

COUNSELING AND SOCIAL WORK

Who You Are Matters: Combating Trafficking Every Day

Springfield Family Services is a nonprofit serving familial and behavioral health needs. Their staff includes social workers and counselors with varying expertise. Professionals at Springfield Family Services combat human trafficking and wrap around vulnerable populations in their everyday case work and job duties.

Deanna is an LPC who specializes in PTSD, complex trauma, and familial violence. She often works with women who have suffered years of abuse, trauma, or neglect. With the understanding that many women in trafficking Aftercare programs need intensive and ongoing therapeutic services, Deanna decided to offer three hours of her time each week free of charge to the clients at her community's Aftercare home. Utilizing the skills she has gained, Deanna helps her colleagues understand the connections between vulnerability, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and human trafficking.

Carey is an LMSW who is passionate about macro social work in her community. Carey utilizes her role to mobilize others around engaging the issue of human trafficking. She serves as a liaison between nonprofits that serve vulnerable populations in her community (such as domestic violence shelters, foster care agencies, group homes, homeless shelters, etc.) and the local human trafficking task force/coalition. She connects the tangible, service, and financial needs of service providers in her community to those who want to help. Additionally, Carey works to ensure coalition efforts are culturally appropriate, survivor-focused, trauma informed, and empowering.

Keiko is a BSW who has an active caseload of families. Keiko educates her youth and families on many topics regarding safety and empowerment. She discusses internet safety, safe and unsafe touch, boundary setting, self-advocacy and other crucial skills to her youth. She also assists families in creating their family rules regarding safety, internet use, and more. One of the goals Keiko asks every individual on her caseload to set is to identify three safe people they can turn to in a crisis. Additionally, Keiko keeps her eyes and ears open on her commutes and during each of her home and school visits to identify any suspicious activity.

Miles is a LMFT who specializes in working with families going through divorce. Miles sees families on a weekly basis to help them through the transition. One of his primary objectives is to ensure that the children of the family do not become withdrawn or blame themselves for the separation. Miles works with parents and children to be intentional about connection so that youth do not reach out to unsafe people for affirmation and connection or fall prey to a person who would harm them.

William is an addiction counselor who mostly sees court mandated clients. Recently, William saw a female client on her third substance abuse charge. By utilizing a client centered approach, he was able to discover that his client's drug use was directly related to being trafficked for sex in their community. With the client's consent, the client and William were able to share information with the judge in her case and receive services as a victim instead of only as a perpetrator of a drug crime.

Counselors and social workers at Springfield Family Services did not have to create a new therapy group or start a new program. They simply enhanced what they do to serve vulnerable populations every day.

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Counselors and social workers see perhaps the most vulnerable clients on a regular basis. Impoverished families, children and youth in foster care, individuals who have suffered abuse or neglect, and individuals who have been displaced or impacted by natural disasters or political unrest dominate caseloads. Understanding the connections between these vulnerabilities and human trafficking is essential in order to identify human trafficking and to protect and resource vulnerable populations to prevent them from ever being harmed.

As a professional, you can make a big difference with simple additions to what you are already doing every day! Consider the following:

- Learn the signs of sex and labor trafficking. Know what to look for to identify human trafficking of women, men, girls, and boys in your caseloads and in your community.
- Program the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888) into your mobile device, post free flyers with the contact information in your offices and include a link to www.humantraffickinghotline.org on your social media pages and website so that you and your clients can quickly report suspicious activity or get help. Keep free printable cards on hand to share during site visits.
- Explore publications by the APA, NASW, AAMFT, NAADAC, and other professional organizations about how to work specifically with human trafficking victims and how to uncover vulnerabilities.
- Coordinate with other service providers in your community to discuss what needs and challenges vulnerable populations in your area face. Consider mapping the efforts to identify where there are adequate services and where there are gaps in services.
- Establish a protocol for what happens when human trafficking is suspected. Ask local law enforcement or your community's anti-trafficking Task Force where to begin and consult with supervisors about applicable ethical dilemmas.
- Offer pro bono services to Restoration programs as part of your community services.
- Seek out continuing education courses that address the issue of human trafficking and how it intersects with your field of practice.
- Understand the vocabulary of how victims talk about their abuse. Be prepared to ask clarifying questions and to discover what type of victimization a person experienced.

When we engage together, miracles happen. Eradicating human trafficking will not be an easy task, but the steps to engaging the fight are simple. For more information about combating human trafficking and protecting vulnerable populations as a business, individual, or organization, visit www.engagetogether.com.