

Empowering Human Trafficking Survivors

On May 6, 2021, Michael Billet, senior manager of policy research in the Employment Policy Division at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, kicked off the [Business Solutions: Empowering Human Trafficking Survivors](#) forum.

Billet presented an overview of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Task Force to Eradicate Human Trafficking, which develops toolkits to raise awareness and provide education, hosts programs with stakeholders, and meets with federal government officials to advocate on behalf of the interests of Chamber members. In addition, the task force gives a voice to the survivor community by providing companies with a platform.

Glenn Spencer, senior vice president of the Chamber’s Employment Policy Division, said that the objective of the forum is to lift up individuals who have been marginalized. This event follows

the January 2020 summit *Integrating Services for Trafficking Survivors*.

After Spencer’s remarks, Ashleigh Chapman, president and CEO of the Alliance for Freedom, Restoration, and Justice (AFRJ), interviewed Crystal Crowley, Senior Diversity and Hire Hope Program Manager at Randstad Sourceright.

AFRJ and Randstad Sourceright have been partners since the inception of the Hire Hope Program. According to Crowley, the program provides mentorship and job opportunities to women who are at risk or have been trafficked.

hire hope phases.



women 18-40 | HS diploma | GED | background check | transportation | interview assessment

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The Hire Hope Program has three elements—restore, grow, and thrive.

- Restore is a 12-week interactive career readiness training program. The classes, which are facilitated by Randstad employees, focus on building confidence, honing business acumen, building teams, and preparing for interviews, among other soft skills.
- Grow is a 23-week paid apprenticeship that provides on-the-job training and incentives for transportation, child care, meals, and clothing.
- Thrive consists of placement in a temporary or permanent employment opportunity and six months of career transition support.

Owing to the success of the Hire Hope Program, Randstad Sourceright launched TRANSCEND in 2021. TRANSCEND's mission is to reskill 40,000 workers and provide resources to disadvantaged populations.

Following the interview, May Collins of the AFRJ Freedom Council, gave the keynote address. She said that the council's mission is to catalyze business engagement—alongside government, nonprofit, and community efforts—in ways that impact millions of lives. AFRJ requests that participating business stakeholders sign the End Human Trafficking Pledge.

Spencer interviewed Nicole Robyn, director of Freedom Society and a member of the Freedom Business Alliance, the only global network that aims to combat commercial exploitation and human trafficking by scaling the freedom business movement.

Robyn spoke about her journey of becoming a human rights advocate. Her passion stemmed from a life-changing trip to India in 2011 where she witnessed the exploitation of women. Upon returning to the U.S., she started Freedom Society, a gift shop and tearoom that helps create sustainable freedom. It employs survivors of human trafficking through its products and profits, with a portion of its sales given to the Freedom Business Alliance.

Closing out the program, Billet moderated a panel with Lucy Bloom, executive director of Veronica's Voice; Mary David, human trafficking specialist, media commentator, and television host; Elena Shahnaiian, co-founder and CEO of Qualified; and Theresa Flores, program director of U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking.

The panel focused on three key themes—recovery, reintegration, and resilience.

Recovery: If a trafficked person is arrested for prostitution or an affiliated drug-related charge, an arrest or criminal conviction may be a barrier to employment.

For those who are charged with state crimes, David and Bloom spoke about the need for advocacy efforts in state legislatures regarding enactment of vacatur and expungement legislation to ease reentry.

According to Bloom, "In Kansas, Veronica's Voice, together with the business community, is educating public officials on the importance of trafficked individuals being gainfully employed."

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Reintegration: Shahnaian spoke about the role of the Qualified Career Development Academy in providing life skills training.

She said, “We believe in job opportunities for our participants based on their skill sets and want to make sure that the role they are stepping into is going to be a good fit.”

Flores provided an overview of the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT), the designated U.S. member of Talitha Kum. Members of Talitha Kum are incoming Sister-led national and regional networks that are linked to their national conference on Major Superiors. In the U.S., USCSAHT relies on its partner organizations to provide job training, mentoring, and employment opportunities, among other services, for women who have been exploited.

Resilience: David said, “We need to do a better job of educating the public on human trafficking, especially how trafficking manifests itself. Also, we need to recognize that the journey of survivors doesn’t end the moment they are portrayed as saved. There is a whole process that needs to happen for rehabilitation and restoration to occur.”

Flores highlighted the important role that businesses play in the community. She said, “Business owners should know the source of the products they are selling. Furthermore, if a business employs a third party such as contractors, it is the owner’s responsibility to educate them on trafficking indicators.”

Both Bloom and Shahnaian explained how COVID-19 altered their business models.

Veronica’s Voice moved 60% of its classes online. The nonprofit expanded its services to include anger management, financial literacy, computer literacy, and career readiness training and moved its therapeutic services in-house.

Qualified pivoted to an online format. Because of a shelter-in-place order, the organization trained its volunteers on best practices, including creating a designated workspace, maintaining work-life balance, understanding crisis management, and operating in a virtual environment

Panelists concluded the discussion by urging businesses to engage further as it’s not only good business practice, but it’s the right thing to do.