

Supporting the social integration of trafficked young people

Claire Cody

By definition, trafficking requires movement. In many cases this leads to the disconnection of an individual from family, friends and, in some instances, language and culture. Young people who have been trafficked often find themselves in unfamiliar cities where they are unlikely to have friends, family or other meaningful connections. Traffickers are well versed in the methods for maintaining control; young people may be regularly moved, which adds to their disorientation, and victims of trafficking are often kept isolated from others. Through violence and experience, these young people may learn not to trust their peers.

But for those who were formerly trafficked, having the opportunity to speak with others who have common and shared experiences, especially those from similar backgrounds or communities, may help them to realise they are not alone. Many leading organisations working with trafficked young people bring survivors together to meet, share their own stories and access support and advice. However, some young people may fear interactions with others from their home country, believing that their stories will be divulged to the host community or their family back home. In other cases a young person may know or believe that those in the community know the trafficker or have links to others involved in trafficking back home.

Young people need to be shown their future is not dictated by their past. Positive role-models, including individuals who have faced similar adversity and are now living happy, positive lives, are also critical. This may come from peers who are further along the recovery process but also from the increasing numbers of survivor-led organisations across the world – organisations such as Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), Breaking Free and Courtney's House (all in the US), the Somaly Mam Foundation in Cambodia and Shakti Samhva in Nepal.

With the participation of young people, such organisations can support survivors to re-define their identity and re-gain a sense of belonging.

Claire Cody claire.cody@perth.uhi.ac.uk is Oak Fellow at the Centre for Rural Childhood, Perth College University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland. Her work involves developing resources to support the recovery and reintegration of children affected by sexual exploitation and trafficking globally. www.childrecovery.info