

FROM DATA TO ACTION

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN TRANSFORM THE FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING

With hundreds of thousands of people being trafficked in the United States on any given day, it is undeniable that the anti-trafficking movement has taken up a big fight. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the individuals working in this industry are doing so with severely limited resources, time, and manpower. Much of their time is spent reacting to the epidemic of trafficking and addressing the needs of survivors while traffickers continue to exploit more individuals each day. The people serving survivors dream of a day when their skills, talents, and dedication will no longer be needed to fight human trafficking — a day where justice and healing are available to every survivor.

Technology and data analysis can play a vital role in building an anti-trafficking response that makes those dreams a reality. There is room for the exact kind of improvements that technology can offer in every category of the anti-trafficking response, from victim identification to survivor aftercare to prosecution of offenders to legislative change. As technology and its ability to translate data into action continue to improve, the possibilities for transforming the anti-trafficking industry grow along with it.

TECHNOLOGY & SURVIVOR IDENTIFICATION

The need for identification training is great — only 1% of human trafficking victims will ever be identified, and only a tiny number of those identified will receive the aftercare they desperately need. While in-person courses and individual training opportunities are certainly impactful for educating the general public, numerous opportunities for in-depth training initiatives exist

among individuals with a higher likelihood of interacting with victims while they are still being trafficked. These key groups include first responders, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, educators, and childcare providers.

Technology makes it possible to facilitate large-scale and high-quality training programs for these key groups. As data collection on trafficking increases and trends emerge, these training opportunities will continue to provide more specific information and risk factors, refining and enhancing the abilities of key group members to identify more and more survivors over time.

The statistics and trends available through software and tech innovation also hold the power to remodel how members of key identification groups understand and identify survivors of trafficking. With more available data and the tools to interpret it, we can better understand how victims are targeted, what vulnerabilities they have, and which methods traffickers use to keep power over them. This knowledge can continually inform more comprehensive and effective screening protocols that can be implemented for staff in hospitals, schools, police stations, etc.

IMPROVING THE CONTINUUM OF CARE

Technology and data analytics also offer remarkable potential for building, growing, and improving the continuum of aftercare for survivors of trafficking. The impact of a trafficking experience on a survivor's mental, physical, and emotional well-being is immense and significant, long-term care is necessary for their success in healing.

However, there are notably inadequate resources and support for restorative care programs across the United States, even beyond the lack of spaces available for identified survivors. These safe house programs often find it challenging to balance their need for staff with accessible funding, or their knowledge of trafficking with the actual experiences and trauma of survivors. Most safe homes have little time and few resources to evaluate how well their programs are serving survivors, even though that information is exactly what they need to improve their ability to care for them.

As a whole, the anti-trafficking industry needs to understand what the current aftercare landscape looks like before it can identify and improve the overall response to trafficking. This approach requires data collection and analysis, but there is very little funding available to either safe house programs or external organizations to support that level of data collection.

However, if additional funding was used to address that barrier, technology would allow analysts to examine the processes, resources, and allocation of resources in the anti-trafficking industry. By studying how this work is completed, technology empowers us to spot inefficiencies and take advantage of opportunities for tangible and transformative improvements to restorative aftercare, without using limited resources for ineffective processes.

FOCUSING PROSECUTION

Technology has become vitally important for law enforcement to identify and prosecute traffickers and buyers, as well as to respond appropriately to survivors of trafficking. A large proportion of trafficking survivors have a criminal record when they should have received help and access to resources to find freedom and healing. Training programs for law enforcement officers and prosecutors are desperately needed, but an approach to preventing and anticipating trafficking is equally necessary.

Data collection and analysis help law enforcement to

understand the current state of trafficking, which in turn enables them to look forward and plan for a more broadly effective approach in their jurisdiction. Technology can provide answers to questions like, “How do we predict where trafficking may happen?”, “How are traffickers and buyers using technology to avoid detection and facilitate exploitation?”, and, “What are the risk factors in our community that contribute to trafficking?”. Asking and exploring these kinds of questions allows law enforcement and prosecutors to take an active role in preventing further trafficking situations and identifying ongoing cases for what they truly are.

The insights provided by data analysis can also inform how first responders and law enforcement respond appropriately to potential victims of sex trafficking. With updated screening protocols based on current trafficking trends, these key individuals are better equipped to identify and support survivors. Technology can also streamline how survivors access the resources available to them and find more immediate support for their healing journey.

SUPPORTING LEGISLATION

New and innovative technology and data analysis processes are powerful tools when it comes to informing and developing legislation on human trafficking. Lawmakers require extensive data and projections to bring new proposals for addressing trafficking – and rightfully so. However, with an anti-trafficking landscape united through data sharing and technology utilization, there is unprecedented potential for passing laws capable of making significant headway in combating trafficking.

Collaboration is needed on a federal level for developing legislation to protect survivors and prosecute offenders. With common definitions, survivor protections, and sentencing guidelines for traffickers and buyers, anti-trafficking professionals could better track and analyze the current national landscape of trafficking, as well as the effectiveness of the response to it. Without understanding where the need for improvement lies, legislation

addressing trafficking may not be working to address the most significant problems. Without unified processes for apprehending and prosecuting traffickers and buyers, there is only a small chance of making progress toward decreasing their numbers. Without understanding how pervasive trafficking is in the United States, our response to it will always fall short.

CONCLUSION

Technology and data analysis are incredibly powerful tools for combating trafficking, but we must first learn to take advantage of their abilities and bring their insights into every category of anti-trafficking work. By moving from data into action, we can move ever closer to realizing the dream of eradicating trafficking in the United States.

