



Network News

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32 Member Programs Receive Funding To Improve Services for Human Trafficking Survivors

Thirty-two member programs are improving their services for human trafficking survivors thanks to a \$1.8 million grant ODVN received from the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Office of Criminal Justice Services division.

The new funding allows the programs to be more intentional about serving human trafficking survivors and improve their ability to identify them. Identification of human trafficking survivors continues to be challenging because of a lack of awareness and misinformation, according to Jasmine Myers, Program Support Manager for ODVN's Human Trafficking Project. Myers joined the ODVN staff in April.

"Domestic violence programs have been serving human trafficking survivors from the very beginning without being aware that they were serving human trafficking survivors," Myers said.

Expectations for the sub-grantees include attending human trafficking trainings, receiving training and technical assistance from ODVN's Substance Use and Mental Health Program Director, attending local anti-human trafficking coalition meetings, and collaborating with other resources in their region that provide services to survivors. ODVN will assist participating programs with implementing a screening tool and will review the Ohio Attorney General's Standards of Service for Trafficked Persons.

"Most people think about human trafficking the way it's portrayed in movies or on television with the kidnapping narrative involving a child that is kidnapped and sent to another country. People also think about the 'scary white van' or 'zip ties on the car' inferring that 'stranger danger' is what you should be concerned about. In reality, the kidnapping narrative only happens about 3% of the time in the United States," Myers said.

Traffickers are more likely to be someone the person knows, and recent studies have shown that up to 44% of survivors were trafficked by a close family member. Familial trafficking is when a family member, related by blood or legal relationship, facilitates access to an individual in exchange for something of value. The average age of entry to human trafficking is 12 to 14, but, with familial trafficking, Myers said, the age is much lower, about three to five years old.

The media paints a very specific image of trafficking that most survivors do not experience. As a result, survivors don't have the language to describe their situations, and many don't even know that victimization is occurring, Myers said. The grooming tactics used by traffickers normalize the abuse and exploitation to the point that many survivors report believing this is just how the world operates. In other words, she said, exploitation becomes such a normal part of the survivors' day, they don't know they are a crime victim.

Myers was a survivor of familial trafficking, both sex and labor trafficking, between the ages of 5 and 17. "Exploitation was all that I knew, and I did not identify as a survivor until I was 25 due to the misinformation surrounding trafficking and the normalization. I used a lot of other words to describe my trafficking experience including childhood sexual assault, domestic violence, abuse and 'just a bad life.'"

ODVN's grant was part of more than \$9 million Gov. Mike DeWine included in the FY 2024-25 state budget for anti-human trafficking efforts.

View the list of [participating ODVN programs](#).