetings, every other month or as necessary for your organization, in order to connect the organizations in the area.
- Recruit volunteers to provide care packages, rides, job opportunities, counseling services, mentorship, court accompaniment, and other services.

## Recruiting Volunteers

- Identify ways in which volunteers can contribute (i.e. creating care packages, providing rides to victims, offering job opportunities, providing counseling services, acting as a mentor/caregiver, accompanying victims to court, etc.).
- Consistently Address volunteer opportunities at Community Meetings.
- Provide **tangible** ways that volunteers can be involved and provide contact information for these opportunities. Volunteers may respond more readily to specific, time-limited tasks or involvement versus an ongoing role.
- Include a “Volunteer Opportunities” section on the website that is visible and interactive.
- Provide a volunteer application to interested individuals.
- Designate a Volunteer Coordinator who can process volunteer application, contact personal references, and meet with the individual to discuss level of interest, skills, passions, and specific volunteer needs within the coalition.

## Fundraising

- The organization and volunteers can fundraise at community events (i.e. hot dog sale at a local baseball game, yard sales, etc.).
- Solicit grant matching from local businesses.
- Seek donations from community members.
- Schedule fundraising events or empower volunteers or partnering organizations to plan fundraising events specifically for the organization (i.e. benefit concert, dinner, Fine Arts event, etc.).
- Ask for specific items to be donated (phone, bus tickets, clothes, etc.).

## II. STRATEGIC PREVENTION PLAN:

### Establishing a Strategic Prevention Plan

- Develop a plan to meet your prevention goals, including awareness, action, aftercare etc.
- Practice Tip: “Don’t reinvent the wheel.” Utilize strategic plans/logic models that are effective in other communities.
- Keep the plan simple and easy to understand.

### Awareness

#### The Awareness Model: Goals

- Educate the community, service providers, and organizations on issues of human trafficking.
- Train the public on the connection between human trafficking, demand for commercial sex, and resulting trauma.
- Provide resources and social support for the public to plan human trafficking awareness events and educational opportunities.

#### Implementing the Awareness Model

- Host Community Meetings, and include an educational piece at each meeting.
- Participate in awareness events and educational opportunities in the community. For example, set up a booth at a baseball game and hand out literature about the organization and human trafficking generally.
- When providing educational information, tailor the information to the specific audience (i.e., if the meeting is for attorneys, provide information about the law).
- At each educational event, provide information about human trafficking. This may include: an overview of trafficking, the psychological impact of trauma, indicators/red flags of trafficking, how to respond to trafficking, needs of victims, resources available etc. It is valuable to address misconception of human trafficking, misconceptions of prostitution, any local examples or statistics, and ways the specific audience can respond and take action. This is also the opportunity to promote the mission and activity of your organization.
- Utilize social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to raise Awareness.
- Examples of Opportunities to Raise Awareness:
  - Host film screenings for the community (i.e. Sex and Money, Nefarious, etc.)
  - Create a blog on the organization’s website
  - Hand out literature in the community
  - Provide folders for professionals in the community with an introductory letter about the organization, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline information, articles, and trafficking indicator cards
  - Post the NHTRC hotline information

- Organize a Hotel Awareness Campaign, to provide hotel employees with specific indicators to look out for in hotels
- Provide trainings to schools, social service providers, law enforcement, etc.
- Work with organizations such as Arise! (Artists Stand Against Sex Trafficking), which uses music and art to raise awareness about human trafficking

## Action

### The Action Model: Goals

- Reduce the demand for commercial sex in the local sex industry.
- Participate in trafficking response protocol by providing stabilization and support resources for victims.
- Develop a coordinated, inter-agency system for trafficking victims through coalition initiative.
- Challenge standards of practice in the community through legislative and community advocacy related to care of trafficking victims and systems of society that fuel trafficking.

### Implementing the Action Model

- Provide presentations on the demand for commercial sex.
- Establish an educational program/"John School" for men who are caught purchasing sex to inform them about trauma.
- Create a mentor-type relationship with at-risk youth.
- Provide community members with current developments in the law and contact information to engage in legislative advocacy.
- Create clothing packets/emergency care bags to provide support for and make connections with victims.
- Create or, if already in place, participate in response protocol teams to develop uniform procedures for the community.
- Collaborate with law enforcement and provide support for their anti-trafficking efforts.

## Aftercare

### The Aftercare Model: Goals

- Empower individuals who are vulnerable to trafficking victimization or re-victimization.
- Serve victims by providing holistic wellness, community connectedness, and resource referral to reintegrate into the broader community.
- Conduct outreach through street, prison, and community engagement of individuals who are victims or vulnerable to trafficking victimization.

### Implementing the Aftercare Model

- Conduct a long-term needs assessment.

- Continue to support the victim throughout the legal process.
- Serve as a resource to the prosecution by stabilizing the victim for successful witness testimony.
- Provide short-term and long-term resources, as needed and requested by the victims
- Utilize victim-specific action steps.
- Maintain case management.
- Provide financial assistance, job training, employment assistance, where possible.
- Offer a support network that fosters independence and life skills to reintegrate victims into the community.
- When gaps in services are identified, develop needed resources within the community.

### III. VICTIMS' SERVICES:

#### Getting Referrals

- Publish contact information with the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline number and information.
- Contact local law enforcement and explain purpose of your organization.
- Provide trainings within the community.
- Create a helpline for your organization.

#### Post-Referral Action Steps

- Develop separate plans for emergency and non-emergency victim referrals.
- Assess the situation, and determine the goals of the victim.
- If the victim is ready for assistance, conduct a Needs Assessment (either over the phone or in person)
  - Collect identifying/background information and the victim's current situation
  - Determine the victim's needs, strengths, goals, requested services, etc.
  - Needs to Assess: victim advocate, childcare, employment, job training, case management, counseling, social service coordination services, legal services, housing/shelter, clothing, food, substance abuse treatment, financial counseling, financial assistance, life skills, repatriation, etc.
- Based on the victim's responses, refer the victim to services they need and connect the victim to resources in the community.
- Assign a case manager/mentor to oversee the process and maintain contact with the victim.
- Be aware that sometimes the victim is not ready to seek help and the only thing to do is serve as a stable and consistent person in the victim's life.
- Maintain regular contact with the victims, keeping in mind that "regular contact" may mean different things to different victims.
- Remember that every case is different and it is important to individually tailor services as needed.

#### Conclusion

VAST is a collaborative effort aimed at uniting and empowering individuals to eradicate sex trafficking and exploitation within the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania. It is our hope that the Best Practices Guide serves as a model for others seeking to establish a multidisciplinary coalition.

As stated above, the CSE Institute worked with VAST to capture these Best Practices. The CSE Institute is available for technical assistance, training, etc. with respect to human trafficking.



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COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION