

Exploitation, Trafficking, and Violence: Child Protection Roundtable Series

October 15, 2025

Claire Hopkins (CH): Hello, everyone, and welcome to our second session of the three-part Child Protection Roundtable series. Today, we will be talking about exploitation, trafficking, and violence. My name is Claire Hopkins, and I'm a training officer with Switchboard. Prior to Switchboard, I worked in community engagement, as well as recruited and trained foster parents for unaccompanied refugee minors and unaccompanied children. I also have experience and am passionate about advocating for domestic and sexual violence survivors. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Grand Valley State University.

I'm so excited to be able to introduce to you all and be joined by our two roundtable speakers and panelists for this session today. They come with extensive experience and knowledge related to child protection. First, we're joined by Carlyn Sperling. Carlyn is a social work professional with expertise in refugee services, foster care, and program development. She currently serves as the URM Program Director at Bethany Christian Services, where she leads program operations, ensures compliance, and fosters strong partnerships with community stakeholders. Throughout her career, she has helped establish Michigan's first refugee treatment foster care program and developed an independent living program for refugee girls. She is certified in evidence-based treatment foster care models, as well as motivational interviewing, and is committed to advancing trauma-informed, youth-centered care. Carlyn is also a proud foster parent to a refugee teen boy. She holds a Master of Social Work from Grand Valley State University.

CH: Next, we are joined by Regina Bernadin. Regina is the Director of Protection in the International Rescue Committee, or IRC, Safety, Health, and Education Technical Unit, which supports the organization's child protection efforts and anti-trafficking work. Previously, Regina served as the statewide human trafficking coordinator with the Florida Department of Children and Families. She is a consultant for the Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, as well as the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center on human rights issues. She holds a BA in International Studies and Criminology and an MA in International Administration, as well as a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, with her dissertation focusing on refugee self-sufficiency.

We are truly joined by experts today, and you will be able to hear from them shortly, but let's first go over our learning objectives for this session. We hope that by the end of this roundtable, you'll be able to identify signs of trafficking and exploitation that may impact newcomer youth before and after arrival. Our next is to describe how systematic factors such as labor practices, digital access, and grooming tactics contribute to newcomer youth vulnerability. Our final learning objective is to use prevention and safety planning strategies that center youth voice and cultural context.

CH: Before we go forward, we wanted to thank you so much for your thoughtful questions that you submitted at registration. Some of the topics that you asked about, like recognizing abuse and neglect, as well as the impact of cultural context, were covered in Session One: Abuse and Neglect in Newcomer Context. If you missed that, we're dropping the link in the chat now so that you can access the recording as well as the slide deck. We also will not be going into detail or discussing mandated reporting today. There's an accompanying guide that follows this roundtable series, and that guide has tons of reporting links and helpful resources, which will also be in the chat for you.

Then, finally, we wanted to thank you for your questions around supporting students and educators. For these kinds of topics, we invite you to take a look at our newsletter, make sure that you're signed up for it, as we will be putting out updates of our community of practices, including one focused on youth and student support. Now, for questions that we'll answer today, please put your questions in the Q&A throughout today's session. We will be monitoring this and use your questions during our Q&A time at the very end. Lastly, looking ahead is our Session Three. This will take place Wednesday, November 5th. The final session is "Hear from the Experts: Foster Parent and Staff Perspectives". We hope that you'll join us for that as well.

CH: Let's jump into today's content. If you know Switchboard, you know that we start by using Slido. We will have Slidos taking place throughout this [presentation]. It's a really great opportunity for engagement for our audience and learners, because y'all are the ones that are in this work, so we want to hear from you. You can access this by joining at slido.com in your web browser. Otherwise, you can take out your smart device, scan that QR code, and it should pop up this question for you, which is: when you think of trafficking and exploitation, what words come to mind?

We're seeing abuse, manipulation, vulnerable, oppression, sexual abuse, coercion, crossing borders, labor. Wow, look at these coming through. This is awesome. This is a word cloud through Slido, which makes the ones that have been submitted more than once larger. It's really cool to see these themes that you all are thinking of: coercion, manipulation, abuse.

Then it's also super great to see some of these more specific ones that we're seeing, so wounds, trauma, innocence, drug dealers, minimizing, oppression, risk, harm, LGBTQIA, abduction, vulnerable. These are super insightful. Cartels. I'm seeing brainwashing, force. Thank you so much for submitting these. This really is going to be captured throughout our time together and sets the tone for what you are already thinking of and what we hope you can keep in your mind and center throughout our training today. I'm going to go over and pass it to our first panelist here, Regina, to open up our first learning objective.

Regina Bernadin (RG): Thank you, Claire. Thank you, everyone, for participating in that Slido. There were so many rich descriptors for what we're going to talk about today. I'm also going to provide a little bit of context around two of the key issues, which are exploitation and human trafficking. They are two distinct issues, but they often overlap in ways that can make them hard to tell apart in practice. It's important that we understand both clearly so that we can recognize the signs early and respond in the right way.

Exploitation is a broad term. It happens when someone takes advantage of a child's vulnerabilities, often related to their age, their dependence, or life experiences, and they do so for their own benefit or profit. This can take many forms, such as with sexual exploitation or labor exploitation, including situations where a child is working or engaging in harmful activities to meet their most basic needs. At its core, exploitation is about using a child's vulnerabilities for someone else's gain.

RG: Now, human trafficking, on the other hand, has a specific legal definition. It involves recruiting, moving, harboring, and controlling a child with the purpose of exploitation. What's especially important to remember is this happens within a spectrum. In cases of labor, to meet the threshold of human trafficking, there needs to be force, fraud, or coercion. The only instances in which that element is waived is if there's commercial sex. That then meets the definition of sex trafficking. There's also special protections for a trafficking survivor as well. In short, though, trafficking always includes exploitation, but not all exploitation involves trafficking.

Because these situations are so closely connected and often look very similar, we'll be talking about them together in this training. By understanding how they overlap and also as they differ, we can better identify children who are at risk, make appropriate reports or referrals, and ensure they get the protections and services that they need.

RG: Now, we're going to go ahead and look at some common signs of exploitation and trafficking. I'll highlight a few, and this list is definitely not exhaustive. You might see some elements, some of these, in a situation; you might see none of them. That's why these situations require us to really look at the nuances and how everything comes together to take a look at the full picture.

One of them, for example, is that the minor receives promises of job or education or affection and love, but specifically for job and education before or during migration. These could actually be drivers for them migrating, or also methods of control, their expectations of what life is now going to be here in the United States. These are both recruitment tools, and these promises are also a way in which traffickers keep minors under their control. They might be traveling also with non-relatives, or the guardianship is unclear. We see that in a lot of programming there's a little bit of greater scrutiny around the fact of sometimes the relationship between-- For example, we see it in the case of unaccompanied minors, who are they here with or who have they traveled with?

However, we also have to be cognizant that exploitation can also happen-- Or trafficking, through biological parents or that type of relationship. There could be a lack of contact with their family or friends, or controlled communication. This usually stands out when a minor has been particularly close to their caregivers and then all of a sudden, that communication ceases. For example, it feels that they're very mindful of their words or who's around them or what they say. It's no longer fluid. It's no longer what it used to be in the past. There's a marked change in their communication style overall.

There may also be debt bondage or forced arrangements and fear for their loved one's safety. Sometimes, there could be some sort of debt or arrangement over the covering of basic needs and also the expectation of their contribution to a household.

RG: It's one thing for a youth to contribute to a household, whether it's looking at, as I used the word earlier, about spectrum. There's chores, and then there's other types of contributions. There are child labor laws in the United States that do allow for certain category of youth and in certain industries for them to work. There's also that piece around exploitation and that threshold of trafficking where a minor is working to pay off a debt or to pay for their most basic needs to live in a household. A couple of others to also share is, for example, living somewhere that is inappropriate, whether it is such as where they work or in conditions that are unhygienic or overcrowded, many people living in one space and not having their own personal space to sleep or keep their belongings.

In communication, being unsure about or unable to say, for example, where they live and with whom. I've seen this, for example, in a case. I started my career providing direct services and then moving to program management. There's a case that stands out where; in connecting with my client, we were talking about just day-to-day things about life. It came out that Monday through Friday, they mentioned living with an uncle. Then over the weekend, the arrangement was a little different. It turned out that it was because Monday through Friday, they were working overnight as part of trafficking. It turned out to be a trafficking situation. Sometimes, having those conversations about day-to-day things can lead you to finding out more. In this case, the opening was talking about where exactly where they [were] living and what did that look like?

[pause]

CH: Thank you so much for going into that. You've already shared some of your expertise and whatnot, but I would love to hear what I think you were going to dive in more. What kinds of exploitation or trafficking have you seen after you've arrived in the US?

RG: Oh, yes. Thank you, Claire. Some of the ones that I see here, I've seen very frequently in my work. I shared in the prior slide, for example, about the sudden changes in housing or caregivers. In part, it's also about that expectation of what now and how are they going to meet those basic needs. For example, they were living with someone, but now there's that expectation that they're going to contribute, they're going to work, and so forth, so the housing changes or it looks differently as part of that potential trafficking scheme. It could be a situation where they're being exploited as well, working these long hours or unsafe jobs.

You find that you're trying to set an appointment, or you're trying to meet with the youth, and they're unavailable, or the hours that they're available are not traditional hours. What is the reason that that's the case? Or you might see them and they might have now these, for example, in the case of a new handbag or new sneakers or things that in the past weren't as accessible. That also raises a potential red flag as well of what could be going on in their lives? What has changed? What has been that pivot that wasn't there previously or prior to that?

Just a couple more to highlight: lack of school enrollment or attendance. What is the reasoning behind that? Is it because they're working? Is it because they're just having issues accessing enrollment in the school system? That's why I said that some things could appear individually. They could be something as innocent as just

being not able to enroll, but together they start to paint a different picture. I also invite Carlyn to add from her experience and expertise what she's also seen in her work.

Carlyn Sperling (CS): Thank you, Regina. I think you hit a lot of it. The one example I think of that adds some context to this is we had a youth in care who would often AWOL. When she came back to us, it was the same rehearsed and repeated story that really wasn't plausible. In addition to that, [she] had reoccurring STDs. She would be treated for that in our care. She would AWOL again, come back with the same story and the same health issues. Those were some red flags we had to then later be able to identify that she was indeed being trafficked.

[pause]

CH: Thank you both so much for sharing and opening up our first learning objective here. We're going to now move into a case scenario. You'll see this case scenario showed through each learning objective, and so we'll come back to it each time. This is where we're hoping that you all can take what our experts have shared and apply the knowledge there. Our case scenario for this learning objective is to focus on those warning signs of exploitation and trafficking.

We have Camila, who is a 17-year-old unaccompanied refugee minor, or URM, from Honduras who lives in a foster care agency's independent living girls group home. She came to the US hoping to reunify with an adult cousin she believed would support her. At first, Camila spoke positively about the relationship. Recently, however, she has begun to withdraw. She appears tense when weekends with her cousin approach and guards her phone, and spends long periods online late at night. The cousin has given her expensive electronics for her upcoming 18th birthday, suggested "quick cash jobs," and told her to keep the conversations private. In a recent therapy session, Camila shared that someone close to her pressured her to send private photos and implied there would be consequences if she refused.

CH: Thinking through Camila's case scenario here, and maybe that has brought to light a case that you are currently working on, we'd love to hear what possible warning signs of trafficking or exploitation stand out to you in this situation. Again, we're using Slido here. Go ahead and scan that or join on your web browser.

Expensive gifts, absolutely. Sexual trafficking, withdrawal, secrecy. Secrecy is a really good one to point out and to be mindful of, especially thinking through, is secrecy because of team boundaries and wanting that healthy boundary set between relationships with caregivers and staff, or is this something that we need to really look at as a warning sign, which it is in this situation? Anger, up late at night, change in disposition, being told to stay silent on what's happening, pressuring those explicit photos, hiding her phone again, some sense of isolation. Yes, way to pick up on that. That wasn't completely clearly named, and so you all really captured that.

Wonderful. I appreciate all of your responses here, and I think we're ready to jump into our next set of discussion here. Our second learning objective is going to be focusing on labor practices, digital access, and grooming tactics that all contribute to youth vulnerability. For these next two slides, we're going to hear from our panelists again. Carlyn, I would love to hear from you as we go to our next slide here. What are the impacts of immigration and labor practices on newcomer youth?

CS: Thank you, Claire. As indicated with some other signs of trafficking, specifically for labor practices, what we can often get confused or can be masked is working under the table. We know, especially for some of our immigrant folks and the challenges with legal status, many of them turn to under-the-table work, but in many ways, that can also be a risk for exploitation and trafficking. On the same thread, the limited legal work options that can push youth towards doing that. Then fear of deportation or the system involvement really discourages youth from reporting because they maybe fear the repercussions of being identified as undocumented, or identified as working under-the-table, or even just the fear of some ICE involvement.

There's also, not listed on this slide, but the fear of immigration impacts, so even the ability to get that documentation. For example, admission of drug trafficking through coercion, whether that's like you were forced to carry a backpack across the border or forced to stand on the corner, to be a lookout. That drug trafficking involvement, even when forced, even when a minor, that can result in lack of viability for certain legal relief. There are some youth who may withhold that information if they are aware of some legal implications for doing so.

CH: Thanks, Carlyn. It's helpful for me, at least, as I listen to you both share, to be able to put this into practice into some of the specific. I'm not in direct care right now, but I can remember some of those situations where I'm like, "Oh, I could name that a little bit better with this information." Thank you for taking that and applying it from what you've seen. I also wanted to ask you here our next question, which would be, what online dynamics or grooming tactics have you seen put newcomer youth at risk? Carlyn, I'll start with you again.

CS: Part of my history of opening the girls' independent living home for refugees here in Michigan, as mentioned in my bio. This was one of the most eye-opening experiences during that, when it comes to trafficking and digital access. We've had situations where I've seen a lot of youth who are constantly facetimeing somebody, typically the trafficker, and out of concern for what they, really, for a controlling tactic from the trafficker's perspective. Then, in addition, maybe that trafficker holding the financial support for that phone to be active and then using that as a tactic to further that coercion. Threatening to remove their data services or take the physical cell phone back if they do not follow some of their expectations. Then I'm going to hand it off to Regina to add from her experience here.

RG: Thank you, Carlyn. This really speaks to me because one of the new areas in where the IRC has actually become more involved in its fight to combat trafficking is now in a new project in which we are using AI and tech to combat trafficking. When I see here as this question, the truth of the matter is that one major risk factor that we've seen is the social media and gaming apps used for recruitment. Traffickers approach newcomer youth in these spaces pretending to be friends and mentors, and they slowly build trust in these private messages, for example. Because these platforms feel very casual and familiar, youth may not recognize the danger until that connection is well-established, which makes it much more difficult for us then to step in and how do we support them.

Another warning sign is secrecy around phone use and sudden changes in online behavior. As we look at the relationship with apps and with the phones and with now technology, one of those things that as far from a behavioral component that we hear

more and more about, particularly when maybe working with parents who are working with youth who've been trafficked, they talk about, for example, things that they saw that they didn't connect, like hiding screens or deleting messages or being online late at night. These behaviors often reflect someone that may be coaching them or controlling them behind the scenes. In this case, as we talk about newcomer youth caregivers who already face language and cultural barriers, this can be easy to miss.

The last one we talked earlier about gifts. This is part of grooming. We see that flattery or promises of stability or different types of help. Even like I mentioned, meeting the most basic needs. If a youth is experiencing financial strain or uncertainty them and their families, for example, these offers can feel like real opportunities. Over time, that's when they create dependency, making it harder for a young person to see the situation as exploitative. These dynamics just highlight overall why online spaces are such powerful tools for traffickers, and why early awareness and open communication with them is so critical. That's why we've also now use this space as a place to combat this issue.

CH: Thank you, Regina. Oh my goodness, a couple of the things that you mentioned, even that last point that you hit on of connecting that we do use technology as prevention and as awareness, but it's also used as that control and manipulation. I thought that was really a nice thing to highlight here is, where can we find that balance? The building trust piece, I think that's so helpful for folks to remember and to use as a reframe, that there's a connect, there's a trust that's built where you feel that this is a benefit for them, like you said, offers those real opportunities.

Let's go ahead now, and we'll turn it back to you all, returning to Camila and focusing on some of these systematic factors that Carlyn and Regina both covered. When we think back to her situation here, we know that Camila is a 17-year-old URM from Honduras living in a group home, reunified with a cousin that she trusted. Initially, it was that positive relationship, and now there's that withdrawal, feeling tense. He has also provided those "quick cash jobs," touching on the secrecy piece that was discussed in the earlier slides. Then also being pressured to send private photos and threatened.

CH: Bringing Camila back to your mind, we'll go into our Slido that is paired with this section here. This is going to be a "select all" option on your Slido, so different from the ones before, where you were typing in. Which systematic factors are influencing Camila's vulnerability? We have limited legal work options making her cousin's "quick cash job" seem appealing, fear of immigration or system consequences that could keep her from reporting concerns, constant access to phones and devices that allows her cousin to stay in private contact which increases risk of online grooming, her personal preference for spending time alone rather than with peers, and finally, trust in family and hopes for reunification that may mask unsafe behavior.

[pause]

CH: Wonderful. We're seeing some responses coming in here. Thank you so much for scrolling down here. Seeing most of them being the limited legal work options, which Carlyn touched on. Making cousin's "quick cash" seem appealing, constant

access to phones, fear of immigration or systems coming up here. Third. I'm glad to see that we're interacting with all of them because this is a learning opportunity here. That personal preference for spending time alone rather than with peers, that might be true. In the case of looking for what factors might be influencing that vulnerability, this is more of an individual trait versus that systematic factor. It might be still good to recognize and keep in mind for future service planning with Camilla that she does enjoy spending time alone. How can you safely incorporate new practices and routines for her? Not quite that systematic factor.

Wonderful. Thank you so much for engaging with this. We've got one more for you here for this learning objective. This will go back to that open response. How might constant phone and device access contribute to Camila's vulnerability in this scenario?

[pause]

CH: Seeing some responses come through here. Thank you. Lack of sleep, isolating from the outside world, control, predators on the web, might increase that risk for depression, having zero censorship of dangerous or harmful content increasing her risk to exploitation, which is a really good point. That we'll go into bringing up some strategies here in our last one, but something that could be used as education. Who else can engage with their conversation, false sense of belonging. I think that's really important to tie back to-- I believe it was Regina who said, "It offers real opportunities and that trust builds connection." It feels safe. It might even feel good to be seen, but us being able to notice that this is absolutely a risk factor and identifying that. Attachment issues. It can lead to attachment issues. Manipulation, hyper-stimulation that affects focus and clarity and decision-making. These are so insightful, y'all.

The phone can be isolation and making vulnerable to any and all offers. There's no awareness of what is safe and what's not, right and wrong, healthy versus unhealthy, or abuse. Thanks, all. It sounds like you're really capturing what we're discussing and being able to apply it into these case scenarios for Camila. Which brings us to our next slide for our third learning objective here, which I'm going to toss to Carlyn as well. What are youth-centered prevention strategies?

CS: Thank you, Claire. This is the role that we play in trying to prevent this as caregivers and supporters of these vulnerable youth. The first strategy that we can implement is really making sure that they have trusted adults in their lives. That can be their foster parents, their caregivers, a mentor, community members, maybe a faith leader. Having somebody to go to and that we know to be safe and to be a welcoming space for them. Then establish routines and communication channels with them. If you're a foster parent and they have a mentor through the local mosque, you may want to make sure that you have communication with them. There's those clear communication channels.

Then establishing safe routines. We may want to have a safe space in the home that they can go to, have those daily routines and rituals like morning check-ins, checking in the evening, how they're doing, to just really continue fostering that relationship and that trust and communication channels. Then, of course, teaching online safety and digital boundaries. A lot of times, what we encounter is that these kids don't know the warning signs. They don't maybe know that they are entering into what

may be an exploitive or trafficking situation. Helping them understand what is grooming? What is manipulation? Can help prevent them from then maybe mistakenly or unknowingly entering some of those trafficking or exploiting spaces. [chuckles] Excuse me.

CS: Then we're going to also want to make sure that we are providing clear and accessible information to them on not only our laws, but healthy relationships. What is grooming versus flattering? As a teenager, that can be really challenging to know. Maybe what's appropriate from home country doesn't translate here in the same environment or the same space. Being able to make sure that they're aware of their rights as a member here in the United States. Also teaching how grooming and manipulation can affect emotional, physical, mental safety. Really establishing why it is a concern, why it is an issue, aside from this scary word of trafficking, it can lead to other issues as well. Giving them full insight into how those things can be challenging in all different aspects of their life.

Really making sure at the end of the day that the information that we're providing is not stigmatizing or judgmental. What we want to make sure to do is to reduce any shame or blame that will also open up those conversations that we hope to have with them. Lastly, normalize having ongoing conversations about work, relationships, and safety. Again, without shame. When kids start to feel that shame and blame, it's only human nature to then feel like it's necessary to keep it a secret, and that re-establishes that unhealthy cycle that we're trying to break. We'd want to make sure that we're having those check-ins, as mentioned in the first point of routines, that really feel safe to them, so a safe space, a safe opening of dialogue, and really safe responses to whatever they may share. Really have their voice involved in what that might look like. Some of them might say, "I don't want to talk about this right after school. I don't want to talk about it before I go to bed." Maybe there are reasons for that.

Wanting to include them in what should that routine look like, what should these questions look like. "I want to get to know you. I want to make sure you're safe," and really supporting them through that.

CH: I have to refrain from commenting on so many of the things that you just shared that were so helpful, Carlyn. I think just having that sense of the way that we're modeling what a safe adult looks like now will be so important in the continuum of their life as well. Thank you for sharing that. I'd love to hear more of your expertise as well. How does cultural context shape prevention and safety planning strategies?

CS: Thank you. Certainly, culture plays a huge context and can differ when we're talking about what is the healthy relationship that might look different in a cultural norm in some other countries than it does here. Keeping that context in mind and awareness may help bring understanding as to where the gaps and understandings are here. What's the definition of safe? What's both emotionally, physically, and mentally? Then also community and cultural supports. I'm from a part of Michigan that is blessed to be rich with many culture groups and places of faith, but not every community is that way.

We want to do our best to get them connected with those community and cultural supports to, again, provide that prevention and safety planning. Then from here, I'm going to pass it to Regina to continue talking about her experience.

RG: Thanks, Carlyn. Just picking up on a few of the bullets here on the slide, which I want to highlight, as you've mentioned, that language and culture matter a lot. Information isn't in someone's language or doesn't reflect their cultural values. It may not reach them effectively. I think it's very important for us to adapt our messages and not just translate, but adapt them to the context, and I think that will make a difference. Using also trusted community voices or familiar ways of sharing information, I think that helps to build trust and makes people more likely to act on it. I also want to highlight migration history and reunification hopes.

People's migration history or lived experience, and family hopes play a big role. That can affect whether they report unsafe situations or seek help. Safety planning should take into account those concerns and, I think, find ways to offer support without creating that extra risk. Lastly, balancing, for example, respect for culture with protection. I think we can honor cultural values and involve community support while still prioritizing safety. I think it's important to know. That means understanding the strengths in the community, but also being ready to gently challenge norms that might keep harm hidden.

That may be a little different of how we-- it's that respect for culture, but also the norms and rules and laws here in the US as well. In short, prevention and safety planning are most effective, I think, when they're culturally responsive. They're practical, and they're built on trust.

Claire: Thanks, Regina. Again, being able to take a couple of things from what you just shared, that important reminder of not just translating, but also adapting and continuing to do that. Maybe you need to retranslate with new populations coming in from different regions or having different experiences based on what's happening locally and globally. Then also not just saying, "Yes, I checked off connecting with a cultural group and I've done that," but what you said about understanding those strengths.

Then also, gently challenging and educating communities is that lifelong commitment to learning for all involved, especially as we're relying so much more on our community to be partners, to walk with youth and not behind or ahead of them. For our next question here, Carlyn, I'll ask you to start us off. What challenges have you faced when implementing these strategies that we've chatted about, and how did you address them?

Carlyn: Yes, thank you, Claire. It's easy to talk about what's impossible in theory, but to implement them can be difficult. The first bullet point here, the youth often lack understanding or awareness of trafficking and exploitation. Again, grooming versus flattery can be hard for kids to identify. Also, that grooming part, it feels good when you don't recognize it. Maybe you're getting those expensive gifts. They're providing things to you for free. Those concerning red flags might not be red for a young adult.

We have utilized different resources here to have outside community partners come and talk about healthy relationships and run classes on that. It's not me or my

agency staff. I'm just sharing this with our young adults, but also these community people who can reiterate the same things that we're saying. We've also done it from a law enforcement perspective of having the FBI come in to talk about what trends they see and how they've prosecuted or the challenges that they've had in those situations. Those are the challenges that I've had and some responses. I'm going to hand it over to Regina to talk a little bit about her.

RG: Thank you, Carlyn. I think that what I want to highlight is the role of trauma and some lived experience, how that can impact as we implement these strategies, what can impact that. I think that many times those that we work with, and we've discussed it throughout the last 45 minutes or so, that what can feel unhealthy to us might feel normal or even safe because that's what's known. When we talk about healthy boundaries or healthy relationships, it can feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable to some youth or even the adults who support them. To work through that, that's the core piece about that rapport-building and building trust and moving at their pace.

We use a lot of peer support as well, survivor voices, the importance of making that space, and showing a partnership with other survivors so that they can see real examples that can be relatable and not judgmental. Then the limited buy-in, the point that is stated here on limited buy-in and strong competition from traffickers. As we mentioned earlier, they are so skilled at targeting and building trust quickly, often faster than service providers and support systems can. I feel like we're always trying to catch up to what is the latest move, and we are being more reactive, unfortunately, than being proactive.

RG: It definitely makes it difficult to get buy-in from those who've been exploited or trafficked and may emotionally already be connected to those individuals. To address that, we need to show up in those same spaces, which is what I was talking about. For example, partnership with a tech company to start to address trafficking through the same avenues or platforms in which they're being targeted, in which the traffickers are using to recruit and to target youth. Using it then with honest messaging, using trusted voices, such as peers, and I mentioned survivors.

We have to be honest and transparent about what our role is. The goal here is not to compete against the traffickers, but to bring that honesty about, look at what's happening. Look at these different things that are happening in these spaces. How everything, all these opportunities, there's more-- to borrow a term that's used widely in the trafficking sector, look beneath the surface of things. Even when something looks flashy and looks very appealing to make sure that it is truly what is being offered. We recognize that we can't expect immediate change.

We also have to be mindful of the age of those that we're working with, but meeting people where they're at and just being consistent and reliable over time will hopefully get us to where we need to be.

CH: I loved how both of you brought in the framing of-- the way that you're talking about it, just models that removing the shame and while talking about youth in this topic. I loved that, don't compete against the trafficker. Also, naming the fact that sometimes we are behind as service providers and not as up to date as we wish we could be. Learning with the youth at the same time and having that honesty and that

directness. Balance is so important, and you both captured that so well. Let's revisit Camila one more time here.

CH: Thinking with the lens of this last learning objective of prevention and safety planning strategies. We remember that Regina is a 17-year-old from Honduras in a group home, reunified with a cousin that she initially thought she trusted. Now there are some of those signs where she's withdrawing, becoming tense. Cousin is being flattering by offering gifts and this quick cash. We've got that secrecy coming into play. Then, finally, remembering the pressure that she's experiencing to send private photos, and also the feeling of being threatened.

We have another select all here for our next Slido. Go ahead and pull that back up, please, on your smartphones or joining in the web browser. Our question here is, what youth-centered steps would you include in Camila's safety plan? We first have explore and identify adults that Camila trusts. Teach and practice online safety skills, privacy skills, blocking, reporting, and recognizing grooming or sextortion tactics. Discuss US labor laws and healthy relationship boundaries in a culturally sensitive way. Establish consistent group home support and activities to reduce isolation.

CH: Make sure Camila knows what and how to connect with the resources if she feels unsafe. Finally, discourage Camila from forming any new friendships or connections. I see we've got some folks in there. Awesome. This is one of the select alls as well. Making sure Camila knows what and how to connect with resources if she feels unsafe. I think that's such an important part because just the way that we know how to connect with resources might not be, and most likely is not, the same way that youth are going to have access to and trust to do that, and confidence to do that.

Explore and identify who she trusts. Teach and practice the online safety skills that we've gone over. Using that consistently. Sometimes, if we work with a youth and we've done the things where they've blocked and they've reported, but let's check back in because maybe there's now communication from a different possible threat or whatnot. Making sure that we're not just doing that once and having that be the complete plan. I think, yes, you're grabbing the "wrong" answer here. Discouraging Camila from forming any new friends or connections. That might feel like a protective instinct, but we do want to educate and then rebuild a community so that she and all youth can thrive in a safe way.

CH: This brings us to the Q&A portion of our roundtable session. If you haven't submitted in the Q&A, you're more than welcome to. We'll be prioritizing a little bit of time here, and you'll get to see all of our faces here on the screen together. I'm going to actually start with, since we had some conversation around law enforcement. Carlyn, I think you mentioned that. I wanted to ask, what are the challenges law enforcement faces in prosecuting traffickers?

CS: Thank you, Claire. Yes, it is a challenge, especially when we are talking about our youth who are legally adults. Grooming is not a crime. It is challenging to be preventative in a legal sense. If someone is showing signs of grooming, that is not a criminal offense. However, when it reaches the level of exploitation or trafficking, it is. As I mentioned earlier, often our youth don't recognize that they're being trafficked or exploited. Even when it does become clear, they may not want to participate in any

legal battles or criminal charges out of fear of their own immigration status, out of fear of their trafficker, that involvement. That can be challenging.

Then I think, lastly, just proof. Proof that it reached this level, that it wasn't consensual, that it wasn't something that the youth did willingly, can be a high burden to reach in the legal system here.

CH: Thank you, Carlyn. Appreciate that. Regina, a question for you. What can individuals or communities do to help prevent trafficking?

RG: Sure. It's really interesting because sometimes when people hear about human trafficking, I think I've seen a couple of different reactions. One of them being like, "Oh, that's something that happened somewhere else, not in my community," or "It won't touch me in any way, shape, or form," or that it feels so overwhelming. How can they join the movement to combat trafficking? I think that we all play an individual role. There's different ways I think. One of them is raising awareness. Raising awareness is a combination of both educating ourselves, which I think that's what folks are here doing today.

I think that that's the first step. Then, educating others, having a conversation tonight around the dinner table, and saying, "Hey, I was in this webinar today and heard this really interesting information. Let me share it with you." I think also sometimes it's around not the framing of trafficking, per se, but then the risk factors. Strengthening those community safety nets, teaching others, teaching children about personal boundaries, about online safety, how to seek help. I think those things are very important. There's one that many don't know about, practicing ethical choices. Once again, talking about online, there's different apps and tools.

Back in the day, there was one called-- I think it's still around slavery footprint, which allows you to calculate how many-- the question is how many slaves work for you? That needs to be reframed. What I like about the exercise, per se, it's a survey in which you talk about your life. You talk about, do you own a home? Do you wear cotton? Do you eat chocolate or shrimp? Wear a diamond ring? It shows you how all about supply chain, about the involvement, about different forced labor, and how some of our practices around what we purchase, where we purchase. Fast fashion, cheap goods, and things like that, how we as consumers play a role in that.

I think it's another part of framing the trafficking issue outside of what a lot of people know about the sex trafficking part, seeing also what forced labor and labor trafficking. Lastly, just advocacy. I think that supporting laws to protect victims and hold traffickers accountable. I think just in general, our advocacy and our voice matters. To use it and use it in these instances as well.

CH: Thank you so much, Regina. The fact of naming, we can talk about this after, and we should have these conversations. We don't need to just have them with service providers. We shouldn't. We should have them with folks outside of this work as well. Carlyn, I actually have a follow-up question. I'm wondering if you could dive into, do the youth have the burden of proof about consent? Does the law not protect youth in this regard?

CS: Thank you. That's a great question. I'm nearly certain every state has different laws about what that looks like. I don't want to pretend that I'm in law enforcement or an attorney of any sort. I do believe that in most states, youth have a bit more protection and that trusted adults may be able to speak on their behalf. I think that age is a little bit different per state on what that looks like and what is considered consent, and whatnot, especially when it comes to sex trafficking or labor laws may look different.

Yes, I believe there's a little bit more protection for youth in allowing adults to speak on their behalf, but certainly there is, regardless, a burden of proof that's required that can be challenging to provide.

CH: Thanks, Carolyn. Thanks, folks, for submitting your questions. Regina, I wanted to ask one of the ones that was submitted here. Sometimes it feels hard to establish authority with teenagers who are used to operating independently, taking care of, migrating by themselves, that sense of independence that they arrive with. Any advice for this question?

RG: I remember a particular case of two young ladies from Guatemala that I worked with in our agency collaboration with the URM program, and them running away from the placement. This was very early on in my career. One of those things, luckily, we were able to reunify with them. I think it was the first lesson for me around the fact that a lot of programming then-- I think there's been a huge evolution since. The expectation of them now being, because of their age, being youth in the US when they've had this lived experience, in which maybe either in home country and due to circumstances, they're already functioning as adults and have lived maybe beyond that.

I think that a lot of times what's been important is to be clear around what are our expectations, what are their expectations, and seeing if we can need a space. There are certain things that, unfortunately, based on the fact of age and legal, the legalities of it, but I think it's also being clear of that and looking at what are all the options to address, what are their hesitations, what is not working. I think sometimes we do have the luxury and sometimes we don't, but being transparent about it, I think, is very important.

Just in treating them with that respect and so that they see that you're a partner here, you're a partner with them, and walking this journey and this junction with them, and not another authority there. I know, Carolyn, maybe on your end, if you want to add, working in the URM program.

CS: Thank you, Regina. I echo a lot of what you said. I think when we're talking about our youth who have experience maybe more than we have, and it puts them in life experience maybe beyond their age, coming alongside them as a mutual friend, mentor, adult, versus trying to establish authority and maybe a sense of power. Entering that power struggle with them would be more beneficial when you're looking at your relationship. I often use the phrase of, "You might know more than me in this area. I might know more in this area. Let's work together in establishing that partnership versus power dynamic."

CH: Thank you both. I think you both have touched on this a little bit, but if you have anything specific to add to this developmental context here. Any different strategies or concerns when youth are in that 18 to 21 range? I'll pass it to Carlyn, sorry. [laughs]

CS: Thank you. It does look a little bit different because they have more rights and they have more freedoms to make decisions for themselves. I think our young girls in care who often find themselves in romantic relationships that, from my perspective as a foster care agency, seeing those red flags for trafficking, but they are invested in that relationship for various reasons. I think, again, just reducing that shame, keeping that communication line open. Not entering a power dynamic and pushing them away and pushing them towards that out of, again, a power struggle is important.

I think we really just enter a role of empowering and supporting despite the circumstances they might be in, to then be there to support when they may be ready to disclose more, and then maybe provide them with some of those supports. Regina, anything you would add there?

RG: No, I think you captured it beautifully.

CH: Thank you. Let's think about the support that survivors might need after escaping trafficking. What kinds of supports would you suggest, Carlyn, for folks who have escaped trafficking?

CH: Thank you. I think, again, just that lack of shame and blame environment and relationship is going to be very critical to their support. They're really going to need wraparound services when they're ready to leave that situation. Of course, the therapeutic support, but even some of those physical, tangible needs, like basic necessities, a safe shelter. Not just any shelter, but one that actually feels safe to them, that they feel comfortable staying in. Maybe medical and dental care, depending on what they have been through, to support them in that way.

I don't believe that the best support, especially just leaving a situation like that, is a justice-oriented support and pushing them towards legal involvement, but allowing them to make that decision for themselves, and being able to support them. Especially with our refugee and immigrant youth, we're going to want to play more of a clinical role in supporting them versus a legal or justice-oriented role.

CH: Thank you, Carlyn. Regina, next one for you. What policies or laws do you think could make the biggest difference?

RG: Of course, I think that a lot of the focus right now, for example, with anti-trafficking is, of course, keep supporting laws and legislations which strengthen the identification and response, and strengthen the system of care for survivors. A lot of the focus is, unfortunately, on when someone has already been exploited. I think a focus on prevention is key. We look at how much of programming and even funding available is focused on prevention, and it's a minute amount of a larger pool.

I think also complementing that, what really makes a difference is policies that focus on access to basic-- going back to Carlyn's point about basic needs, and for safe

housing, stable school environment. Mental health support and services that actually are built with experiences of youth in mind. When those supports are in place, young people are less vulnerable to the kinds of situations that traffickers exploit. It also means then that, as case managers and those who support the care of newcomer youth, we spend less time putting out those fires and more time building that trust and supporting, healing, and helping youth find that real stability and a hope for their future.

CH: Thank you so much, Regina. I wanted to just bring some light to some of the really thoughtful comments that were submitted in the Q&A. We had an attendee share that abuse and trafficked immigrant populations used to be eligible for SNAP and Medicaid, so that abusers and traffickers couldn't use those benefits to trap victims in coercion situations. However, the special eligibility for benefits has been eliminated by recent federal legislation. There it is. We wanted to draw attention to that, and thank you for bringing that up about that's what happens.

As we change, as policies change, and what not, it can't stop here. We have to keep being adaptable and flexible and be creative in the way that we are supporting survivors of trafficking and exploitation. We also had a comment here that affordable housing would be a really good safety measure for vulnerable youth and women. We echo that completely. We had also someone asking about resources. You are going to have two full slides of resources at the end here. I would invite either Regina or Carolyn, if you have anything specific that you can think of that's in different languages, feel free to share. Otherwise, there's some good chunk of them that you'll get after this as well.

CH: All right. We have made it to where we review what we started with. We hope that you are now able to identify signs of trafficking and exploitation that might impact newcomer youth before and after arrival, describe how systematic factors like labor practices, digital access, and grooming tactics contribute to the vulnerability of newcomer youth. Finally, use prevention and safety planning strategies that center youth voice and cultural context. This is the portion where we ask you to help us. If you can take a moment to scan the QR code on your phone, we also have dropped the survey link in the chat.

This is super helpful for us, and then it's important to continue improving future trainings for you all. It is six questions long, only takes about 60 seconds to complete. We're going to give you a little moment of silence here to get that checked out of your way. Complete that now if that's helpful, and you won't have to do so after the recording or after the live and the recording is sent out.

[pause]

CH: Here is that list of recommended resources. We will be sharing these via the slide deck as a PDF that will be posted on the Switchboard website, as well as shared via email with all registrants within 24 hours of the roundtable. We have great resources from Switchboard, as well as external resources featuring different organizations, a lot of different types as well. If you are looking for maybe a short-term read or a longer dive into rewatching a webinar, we try to give you a variety of different resources to support this work that you all are doing.

Finally, we invite you to stay connected with us. For more training and technical assistance, which is free, you can do this by signing up for our newsletter. You can reach us on social media, email us at switchboardat@rescue.org. Visit us at switchboardta.org, as well as find us on social media at switchboardta. On behalf of all of us at Switchboard, we thank you so much for learning with us. We hope to see you again at our final session for this series, which is November 5th. A huge thank you to Regina and Carlyn for so gracefully sharing expertise, experiences, and strategies. So appreciative of this. We hope that all of you take this into your work and have a wonderful rest of your week.

The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.