



SAFE
HOUSE
PROJECT

+

OR

—

TIPS FOR SURVIVORS
WORKING WITH
ANTI TRAFFICKING
ORGANIZATIONS

Written by Survivors Hope and Sarah-Beth

A LETTER FROM HOPE

As a survivor, being given the opportunity to use my voice, tell my story, and help others who have been where I've been is an exciting prospect. I want to be empowered to paint a picture that reflects the truth, and honors survivors. But, as many survivors know, finding an organization to work with can be tricky.


It's important to find an organization that fits in with what you're passionate about. You want to work with an organization that is doing the kind of work that you want to be doing, be it education, safe houses, advocacy, or a number of other things.

It's important to find an organization that has a place to use your talents in a way that honors them and you, be it writing, public speaking, artwork, building things, or what ever your talent may be.

One of the most important things to think about when finding an organization to work with is finding an organization that operates well and appreciates your work as a survivor and as a person.

I hope this will be a helpful resource of pluses and minuses that can be evaluated when you are deciding whether to work with an organization.

Your friend,
Hope



***"When the whole world is silent,
even one voice becomes powerful." -
Malala Yousafzai***

1 / NEGATIVE INDICATORS

Warning signs to look for

2 / WHAT TO DO WITH THE NEGATIVES

Got the red flags, now what?

3 / POSITIVE INDICATORS

Positives you want an organization to have

4 / WHAT TO DO WITH THE POSITIVES

Got the green flags, now what?

5 / TIPS AS YOU GO FORWARD

A message to take with you

HOW DO I KNOW AN ORGANIZATION IS WORTH PARTNERING WITH?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS

Survivor Care

- Leadership, supervisors, or human resource staff of the organization ask to hear your story as a way to “prove” that you are a survivor.
- They have no idea what to do if you get triggered and have never asked how to help in that situation.
- They expect you to participate in projects on topics that are difficult or triggering for you that you would rather not participate in.
- They do not check in with you on how you are doing, but expect you to continue to do the work. You may get backlash if things are not going how they’ve decided they should be, even if you are struggling.
- They approach you telling them something was triggering for you or that you felt something was inappropriate with a “we can’t cater to everyone” or “well, another survivor said it was okay” attitude. Your opinion matters and should be heard. While the work they do may be triggering by nature and that is not always avoidable, they should be willing to listen to constructive criticism and ideas on different ways to handle triggering situations and topics.
- You are asked to do things such as writing, speaking, or consultations in exchange for services the organization offers.
- You are offered services in lieu of actual payment.
- Other survivors have had bad experiences with the organization.
- They ask survivors currently in their program to work for them. This is a power dynamic issue.
- You are told you should not want to identify as a survivor.
- You are advised against spending time with peer support groups, survivor mentors, or other survivors.

NEGATIVE INDICATORS

Survivors as Individuals

- They expect survivors to want to be advocates, write books, and speak publicly about their experiences. They do not allow room for other hobbies, interests, or career paths from survivors.
- They present you as the “face” of the organization, using your story as an advertising point or for shock value to move people to action. While sharing your story can be shocking for others and difficult for them to interact with, this should only ever be done to humanize you or show the magnitude of the situation, never to shock or sensationalize.
- They do not give you credit for your work. Things that you have written, artwork you have done, training you have consulted on, everything that you work on should be credited to you unless otherwise discussed.
- They view and treat you as the survivor on staff in a way that discounts your other talents and contributions. They reduce you to just a survivor.

Communication

- They lack follow through. They do not keep appointments, break promises, and are not reliable.
- They do more talking than they do listening in consultation conversations or when you bring up an issue.
- They never thank you for your work.
- The organization is not willing or able to admit when they have messed something up, an event flopped, or they are running short on funds.
- They drop contact with you when you are struggling or not fitting into the image they wanted for their organization, with no explanation.
- They do not offer support or suggestions for improvement when you are not completing the job well.
- Leadership has opposing viewpoints or otherwise contradict one another.

NEGATIVE INDICATORS

Management

- A new organization takes on several new projects at once and struggles to complete any of the projects. This may be due to lack of planning, funds, or volunteers.
- There is a lot of turnover in leadership in the organization.
- They aren't transparent about where money donated is going, even if you as part of the organization are doing the fundraising.
- Supervisors and those in leadership roles micromanage. They dictate every detail of your involvement, when and where you are seen, and can be seen as very controlling over all work done by you or others in the office.
- They appear to have "tunnel vision" focusing on one aspect above all else. This includes overlooking survivor care and the very people they advocate for. For example, if an organization is focused on abolition and they are so focused on staging rescues that they have no aftercare plans, that is counterproductive.
- Staff or volunteers go unchecked and are not held accountable for their actions by leadership.
- Management seems overly personally invested in you, including who you spend time with, how you are doing emotionally, and aspects of your story.

Education

- The organization is not diverse, or has the "token minority" member.
- The organization is not trauma informed. ALL organizations working with survivors should make an effort to have training for their staff and volunteers to be trauma informed, which means they recognize signs of trauma and avoid things that could re-traumatize survivors.
- The organization has no Survivor Leaders in leadership, on staff, or in consultation positions.
- The organization is resistant to survivors trying to provide input.
- The organization does not offer training to staff and volunteers prior to allowing them to work with survivors or community members.

NEGATIVE INDICATORS

Religion

- They are a religious organization promising faith as a fix all, and condemning survivors who still struggle for not having enough faith/not trying hard enough.
- The organization expects survivors to convert to their religion or follow strict guidelines not meant solely for their healing and protection in order to receive care. For example, requiring involvement in treatment groups or therapies vs requiring church attendance.
- They treat trauma responses (such as trauma bonding or promiscuity) as morality issues, shaming survivors for them instead of helping them with therapy and support.
- Their work is purely missional. They are seeking survivors who are in a vulnerable position to recruit them to their religion.
- They do not allow survivors of other religions or survivors that are LGBTQ+ to receive services.

Media

- The behind-the-scenes do not match the image that the organization puts out. For example, an organization may advertise that they are survivor informed, talking about you, but not allow your input or put you in any kind of leadership position.
- They are quick to connect you with the media to speak with about your story, sometimes seemingly with an agenda.
- They do not properly vet the media they connect survivors with and will later retract their support for that media outlet or journalist.
- They do not provide any kind of follow up or debriefing opportunity after sending you to meet with the media.
- They promise anonymity but the media says or does otherwise. They do not make an effort to protect your identity from the media, even when you've asked to remain anonymous.
- You are asked to exaggerate your story as a way of fitting the organization's narrative.



WHAT TO DO WITH THE NEGATIVES

Know that an organization does not have to have all of these warning signs to be one that you should stay away from.

- If you walk into an organization and they are immediately showing several of these signs, take it as a warning to take a step back and look for a different organization.
- If you begin to discover more and more issues the longer you work with an organization, it is completely okay to step away from the organization to find one that is better.

Having one or two of these signs is not necessarily indicative of a bad organization.

- Organizations are run by humans, who will inevitably mess up. There will probably be things that happen that shouldn't. There will probably be a red flag or two.
- This does not mean that you should be putting up with being mistreated or an organization behaving inappropriately.
- If the organization is not open to constructive criticism about these issues, do not forgive shortcomings or continue to work with them.

Please keep in mind you do not have to tolerate any behavior that appears here or any behavior that makes you feel exhausted, burnt out, uncomfortable, or like you are not enough.

POSITIVE INDICATORS

Survivor Care

- They are up front about their policies and procedures regarding employing survivors with criminal histories related to their trafficking.
- They are empowerment-based, with the ultimate goal of helping survivors be safe, self-sufficient, and thriving.
- Leadership checks in with you when doing difficult work to ensure that you are doing okay and taking enough time to take care of yourself.
- They allow you to share your story at a rate and level of detail that you are comfortable with, including when, where, why, and how much you share.
- Your well-being is valued over the work that you are doing and you are fully permitted to step back when needed.
- They offer flexibility (within reason) when needed when it comes to completing projects.

Survivors as Individuals

- They see you as a person, a member of the team.
- They provide opportunities for survivors to work for/volunteer with the organization that does not require them to disclose any part of their story at any point.
- They give you full power over your own story and when and who is told.
- They provide professional development for survivors outside of just things in the anti-trafficking world. Survivors are not expected to want to work in the anti-trafficking field or for that to be the only thing they are passionate about.
- They see you as more than just a survivor and acknowledge your gifts, talents, and abilities beyond being a survivor.
- They offer to pay you as a consultant just as they pay other consultants/professionals. (Not all organizations pay their consultants. The important thing here is that you are not being expected to do work for free that the same organization is paying others to do.)
- You are treated as someone of value to the team, with helpful insights and something unique to bring to the table.
- Your thoughts, opinions, and feelings are always listened to and taken seriously. This does not necessarily mean the organization will use your input or that you are in charge, but they are receptive to your unique voice as a survivor.

POSITIVE INDICATORS

Communication

- Survivor input is a key component of the projects they do.
- They are open and attentive when listening to your ideas while also being willing to point out when things won't work or do not align with their organization.
- If the role you play with the organization should come to an end for any reason, they discuss this with you and answer any questions you may have.
- Communication is open and available at all times during work on projects.
- They are willing to hear constructive criticism and change behaviors or practices that could be executed better.

Management

- There are survivors in leadership roles.
- Leadership is open to suggestions, constructive criticism, and being held accountable.
- Leadership also holds other members of leadership accountable.
- The organization must have a Board or Directors and a 501(c)(3) designation. If the organization does not have this, they are not filed as a nonprofit and you should discuss with them why.

Education

- They understand that working in the anti-trafficking field can be traumatizing for people who are not survivors as well.
- Self-care is a practice that is encouraged, for all staff, not just survivors.
- Members of the organization who are not survivors have an understanding that there are things that you've experienced that they cannot understand (particularly those in leadership roles.)
- They host regular training on trauma-informed care and, if they are an organization that involves education on trafficking matters, they include trauma-informed practices in their training.
- Staff and volunteers are adequately trained before working with survivors or community members, including training on dealing with the media

POSITIVE INDICATORS

Religion

- Faith is used as a way to speak redemption, healing, and growth into survivors. It is used to lift survivors up and tell them of their worth and a purpose in their life.
- Faith is optional in the organization regarding the care of survivors. While the organization may prefer that staff working with them are of a specific religion, the survivors are not expected to be and will still receive services if they are not.
- LGBTQ+ survivors and survivors of different faiths receive the same level of care as all other survivors.

Media

- They speak with survivors about sharing their story with the media and what that means, including the longevity of online media and the possibility of people recognizing them as a human trafficking survivor in their day to day life.
- They provide you with a press release or some kind of guide or preparation when going into interviews with the media.
- Media is screened before agreement upon interviews and some kind of protections are put in place for the survivor during the interview.
- They understand and readily accept that the survivor agreeing to do one speech or appearance is not agreeing to all future engagements and that consent must be renewed for each new speaking engagement.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE POSITIVES

Even the best of organizations may not have all of these traits.

- The more of them they have, the better.
- Feel free to decide on what positives are a “must” for you and seek out organizations that have those traits.

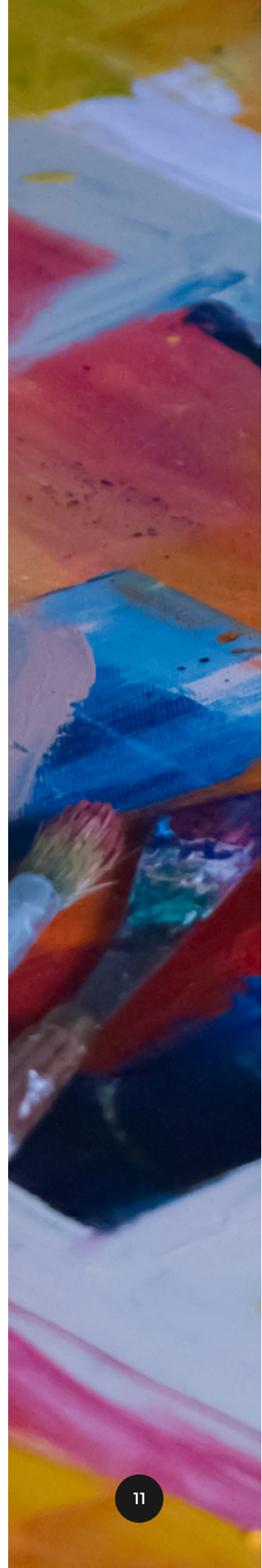
Bad organizations could have good traits.

- Do the positives outweigh the negatives?
- Is the organization willing to listen to you about issues you’re seeing?
- Are the positive traits an attempt to cover the negative?

Tell them.

- If they’re doing good work, tell them.
- If they’re supporting you well, tell them.
- If they check off all the things you were looking for in an organization, tell them.
- Organizations need to know what works (and what doesn’t.) Feedback is always helpful. Communication is so important.
- This includes telling other survivors you are connected with that this is a good/helpful/well managed/etc organization.

A good organization should always value you as a person. They should always empower you and help you grow, even if that means tough conversations sometimes. A good organization reminds you of your worth through word and action.



TIPS AS YOU GO FORWARD

“KNOW YOUR WORTH, HOLD YOUR OWN POWER, BE YOU.”

- MORGAN HARPER NICHOLS

- Your voice matters.
- Your story matters.
- You as a person matter.
- You deserve to be advocated for.
- You deserve to be heard.
- You are more than what happened to you.
- Your story belongs to you.
- You are capable.
- You are worthy.
- You are important.
- You are loved.
- Any organization that tells you otherwise is not worth working with.



SAFE HOUSE PROJECT

www.SafeHouseProject.org

info@safehouseproject.org

Charitable Tax ID: 82-3487081

Copyright © Safe House Project