



SECTION 5

Service Provider Partnerships

Introduction

In 2014, the Colorado legislature established the Colorado Human Trafficking Council (the Council) and its mandates through Colorado Revised Statute (C.R.S.) § 18-3-505. A previous mandate, now removed, contained in C.R.S. § 18-3-505(4)(a)(I) reads:

On or before January 1, 2016, make recommendations to the judiciary committees of the House of Representatives and Senate or any successor committees, concerning: whether the General Assembly should establish standards and a process for the certification of organizations that provide services to victims of human trafficking.

While the mandate no longer applies as of 2019, the intention of supporting service providers with promising practices still remains in the guiding principles of the Council. The Council established the Service Provider Partnership Task Force (SPPTF) to strengthen the overall response to service provision for all victims and survivors of human trafficking. The work of the SPPTF supports and adds to the previous work and recommendations outlined by the Standards and Certification Task Forces in the Council's 2016 and 2017 annual reports.

People who experience human trafficking often do not self-identify due to misconceptions about the crime, fear of retaliation or criminalization, and other concerns. Although they may not self-identify, the individuals may have specific needs related to the complexity of their human trafficking situations. When they reach out to service providers that do not specialize in human trafficking, their situations and some of their needs may not neatly fit into the types of services those providers are accustomed to administering. As a result of this misalignment, the organizations—especially if they do not specialize in human trafficking—might decline to provide services to the survivors. Rejection often causes survivors to stop reaching out, isolating them further and jeopardizing their safety.

While the complexity of human trafficking situations may require provider flexibility in determining how or whether they can adequately address the circumstances, specifically when they do not specialize in human trafficking, the realities of limited funding and resources can be real barriers to meeting survivor needs. In the beginning of 2025, service providers across Colorado and the nation saw funding streams shift substantially, reducing scopes of care. This happened to the majority of victim service providers, both specific to human trafficking and not. The SPPTF worked to better understand how service providers focused on human trafficking could better partner with other providers to offer meaningful support in an ongoing environment of precarious funding and endangered resources. While one organization cannot fulfill all the needs of a human trafficking survivor, stronger partnerships can strengthen that response and care.

Existing Resources to Support Partnership

Much partnership work has already been established over the last decade in Colorado. Because many current Council members were not present during the initial development of partnership resources, due to changeover from term limits, the SPPTF started its work by looking at the resources the Council created in prior years. The first resource the task force reviewed was guidance and standards for certain providers, created in 2016 and 2017, containing recommendations on partnerships and quality service provision.

Standards and Guidance

When examining the standards and guidance that might be most useful, the task force noticed that the Council had limited the scope of provider types to community-based victim advocates, mental and behavioral health professionals, and housing program providers. While the Council's previous work identified case managers and social service providers¹⁴ as groups for which standards and guidance would be beneficial, they were not addressed in the resources previously created. This task force looked to expand the partnership work by engaging with these groups.

The prior standards and guidance offer recommendations to local governments and providers, specifically around training and promising practices in service provision. By providing quality services and receiving training on human trafficking and related service provision topics, organizations can recognize (1) that this is a human trafficking situation and (2) when there would be a need for a warm handoff¹⁵ to other providers. For more on these standards and guidance, see the Council's 2016 and 2017 annual reports.

Advanced Training

In addition to guidance and standards, the Council created an advanced workshop specifically for service providers in 2019. Service providers might have learned about human trafficking identification but may not be sure what to do next with seemingly unclear and often complex traumatic situations.

Meeting Human Trafficking Survivors' Needs: An Advanced Workshop for Service Providers is designed to be delivered to many different service providers within a community taking the workshop together. It examines the service gaps in the community and builds skills and solutions for delivering trauma-responsive care and culturally specific services for human trafficking survivors in that community, regardless of whether the service provider has a

¹⁴ The Council decided, in 2018, the community-based victim advocate guidance could apply to case managers and social service providers.

¹⁵ Warm handoff refers to when a service provider contacts another service provider in efforts of connecting a client to services that the initial service provider cannot help with. It typically includes a direct introduction of the client to the new service provider through phone calls, emails, video calls, or in person to encourage smooth continuity of care and establish rapport.

human trafficking focus. This workshop helps participants look critically at provider gaps and strengthen the partnership mentality through networking in the room. It is a free program offered statewide to any community upon request to Human Trafficking Team (HTT) staff. For more information on this advanced workshop, see Appendix 1.

Vulnerability Assessment

Finally, Colorado service providers working specifically with children and youth have a revamped screening tool, the Human Trafficking Vulnerability Assessment (HTVA). Formally known as the Colorado High-Risk Victim Identification Tool, the HTVA is currently used in child-specific human trafficking multidisciplinary teams and across the state in human services. Members of the Council worked from 2022 to 2023 with HTT staff under a federally funded project, *Connecting Colorado*, to revise the former tool to its new version to make it more applicable and usable for providers.

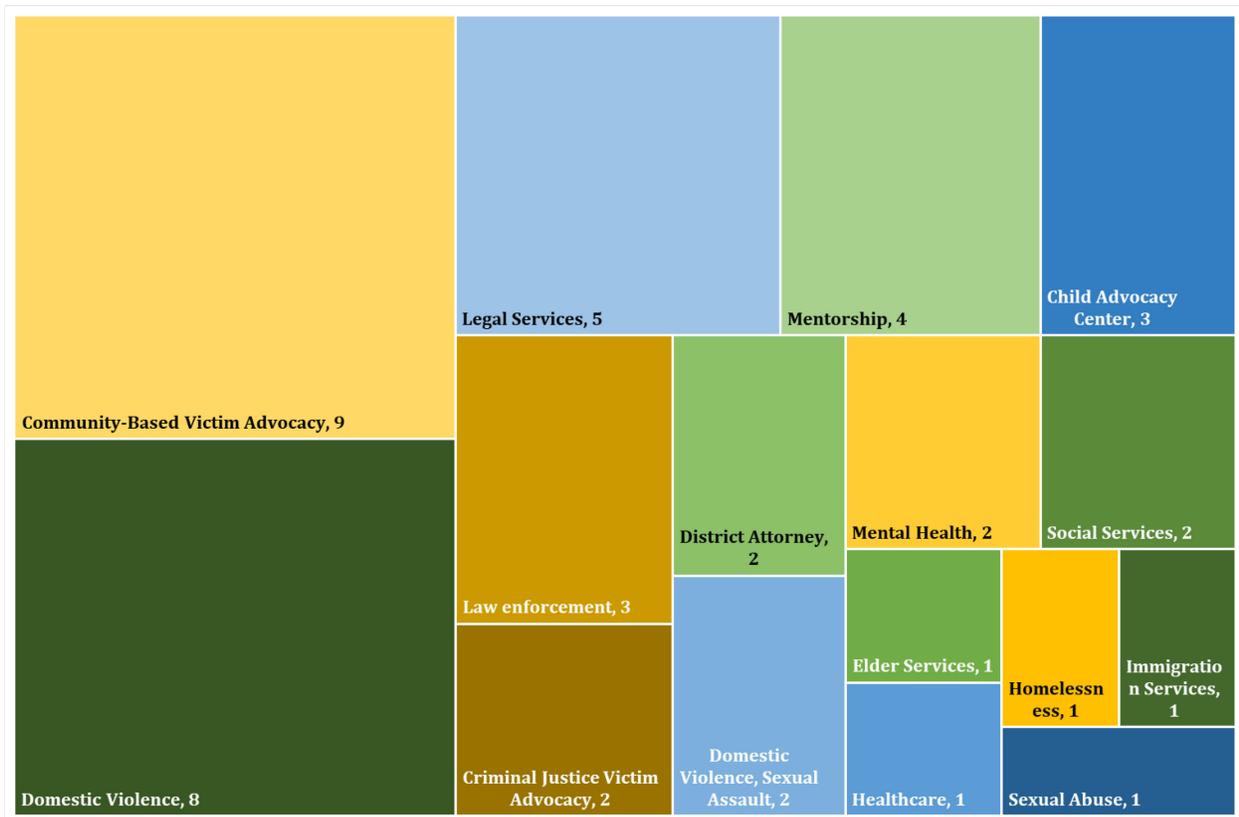
This tool is meant to assess for vulnerabilities to human trafficking. It can thereby be used as primary, secondary and tertiary forms of prevention work. By screening someone for vulnerabilities for human trafficking, these providers can screen people into specialized services with partners, strengthening partnerships through continued referrals to one another. The task force reviewed the HTVA to better understand the various components of the tool that will be available to direct care providers and where it could help strengthen partnerships.

The three resources previously created by the Council—the standards and guidance, advanced training, and the HTVA—primed the SPPTF to understand promising practices for good partnerships and what its ask of partner agencies could be. With these three resources, task force members could approach partner organizations and help bridge the service gaps, whether through connecting them with training, reviewing guidance together to establish stronger partnership procedures or giving them a tool to assist with identifying vulnerabilities and risks.

Finding the Gaps

After reviewing the Council tools that already existed, the SPPTF conducted a systematic review of service providers receiving state funding for crime victim services. This review allowed the task force to understand which providers were already working with people who have experienced human trafficking. Out of 204 organizations receiving American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding, 76% reported at least one human trafficking victim served. The remaining 48 organizations reported zero human trafficking victims served. These organizations posed an opportunity for the task force to understand where partnership gaps exist. Figure 43 shows the distribution of organizations by type that reported serving no human trafficking clients.

Figure 43: ARPA and VOCA, Organizations with No Human Trafficking Clients (n= 48), Calendar Year 2024



Data Source: Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, Office for Victims Programs. October 31, 2025.

Note: In calendar year 2024, 204 organizations received funding under ARPA and VOCA. Seventy-six percent of the organizations served at least one victim of labor and/or sex trafficking. The figure depicts the service provision category of each of the remaining 48 organizations.

What Organizations Are Left Out

These 48 organizations are categorized as follows: community-based victim advocacy (8), domestic violence (8), legal services (5), mentorship (4), child advocacy center (3), law enforcement (3), criminal justice victim advocacy (2), district attorney (2), mental health (2), domestic violence and sexual assault (2), social services (2), elder services (1), homelessness (1), immigration services (1), healthcare (1), Muslim services (1), and sexual abuse (1). The SPPTF suspected that many of these organizations were serving human trafficking victims but not including that service provision in their required grant reporting for a variety of reasons. To better understand these reasons, the task force designed a survey.

The survey seeks to understand whether services are being provided to human trafficking victims, whether services provided would be different if someone disclosed human trafficking, whether the providers are referring human trafficking survivors to other organizations, and their grant-reporting decision-making. The survey was also designed to help the task force learn about service provision norms (such as duration of services and policies around return clients), whether providers are serving clients with human trafficking-related needs, and grant-reporting policies. By understanding the experiences of the providers that do not report serving human trafficking victims, the Council can better identify how to improve partnerships with these organizations, whether through expanding education on human trafficking, improving communication about referral partnerships and/or advocating for expanding capacity of these organizations.

Implementation in Fall 2025

The survey was approved by the task force in July 2025 and, subsequently, by the full Council in August 2025. The HTT staff have partnered with a master's-level intern, Jessica Manrique, to conduct the survey with the 48 organizations as a degree capstone project. The survey and accompanying tools were submitted for review by an Institutional Review Board and received an exempt from further review determination from the University of Colorado Denver as the survey presented a low ethical risk to participants. The results of this project will be published in 2026.

With these survey results, the Council hopes to better understand what form of partnership is most meaningful to provider organizations that are not currently reporting services to human trafficking victims. With that better understanding, future efforts in the field can focus on reducing the instances of rejection when a human trafficking survivor seeks help from an organization but cannot receive meaningful care. Instead, by strengthening the network of service provider partners, the survivor will be able to access meaningful services with a “no wrong door” model, decreasing the likelihood for revictimization and further harm.

