

## Disrupt the Status Quo this Human Trafficking Awareness Month: No more anti-trafficking trainings that perpetuate systems of oppression

*Nat Paul provided this original piece for publication by organizations that work on Human Trafficking training and awareness campaigns. Nat Paul's bio is included at the end.*

By Nat Paul

As many organizations are starting to share promotional materials for the Human Trafficking Awareness Month campaigns, I would like to challenge organizations to maintain ethical integrity with how they provide these initiatives. I see more and more Labor Trafficking pieces of training provided by individuals that have experienced Sex Trafficking. With awareness around the paradigms of intersectional oppression like racism within the Human Trafficking campaigns, I would challenge organizations to not accept just any training on Labor Trafficking but a program informed by individuals who have experienced Labor Trafficking.

Many individuals experiencing Labor Trafficking are migrants, BIPOC, and other marginalized entities. It is merely perpetuating the systems of oppression when we take meaningful opportunities to train on Labor Trafficking away from the very communities impacted by Labor Trafficking. As we continue to confront systemic oppression, it is of utmost importance that we maintain integrity in how we continue to perpetuate those systems and therefore work to ensure that they no longer permeate the atmosphere of anti-trafficking initiatives.

Every training given without engaging an impacted person only perpetuates the myths, the stigmas, and the assumptions that a privileged person wields over the actual communities impacted by the blight of Human Trafficking. It has taken over a decade even to incorporate Labor Trafficking Awareness initiatives into pieces of training—it cannot be acceptable to take those opportunities away from the very individuals that have experienced it.

We can and must do better with engaging with impacted communities to overcome the reliance on “professionals” that are predominantly white cisgender females within this “movement.” As well-meaning as the awareness campaigns are, they continue to reflect the opinions of individuals that have not experienced the situations they are training on. They continue to exclude impacted communities. They continue to perpetuate myths. They continue to rely on the “professional” assumptions of what justice looks like to individuals impacted by systemic oppression and Human Trafficking.

Before you sign up for an awareness campaign this coming January, I challenge you to ask if the individuals creating and training are individuals that have experienced the situations being discussed. For example, suppose another white woman works in the field discussing experiences of a Latinx Gay Man—that is no longer an adequate training to take. Suppose it is a domestic woman that has experienced Sex Trafficking discussing the nuances of International Labor Trafficking schemes—that is no longer acceptable. These funding opportunities and financial incentives MUST go to those impacted by Human Trafficking to discuss their narratives and needs. We cannot tolerate others speaking over the individuals they proclaim an interest in helping.

Nat Paul is transgender-identified. She has worked with the Office for Victims of Crime's 2016 Survivor Forum and participated in the SOAR (Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond to Human Trafficking) Technical Working Group under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Ms. Paul has provided Subject Matter Expert input for video awareness campaigns for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's blue campaign, as well as input for the Look Beneath the Surface HHS awareness campaign.

**Accomplishments and Highlights:**

Ms. Paul, the former Policy Chair of the National Survivor Network under Coalition to Abolish and Slavery and Trafficking, and has created the pilot program for their Advocacy Academy on Policy with the efforts of the Policy Team. Ms. Paul is a contributor to the Delta 8.7 Project. Ms. Paul is a former member of the U.S. Advisory Council on Trafficking. Ms. Paul has also delivered presentations as a Subject Matter Expert for training on dealing with individuals experiencing trafficking in persons at the National Network for Youth's National Summit on Youth Homelessness in Washington, D.C. Ms. Paul has presented for the SHADE Symposium, a lived experience led conference on marginalized populaces. Ms. Paul has presented at the Freedom Network Conferences. Ms. Paul has worked to assist with LGBTQIA2+ inclusive policy and training materials for the State of Iowa. Ms. Paul is also working to establish PRISM—Pride and Respect for Individuals in Sexual Minorities—which will assist in research, awareness, and long-term aftercare of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals experiencing trafficking in persons. Ms. Paul is also a member of the Freedom Network.