



Arizona Human  
Trafficking Council

**Arizona Human Trafficking Council**

**April 6, 2022 9:00 AM**

**Hybrid Meeting**

1700 West Washington Street, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007

A general meeting of the Arizona Human Trafficking Council was convened on **April 6, 2022**

1700 West Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85007, notice having been duly given.

| Members Present (22)                                | Members Absent (6)            |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Claire Sechler Merkel, Co-Chair                     | David Curry                   |
| Jim Waring  | Debbie Johnson                |
| Heather Carter                                      | Marsha Calhoun                |
| Dominique Roe-Sepowitz                              | Rachel Mitchell               |
| T.J. Shope  | Maria Cristina Fuentes, Chair |
| Sarah Chung   | Doug Coleman                  |
| Jennifer Crawford                                   |                               |
| Joseph Kelroy                                       |                               |
| Jill Rable  |                               |
| Lois Lucas  |                               |
| Keith Moffitt (Proxy for Mike Faust)                |                               |
| Jeramia Ramadan Garcia (Proxy for Michael Wisehart) |                               |
| Jennifer Pinnow (Proxy for Heston Silbert)          |                               |
| Brian Steele  |                               |
| Nathaniel Brown                                     |                               |
| Rachel Zenuk Garcia (Proxy for Don Herrington)      |                               |
| Regina Cobb   |                               |
| Sarah Beaumont                                      |                               |
| Tim Roemer  |                               |
| Zora Manjencich                                     |                               |
| Eric Swanson  |                               |
| Jim Gallagher                                       |                               |
| Staff and Guests Present (10)                       |                               |
| Kim Brooks  | Estrella Fitch                |
| Anthony Amezquita                                   | Edna Lugo                     |
| Michelle Rucker                                     | Angela Salomon                |
| Joanna Jauregui                                     | Kristin Sorensen              |
| Deandre Kennedy                                     | Megan Fitzgerald              |

### Call to Order

- **Claire Sechler Merkel, Co-Chair**, called the Arizona Human Trafficking Council meeting to order at **9:03 a.m.** with 22 members and 10 staff and guests present.

### Roll Call

- **Claire Sechler Merkel, Co-Chair**, conducted a roll call of the Council and took note of Councilmember proxies with quorum met.

### Approval of Minutes

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, requested a review of the **February 16, 2022** meeting minutes.
  - **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** moved to accept the **February 16, 2022** minutes.
  - **Brian Steele** seconded the motion.
  - The motion passed with no dissenting votes at **9:07 a.m.**

### Special recognition

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, requested that **Joseph Kelroy** share a few words regarding the recent loss of one of the staff at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Holly Reynolds. **Mr. Kelroy** stated that Ms. Reynolds was a specialist at Juvenile Justice Services and unexpectedly passed away in January of this year. Ms. Reynolds worked closely with the Human Trafficking Specialists in the counties, probation and detention officers, and was an incredible force with the work that she did. She was passionate about helping this population and vulnerable populations, not only in human trafficking but in other areas of juvenile justice. She was a committed professional and served 22 years with the AOC and with Pinal County Adult Probation prior to that. To honor Holly, the AOC has opened a website on SharePoint for anyone that knew her to share their thoughts in support of the family and to gain an understanding of what she did and who she served working in this field. On April 27th, the AOC is doing a presentation of the colors at the Arizona Supreme Court. Lastly, a celebration of life, scheduled by her family, will be held on May 14th. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, thanked **Mr. Kelroy** for his words and shared that Ms. Reynolds was an amazing partner, not only to the Council but also to the McCain Institute and she will be missed dearly.

### Arizona Attorney General's Office: Human trafficking outreach and awareness

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, introduced **Michelle Rucker** for an update from the Arizona Attorney General's Office regarding their efforts surrounding human trafficking outreach and awareness. **Ms. Rucker** began her presentation by providing an overview of their office and the outreach/education division. The Arizona Attorney General's Office has a dedicated Community Outreach and Education Division that has been in place for over a decade. Since the beginning of the current administration under Attorney General Mark Brnovich, concerted efforts have been made concerning human trafficking. These efforts have ranged from prosecution, investigation, and public education. The Division travels throughout Arizona and provides presentations in-person as well as online via webinars in schools, professional agencies, faith-based organizations, and anyone else who is needing information or is curious about any of the topics the Division presents to the public. Since 2015, the Division has presented to over 338,361 Arizonans. In 2016, the Division launched its Human Trafficking Program, and since its inception, the Division has presented the program to over 10,631 Arizonans.
- **Ms. Rucker** then provided an overview of their Internet Safety Program. Since 2015, the curriculum has been presented to more than 194,945 Arizonans. The target audiences for the program are children, parents, educators, and the general public. The age range for children/youth taking part in the program is kindergarten through 12th grade.
- **Ms. Rucker** then provided an overview of the Special Prosecutions Section within the Arizona Attorney General's Office and the work they are doing with law enforcement. In 2015, Attorney General Mark Brnovich created this new unit to be entirely dedicated to prosecutors who prosecute cases involving sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, money laundering, and illegal enterprises that involve human trafficking. Prosecutors within the unit have conducted dozens of training locally and nationally for and alongside law enforcement.

Focus areas of the training have been best practices related to investigations, prosecutions, as well as trauma-informed interviewing.

- **Ms. Rucker** then provided an overview of the Safeguarding All From Exploitation (SAFE) Action Project. The SAFE Action Project is a partnership between the Attorney General's Office, the Arizona Human Trafficking Network, and the United States Department of Homeland Security Investigations Arizona. The project is a profession-specific human trafficking training program for the tourism and travel industry. In 2019, the Attorney's General Office helped the Arizona Human Trafficking Network relaunch the project. Since the relaunch, over 3,400 individuals working in all professions within the tourism and travel industry have been trained, representing over 60 organizations statewide, including a few organizations outside of Arizona. Additionally, 22 organizations/businesses have been SAFE certified.
- **Ms. Rucker** then explained the additional ongoing projects under the SAFE Action Project, training the Arizona Office of Tourism Visitor Center volunteers and working with casinos, specifically Gila River Gaming Enterprises and Harrah's Casinos as well as training students from ASU, GCU, and Scottsdale Community College that are enrolled in tourism and hotel/hospitality management programs. **Ms. Rucker** continued to describe other collaborative projects with the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, Childhelp Human Trafficking Advisory Group and a collaboration with Homeland Security to train 75% of City of Scottsdale employees.
- The full presentation can be accessed at <https://govff.az.gov/meeting/htc/2022/04/06>.
- **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** commented on hotel liability, stating that hotels consider the civil liability that they are facing by allowing human trafficking to happen on their properties and using this knowledge as a tool to encourage the industry to get trained and to show evidence in their policies and procedures. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** stressed the importance of the work of the Attorney General's Office to educate hotels on protecting their patrons and that they know who to call and that it would be beneficial if there was a national level of certification/knowledge surrounding a hotel's actions if human trafficking occurred on their property and the potential liability that the establishment accepts by renting rooms to traffickers. **Ms. Rucker** commented that the American Hotel and Lodging Association, even prior to the pandemic, really put a lot of notice on this, especially for the larger corporations, and told everyone that they need to get some sort of training initiative going on their property. It doesn't matter if they are major franchises or "mom and pop". The Arizona Office of Tourism has been great and the Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association has been really helpful in pushing this message as well. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, commented that the Council is the place to continue the conversation and discuss who the Council would like to have to facilitate a presentation.

#### **Taskforce Update: Yuma County Sex Trafficking Coalition**

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, introduced **Edna Lugo** and **Estrella Fitch** for an update from the Yuma County Sex Trafficking Coalition. **Estrella Finch** began her presentation by highlighting their coalition members and thanked the McCain Institute and Mayra Lopez from Banner Health for inviting others to join the coalition. **Edna Lugo** shared Yuma County Sex Trafficking Coalition's mission statement to provide training and education to our community in recognizing the signs of youth sex trafficking and to establish collaborations between agencies in providing services to at-risk youth and victims of trafficking. **Ms. Lugo** emphasized the importance of collaboration with their members and other agencies in educating the community on the signs of trafficking. The coalition has trained Yuma Police Department and Amberly's Place in the past and is currently working with Yuma County Sheriff's Department, Arizona Western College Police Department, Cocopah Police Department, Quechan Police Department, and Somerton Police Department.
- **Ms. Lugo** explained that currently, Juvenile Court refers youth to the Healing Journey for services when they identify any youth that is being trafficked or a youth at risk of being trafficked. Also, because **Ms. Lugo** is a trainer for Sex Trafficking 101, she provides training for staff and coalition members. **Ms. Finch** added that they also receive referrals from the Department of Child Safety (DCS) when they see that there is a risk for a youth being trafficked, such as continual runaways. When DCS staff sees high-risk factors for trafficking and then they begin working with the youth on the curriculum. **Ms. Finch** also stated that youth often do not see themselves as victims. The coalition has also been working with YPIC charter school and high schools to develop programs and present on trafficking. Another way that the coalition is working with the schools is by receiving referrals from school counselors who notice something is going on with a student and something doesn't "feel right". The goals of the coalition are to provide insight and additional support for ongoing cases.

Oftentimes when they meet with victims they can provide an array of resources through the agencies that are a part of the coalition as one agency cannot do it all. This collaborative effort occurs during coalition meetings.

- **Ms. Lugo** shared the barriers and challenges they continue to experience as a coalition. COVID-19 greatly affected the coalition's ability to promote awareness, provide training, and conduct community outreach. But thankfully they are beginning to go back to in-person. The other main challenge the coalition has experienced is that the Yuma community does not accept that sex trafficking is an issue and believes that it does not exist. People have stereotypes of sex trafficking as people hanging out on the street corner at night waiting for cars to pass by. The coalition's goal is to educate the community that sex trafficking can happen online and via apps, especially with Yuma being a border town.
- **Ms. Finch** then highlighted the Healing Journey's successes since the coalition's inception. In the past six years, the coalition has worked with 20 victims of youth sex trafficking. They explained that it was difficult to get services for these youth. Most of the 20 victims were recruited by a peer for a trafficker. The coalition would identify this issue and bring it to law enforcement but oftentimes the victims would not speak up. **Ms. Finch** realized that the best way to deal with the issue was to bring mental health education and provide trauma-focused therapy. Currently, everyone in the agency is certified through the Arizona Trauma Institute to provide specialized therapy methods and they have an understanding of trafficking. To date, the coalition has served 35 boys and girls through the school districts and DCS. Another success was that of a young lady that was trafficked by a gang and the FBI had to get involved in the case. The victim would drive the FBI to the house and show them where her traffickers lived. **Ms. Finch** added that this victim came by the office one day in her early 20s and she brought her baby as she wanted to physically show **Ms. Finch** that she was out of that lifestyle and had a son. She finally understood the dangers that she had gone through.
- **Ms. Lugo** then stated that their goals moving forward are to continue educating the community, local law enforcement, and behavioral health agencies on recognizing signs of sex trafficking, and identifying victims and those that are at risk of being trafficked. The biggest event that the coalition is working on is the Yuma Sex Trafficking Symposium which will take place from May 9th-10th with assistance from the McCain Institute. Training will be provided to law enforcement, DCS, behavioral health agencies, victim advocacy, prosecutors, and anyone else that is working with youth who are at risk of being sex trafficked. Sessions will be provided in the morning and afternoon so shift officers can participate. The last goal of the coalition is to continue to develop and provide Sex Trafficking 101 for high school students and parents/guardians. **Ms. Finch** added that they want to begin their awareness program as soon as possible now that they are back in-person, as she believes a lot of times parents should ask questions as to why their kids have money and question what is going on. **Ms. Finch** concluded her presentation by thanking **Michelle Rucker** for the presentation she provided years ago on teen dating violence program for high school students.
- The full presentation can be accessed at <https://goyff.az.gov/meeting/htc/2022/04/06>.
- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, thanked **Ms. Finch** and **Ms. Lugo** for their presentation. She stated that they are looking forward to the symposium on May 9th-10th.
- **Joseph Kelroy** thanked the teams in the Yuma area for their work. He then stated that the Yuma County Sex Trafficking Coalition is a great example of the collaborations that have been developed within the Council and thanked **Ms. Lugo** and **Ms. Finch** for their work.
- **Sarah Chung** thanked **Ms. Lugo** and **Ms. Finch** for an amazing job and mentioned the correlation between LGBTQ youth, human trafficking, and homelessness. She then offered her services to **Ms. Lugo** and **Ms. Finch** with any help to develop the Sex Trafficking 101 training as she believes any training that is developed needs to include all intersectionality, especially LGBTQ youth.
- **Claire Sechler-Merkel**, then requested that **Tim Roemer** provide his thoughts on their trip to Yuma this past Monday and share more about the intersection of trafficking issues and border security.
- **Tim Roemer** shared that their recent trip the border was eye opening. **Claire Sechler Merkel, Co-Chair**, **Mr. Roemer**, **Ambassador McCain**, and **Director Orrantia** visited the border about five years ago and a lot has changed since then. **Mr. Roemer** stated that five years ago there were approximately 25,000 apprehensions in the Yuma sector that year. He shared that in the 6 months of this federal fiscal year, the Yuma sector has seen 150,000 apprehensions. This makes the tasks and jobs of law enforcement, prosecution, victims services, and everyone across the board so difficult. It makes it challenging to track who is really the child of a family coming across the border and who is not, and how can we keep track of those coming into the country

and ensure they are protected. He then stated that this is not just a problem in Yuma County and he thanked all those that are working in Yuma County including **Ms. Lugo** and **Ms. Finch**. **Mr. Roemer** went on to state that they visited Amberly's Place and it shook him to the core hearing some of those stories especially based upon the ages of all the victims they heard about, including Amberly herself. The Council has an opportunity, in working with their partners in Yuma County, to really be role models for the rest of the nation. He then added that the Border Patrol does not get involved in any immigration process and is strictly there to process individuals, keep bad people out, and do biometric screenings. This becomes difficult when there is an increase in the number of people coming across the border as their entire job goes to processing instead of proactive work to keep the dangerous individuals and drugs/narcotics out.

- **Representative Regina Cobb** asked **Mr. Roemer** if the National Guard is helpful to the Border Patrol at this point. **Mr. Roemer** answered that they are a force multiplier with the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) and are doing a phenomenal job in working with Border Patrol specifically in drug interdiction. They receive intel on how cartels use human smuggling to complete drug trafficking. The individuals crossing the border pay their fees to the cartels/criminal organizations, approximately \$10,000 per person. Because some individuals cannot pay, once they get into the country they are in indentured servitude or sex trafficking or other areas to pay off those fees. The cartels send groups across the border and observe Border Patrol and law enforcement response, which is when drug loads travel east of San Luis in the Welton area. The National Guard and DPS have a large presence in those areas through the support of Governor Ducey and they have seen tremendous outcomes, apprehending large amounts of drugs, unlike anything they have ever seen.

#### Starfish Place

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, introduced Councilmember **Lois Lucas** to provide an update on Starfish Place. **Ms. Lucas** began her presentation by providing the background of the program. The design of the supportive programming for Phoenix Starfish Place has been informed by the community's sex trafficking survivor leaders. The goal of the program is to promote healing from trauma, promote independence, address health and mental health issues, and support recovery and reconnection to the community. Support services include a range of programming including case management, therapeutic groups, life skills and parenting classes, cooking and nutrition, and mindfulness. The facility was built in 2013, along with fifteen apartments, and has a 6,800 sq. ft. community center equipped with a library/computer room, case management offices, community kitchen, a teen room, and a therapeutic room. The community yard includes an outdoor grill and dining area, lots of space for biking and scootering, and beautiful outside seating around the courtyard. The facility was purchased with city funds and is owned and operated by the City of Phoenix Housing Department. To begin the application process to enter the facility an individual needs to have a caseworker and has to be referred. Oftentimes referrals are received from Center for Hope, UMOM and Catholic Charities. The application is then reviewed by the Advisory Board and an interview is facilitated with the clinical social worker in-person to understand the current state of the individual. The program includes meeting basic needs, clinical programs, medical partnerships, and community advocacy. Current status of applications: two are under Section 8 review and 10 moms and 21 children are currently residing in the facility. Once approved into the program, the individual has to get deposit assistance for their utilities, move into the facility, case management, and therapeutic programming begins, as well as property management. Community Bridges, Inc. facilitates case management and is survivor-led. Case management support includes assistance with enrollment in community resources, goal setting, transportation, and encouragement and support for education and employment attainment. **Ms. Lucas** added that the women in the facility are well supported to move on to the next phase of their lives. Some are going back to school, some are going back to work and if they do not have a job, almost all are looking for one. **Ms. Lucas** continued to explain that ASU provides clinical services for adults including substance abuse groups, trauma intervention groups, mentoring support groups, nutrition/cooking groups, an acupuncture clinic, and music lessons.
- **Ms. Lucas** then explained that residents in the facility are referred by multiple agencies including Community Bridges, Inc. Center for Hope; Dignity Diversion Phoenix Police Department Human Exploitation and Trafficking (HEAT) Victim Services; Dream Center; UMOM; Sojourner Center; Phoenix Children's Hospital; and the Resolution Group. Since opening in November 2017, the facility has served 21 adult female survivors



of sex trafficking and their 48 minor children. The residents have between one and eight children living with them. Many of the residents reported experiencing significant trauma during their lifetimes including experiences of being unsafe and abused in their childhood homes and experiences of homelessness, addiction, and domestic violence as adults. The clients at Phoenix Starfish Place also report high rates of depression, anxiety, intrusive thoughts, dissociation, and defensive avoidance. All of the residents reported experiencing sex trafficking which is defined as being under the age of 18 and exchanging sex for something of value, or, over the age of 18, having a third-party use force, fraud, or coercion to exchange sex for something of value. The age of first sex trafficking experience ranged from age 12 to 26 years old with an average of 17.7 years old. The clients at Phoenix Starfish Place have come from a number of different referral locations including family or domestic violence shelters, treatment programs, couch surfing, or living with family. All of the Phoenix Starfish Place residents reported unstable housing in their application. Three residents were living in crisis domestic violence shelters, four residents were living in programs where they received support and direct services. Four residents were referred by the victim services worker at the Phoenix Police Department Human Exploitation and Trafficking Unit. One resident was living in her vehicle when she applied to Phoenix Starfish Place. Additional services to support the residents at Phoenix Starfish Place include assistance with childcare, GED courses and testing, community college tuition, license training, and books for coursework. All children at Phoenix Starfish over the age of four years old received an Apple iPad in October 2020 and over time, any adult resident enrolled in any training or schooling received a laptop computer. All fifteen apartments received Wi-Fi services for 12 months in 2021 to support the child and parent's educational pursuits. In November 2020, the ASU Clinical team set up a non-perishable food pantry for residents. As of March 2022, residents have received 6,807 food items in 344 visits. In the fall and spring of each year the ASU and Community Bridges, Inc. team puts together events including Spring Festivals and Fall Celebrations.

- The full presentation can be accessed at <https://govff.az.gov/meeting/htc/2022/04/06>.
- **Jennifer Pinnow** asked how long residents can stay at the facility. **Ms. Lucas** replied that the program is 2 years but there are residents that have been there longer as they are doing the right things to leave the facility. The longest they can stay is possibly 5 years. **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** commented that Phoenix Starfish Place has been open for over four years. When **Ms. Lucas** and **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** developed the program they hoped it would be a two-year program. Because it is funded under Section 8 Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the residents can use their voucher wherever they like, thus many are choosing to remain. There are some talks right now about changing the funding significantly to city funds so people would only be able to stay for 2 years. This was highlighted in the newspaper recently that the change is currently in the appropriations process, but Phoenix Starfish Place will let the Council know when the change happens. Currently, 4 people moved into the facility in November 2017 and three of them still live at the facility. **Ms. Pinnow** stated that it sounds like a great program. **Ms. Lucas** added that she and a friend of hers started a Circle of Dignity, a prostitute's anonymous group, and they are going very well. The group used to be facilitated at Catholic Charities but it stopped due to COVID-19. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, asked if the group was only for residents or for a larger group of people. **Ms. Lucas** replied that the acupuncture program is open to any survivor but usually programs are only for residents. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** added that Phoenix Starfish Place is beginning to open up so that the prostitution anonymous group is now open to the community and the acupuncture clinic is open to the community so there are other people coming from other programs. When Phoenix Starfish Place first opened there was just the building, Section 8, and case management but no money for clinical services which is why public housing does not have clinical services. A lot of the clinical programming in the first few years was funded by a grant from Dr. Michael Crow and ASU. Then in 2020, Phoenix Starfish Place received the Attorney General's grant that was advocated for in the Arizona Legislature and has continually extended it until the end of this year because they could not get residents enrolled in school due to COVID-19. Currently, four residents are in school and/or continuing education, two are in college and are provided laptops and get their books

purchased. One of the residents is currently in a victimology class. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** then added that if anyone would like a tour of Phoenix Starfish Place, please reach out to herself or **Ms. Lucas**. Over the past three years, **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** has had 20 ASU interns work at Starfish Place. **Ms. Lucas** added that groups that are facilitated are provided childcare. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** then commented that this year Phoenix Starfish Place had three high school interns from Bioscience High School and they will continue with that relationship.

- **Brian Steele** thanked **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** and **Ms. Lucas** for the work that they do and for the presentation. He cannot emphasize enough how much of a need there was for Phoenix Starfish Place, especially for the survivors who have children. It is more than a place for them to go with their child, it's those wraparound services and therapeutic support which was nonexistent for the mothers and their children. **Ms. Lucas** replied that they are waiting for residents to become stable in their life, not to still be in crisis, and thinks they are all doing wonderful. There is a woman who has been there for 5 years who says she and her child feel so safe at Phoenix Starfish Place and they do not want to leave. She then added that a lot of residents feel that way and when they enter the facility they begin to feel normal again. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** then mentioned that Empact La Frontera received a grant that provides trauma counseling to agencies that serve human trafficking survivors that do not have therapists on site. Phoenix Starfish Place currently has a contract with Empact La Frontera with 4 residents currently enrolled. She went on to share that Phoenix Starfish Place continues to search for community partnerships and highlighted an Argentinian chef that comes to the facility every other Tuesday to cook for residents. Another partnership she mentioned was the Caring Coalition which has donated 6,000 organic food items since September 2020 when the facility realized residents were running out of food at the end of the month due to school closures. Lastly, she highlighted a new 12-step group that meets every other Monday and a therapist that facilitates a trauma group Wednesday nights. During the summer, the trauma group turns into a family night event that shows movies on a projector screen that was purchased with CARES Act funding.
- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, shared that when the National Advisory Council came to Arizona they visited Phoenix Starfish Place and were blown away. This was a great opportunity for Phoenix to shine and represents all the hard work **Ms. Lucas**, **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz**, and others have done to make this a reality in our community.

#### **STIR update: Strangulation Studies**

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, welcomed Councilmember **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** for an update from the Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (STIR) at ASU on the outcomes of recent strangulation studies with the Las Vegas Metro Police Department. **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** began her presentation by explaining how rich and important the relationship between Phoenix and the Las Vegas Police Department is and how Las Vegas is illustrative of what is happening in Phoenix as there is a big network between the two cities. The study began in 2011 with the Las Vegas Metro Police Department Human Trafficking Unit (VICE) by indentifying the challenges they are facing. One of the challenges identified was robberies that were committed by prostituted persons on buyers, who were oftentimes from other countries, and did not return to testify. Traffickers communicate with their trafficking victims to find someone with an accent and rob them because they won't likely return to court and the charges will be dropped. Another conversation that was had with VICE was strangulation and one of the things that very few VICE units do is screen people for strangulation and domestic violence. What ASU did was look through the narrative data on a huge number of cases and found that people were spontaneously reporting strangulation by their traffickers.
- **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** explained that the study explored 795 cases from 2011-2019. It was initially over 1,000 but some cases had to be eliminated as there was no narrative about the experience of the victim including physical violence. If cases included a narrative, then those cases were included. Data included police reports, interviews that were recorded with victims, evidence reports, and any criminal records of the sex traffickers.

The analysis included independent t-tests, chi-square and odds ratio. In the study, it was found that one out of every six sex trafficking case reports included a victim spontaneously reporting non-fatal strangulation by their sex trafficker. ASU has learned that non-fatal strangulation is of great concern as there are bones that can be broken in the throat that cannot be seen, the victim doesn't know bones have been broken, there is no bleeding, bruising may not be on the neck, and a person can die within 24 hours. This is why there are different assessments that domestic violence programs do around the country to make sure that if they were strangled in the recent past that they go to the emergency room and get checked, those protocols are in place. Unfortunately, those same protocols are not in place for sex trafficking units to ask victims the exact same questions. If we are able to use some of the same protocols, **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** believes that victims would be safer because of it. She encouraged everyone to look at the screening used by detectives in domestic violence are to consider using similar screenings in human trafficking cases.

- **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** then stated that they also found that victims that reported non-fatal strangulation were slightly older than the victims who did not report it. This may speak to the fact that they have been in the game a little bit longer and the trafficker needed to use a little more violence to get them to do what they wanted. They also found that they are more likely to be street prostituted than in other settings so the violence is escalated in that population of persons. By saying they are older and are more likely to be on the street, those that work in victim services understand what this means. They may have been in strip clubs before but are no longer able to because of the violence they have experienced, drugs they have used, or experiences that no longer make them the right person to be in casinos, hotels, or in strip clubs. What was also found in the study was that victims of sex trafficking who reported non-fatal strangulation were 2x more likely to also report being threatened with a weapon by their trafficker. This is important as this informs us that those traffickers are more likely to have possession of a weapon. So when we ask a victim if they have ever experienced non-fatal strangulation, and they say "yes", the next question should be: "Does your trafficker have possession of a gun or a weapon?". The study also found that they were two times more likely to report being brought across state lines for prostitution and nearly three times more likely to have their trafficker use a romantic approach in their recruiting. These are known as "Romeo pimps" and are more likely to be relationship-based. This is where you see the link of domestic violence/and interpersonal violence. Victims were also three and a half times more likely to have gotten in contact with the VICE unit through a domestic violence call. They do not go through their traditional screening/investigation so they are not going to be asked about the non-fatal strangulation. Lastly, victims were three and a half times more likely to report that their trafficker used psychological abuse against them such as calling them names, being degrading, demeaning, and so on. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** emphasized that they are seeing a pattern of escalation of physical violence, this non-fatal strangulation, which implies "I can kill you". This is a very strong message that a trafficker is sending their victim.
- **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** concluded her presentation by sharing recommendations. In working with Elynn Greene, Victim Services Director at Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, they recommended that detectives who are working with sex trafficking survivors need to be trained alongside domestic violence detectives. They need more training on interpersonal relationship violence and to recognize that it is a much different relationship than a typical abuse situation that is non-relationship based. The second recommendation is that more training is needed for law enforcement, medical staff and agencies to screen for non-fatal strangulation, especially when law enforcement is contacted about a person being prostituted/trafficked. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** added that because of the way the data was collected, they know that when a person is caught in a sting, for example, a hotel sting, law enforcement is much less likely to do a thorough interview. Instead, they identify them as a prostitute or prostituted person, and they are then arrested and sent to be processed through the jail. In a domestic violence call, they are much more likely to do an interview and much more likely to get that information. They also know that victims rarely during stings come forward and say to law enforcement that they are trafficked. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** then stated that she works with law enforcement in stings and that when victims are brought to her they get HIV tested from Terros, they work with Chicanos Por La Causa, they get wraparound services from a New Life or a New Leaf, and that they are much more likely to tell them what is going on. She went on to say that there are ways to get the stress in the arrest situation lower. Lastly, the importance to walk away with is that non-fatal strangulation co-occurs in these relationships with interpersonal



violence, but also sexual violence. Victims that have experienced sexual violence by their trafficker are more likely to report and so the person is in a much more dangerous situation than a person who does not report non-fatal strangulation. In conclusion, recommendations are training for law enforcement, medical staff and social services; implemented screening where this question is asked, asked often, and asked well; screening implemented when a person recognizes a domestic violence situation where strangulation exists; screening for sex trafficking by asking if this person has ever forced you to exchange sex for something of value; and encouraging medical personnel that if they have someone come in that has experienced non-fatal strangulation to then screen for sex trafficking, in addition to domestic violence.

- The full presentation can be accessed at <https://goaff.az.gov/meeting/htc/2022/04/06>.
- **Jim Gallagher** commented that one thing that continues to come up in studies they've done with ASU or ones that they have reviewed is the need for increased training for police. The idea is that most of their trainings are focused on functional operational training. It helps them refine what they do and how they do it, but what can they do to change the culture of law enforcement to make them recognize the issues, be able to separate them, and also develop a sense of empathy. Functional operational training is great and we need to continue to do it, but how do we make a more empathetic culture within law enforcement to actually implement this more effectively. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** commented that human trafficking cases are so complicated and what ASU sees with their detectives is that people are coming around a couple of times before they are ready to talk, so there are multiple contacts and maybe the story has changed a few times which does not seem to increase empathy, instead, it seems to decrease empathy. She then added that in their last street hybrid project with Phoenix Police Department there were two 18-year-olds that were brought in to get services and to work with law enforcement. One was three weeks from her 18th birthday and she was still in high school. So this doesn't mean that we are talking about women from Albuquerque or somewhere else, these are our kids and our community and we are not asking them if violence is happening to them in ways that we can then save their life. She then concluded by saying those that are interested in the domestic violence nexus with strangulation and the threats and lethality of a person who will strangle their partner, speaks to the fact that there is a pattern of escalation and non-fatal strangulation is part of that escalation which then can result in homicide. If we are not paying attention to it, then we are not protecting clients from those escalations of violence that they are going to be victimized by.

### Workgroup Updates

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, introduced **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** for an update from the Data and Research Workgroup. **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz** shared that **Jim Gallagher** helped coordinate a large FBI training that the workgroup was a part of, using data and research from their community, especially some of the new innovative techniques that have been implemented during the pandemic. She is not promoting that COVID-19 has done great things, but interventions for human trafficking have become much more nimble/innovative and there has been a completely different buy-in from law enforcement. Also, some of the more hesitant partners in the community have bought in as well. She also wanted to emphasize that when they researched survivors of trafficking, on average it takes a person 12 times to get out, with domestic violence it is 7-9. Thus, we need to have many more touchpoints to try and help people exit. The workgroup is working on a project with victims' compensation and the McCain Institute and has offered to do training with all of the boards in the state. Recently the workgroup found out that only 4 out of the 3,000 approved applications for victims' compensation funding were for victims of human trafficking. The workgroup recognizes that it is an important topic and that we need to make that change so that if clients are eligible for \$25,000 worth of victims' compensation then they are much more likely to stay involved in the prosecution and more likely to stay in the community. Additionally, some research is coming up in 2020 with the support of the Governor's Office and the workgroup is collaborating with Pima County clinicians and the Arizona Department of Corrections in working with their substance abuse teams to recognize trafficking and trauma. The workgroup is also working with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and collaborating on a new project with Shefali Gandhi on her domestic violence programs, recognizing the intersection of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and knowing what interventions can be helpful for those with high ACEs scores. The workgroup is also working with juvenile probation officers throughout the state to make sure that new officers that are coming in have basic training and continue to work with experts that were utilized last year. Also,

1,200 people have been trained with the City of Phoenix as the workgroup is aiming for 60% of the total employees trained. There are two events coming up, one being this upcoming Saturday as there will be a Drop-in Center in Mesa that is being directed by the Mesa Family Advocacy Center at the East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT). The second event is the Phoenix Pop Up Drop-in Center at the Helen Drake Senior Center on May 7th and they are looking for volunteers and clothes, and they usually serve between 30-60 people. If interested, please reach out to **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz**. Lastly, the workgroup will be initiating the YES 2022 Survey with support from the McCain Institute and the workgroup recently joined a new project with the Arizona Department of Housing who provide service to young people who are homeless between the ages of 18-24. The hope is to bring in more YES survey agencies as they are losing more and more each month. Recently the Department of Economic Security (DES) funding has gone out for drop-in centers and street outreach so hopefully those programs are able to partner with the workgroup.

- **Jim Gallagher** commented on the FBI training and that they did not hit the numbers that they hoped to get. There were about 50 attendees but they had capacity for 125 individuals. He thinks the problem that they are experiencing from a training perspective is that the market is oversaturated and it is devaluing the importance of this topic. He recommends to the Council that they come up with some kind of structure, almost like a clearinghouse for training, especially leading up to the Super Bowl where there are going to be companies from around the country coming in and putting out their brand of training which will probably hurt more than it will help. He thinks going forward the state has all of the evidence-based practices and major agencies that have been working together and developing a good routine of human trafficking investigations and victims services and he does not want to see this diminished as we approach the Super Bowl. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, stated that she strongly agrees with **Mr. Gallagher** and that the Council has had this conversation surrounding the Super Bowl and **Kristin Sorensen** has put together a grid for the Council where they can catalog those that have informed the Council that they are coming. She went on to state that she is particularly concerned about funding being allocated to outside organizations for work that the Council is doing already and is doing quite well. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** added that she has a friend that works for a sheriff's department who shared that they are going to work with Intel and the jails to search their information and messages and look for traffickers. **Mr. Gallagher** commented that it's typically very siloed, and that's the problem. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** replied that she is better with the silos than them coming and taking over the community. **Mr. Gallagher** replied that he thinks one of two things is going to happen. In the intelligence field you get so much so often that it becomes noisy and you stop paying attention to it, which is the bad side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, you get bad intel or a bad product that is going to impair our ability to do anything. He thinks that the best thing for the Council to do is to establish a claim early with the Super Bowl Planning Committee and asked if there is a place on the Committee for a Human Trafficking Liaison who could serve as the point of contact on all the information coming in. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, stated that she completely agrees and the Council has made some inroads on the civilian side on the Super Bowl Host Committee. She has talked to **Jennifer Pinnow, Tim Roemer, Eric Swanson**, and others about the seat at the table that the Council had in 2015 at the command center for law enforcement and hopes they get that seat again. She thinks the benefit at this point is to be at the front end of it, ask groups to coordinate, and for the Council to be educated on these groups as they will be reaching out for funding and raising money off of the horrors of the Super Bowl. **Keith Moffitt** agreed with what **Mr. Gallagher** stated earlier that while there is a proliferation of people providing training, there continues to be a great hunger for people to get training. He mentioned that their agency has spent a great deal of money to send people across the country only to find out that Arizona got an "F" and yet the people that had the best presentations were people they brought in from Arizona to present on case studies that were successful. We have the expertise and experience, but he thinks that we need to go beyond some of the things that have been discussed as a Council and it would be nice for Arizona to become a hub and for people to come here for training, possibly a yearly training/conference. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, agreed with **Mr. Moffitt** and **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** and then asked **Mr. Moffitt** if the yearly training would be specifically for law enforcement. **Mr. Moffitt** replied that it could be for all communities. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** added that they have done a symposium every year but have never opened it up to all communities and think it is a great idea to do as a Council. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, mentioned possibly creating another committee specifically for the symposium. She then requested permission from **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz, Mr. Moffitt, Mr. Gallagher, Ms. Pinnow, Mr. Swanson**, and

anyone else who touches law enforcement who is willing to join and bolster the Council's awareness and readiness ahead of the Super Bowl. She then openly corralled all those mentioned into a committee and they will be setting up a meeting. **Ms. Sorensen** will help with the information gathering and organize it in a way so Councilmembers will all know the information that has been shared so far and further emphasized that she would like the Council to get a seat at the law enforcement command center table. **Brian Steele** mentioned that he knows three or four places coming out of state for the Super Bowl and it would be great to be able to send them to a landing page/website and ask them to register with the Council or ASU STIR. This way we have started the process of knowing who they are and what they are going to do. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** mentioned the Google Doc and **Ms. Sorensen** added that the Google Doc is ready and after the meeting, she will provide access to all Councilmembers. **Mr. Gallagher** mentioned that everyone needs to populate the document as they hear of something. **Ms. Sorensen** provided clarification on how Councilmembers, and their teams, can populate the Google Doc appropriately. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, stated this is a great first step and the second step will be to gather Councilmembers in another forum. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** asked if the Council could possibly speak to the Los Angeles group that coordinated the event and ask what pitfalls can be avoided. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, stated that the Council has been following every Super Bowl for the last 10 years and have had those conversations and they can certainly bring someone in from Los Angeles to present to the Council. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** stated that it would be a great reflection for the Council. **Ms. Pinnow** commented that Los Angeles kept track of who was coming into town for the Super Bowl and that those individuals are probably going to come to Phoenix as well. The Council can then add to that information and then pass it along to Nevada for their Super Bowl and Nevada can then pass it along to New Orleans. **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, agreed and the Council will follow up. **Ms. Roe-Sepowitz** concluded by volunteering **Sarah Beaumont** and **Sarah Chung** to the committee as well.

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, introduced **Angela Salomon** for an update from the Victim Services Workgroup. **Angela Salomon** shared that the workgroup met on March 1st with a presentation from Beauty from Ashes with an update on their progress toward opening for services. She also provided an offer to support efforts surrounding the Super Bowl training in the victims' services realm.
- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, shared that representatives from the Outreach and Awareness Workgroup are unable to join us today.

#### Upcoming Meeting

- **Claire Sechler Merkel, Co-Chair**, reminded Councilmembers to mark their calendars for the next Council meeting on June 1, 2022, at 9 a.m.

#### Adjournment

- **Claire Sechler-Merkel, Co-Chair**, thanked everyone for being part of the meeting and asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.
  - **Keith Moffitt** moved to adjourn.
  - **Joseph Kelroy** seconded the motion.
  - The motion passed with no dissenting votes and the meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.

Dated 6 of April 2022  
Arizona Human Trafficking Council  
Respectfully Submitted By:  
Anthony Amezquita  
GOYFF