



Exploring Prevention Audio Library
Series 2, Episode 16

Multnomah County Human Trafficking Prevention Toolkit

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This episode features claire barrera (they/them, elle), Sex Trafficking Senior Strategist with the Youth and Family Services Division of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Coordination Office at Multnomah County; and Megan Foster (she/her), Prevention Program Coordinator at Oregon SATF.

Meg: Thank you for listening to this short recording. I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator at the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force. In this series of SATF's Exploring Prevention Audio Library, we connect with people across Oregon to learn more about creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. Today we're joined by claire barrera from the Multnomah County Domestic and Sexual Violence Coordination Office. Claire, do you want to start by introducing yourself, your organization, and telling us a little bit about your roles?

Claire: Yeah, absolutely. I've worked at Multnomah County for about two and a half years as the sex trafficking specialist. Our office, the Domestic and Sexual Violence Coordination Office, focuses a lot on building collaborative relationships among people doing anti-violence work in our county. We also offer funding to community based organizations, and technical assistance. And so my job is all that, specifically as the sex trafficking specialist. I run and coordinate our sex trafficking collaborative, which is a big group of people who are stakeholders and service providers in anti-trafficking work in Multnomah County, and we all work together and have a bunch of different subcommittees in order to improve anti-trafficking work in our county, which can include, you know, offender services, and survivor services, sex trafficking prevention, more grassroots efforts, how we're doing funding, how we're raising awareness in the community. We have a Lived Experience Community Advisory Board that guides a lot of the work that we do. And then I, my specific position, funds some sex trafficked youth services in the county, and I just do a lot of training and education when people need me, depending on what the community is asking for.

Meg: I really appreciate that kind of that just multi-sector approach, just thinking about all the places I hear trafficking response or prevention showing up, like, you know, the domestic/sexual violence sector, the child abuse sector, the like youth violence partners, like all these different people doing or trying to figure out how this fits into into their work. Are there some of those partners, or those sectors, that kind of surprise you, that you get to work with?

Claire: I think a lot of them are familiar to me from doing domestic and sexual violence work that was not trafficking related. But something that's unique in the anti-trafficking field is that there's a lot of folks just community members who are hearing about this issue, sometimes in really legitimate ways, and sometimes from like less legitimate sources that might be more sort of conspiracy theorists or sensationalized media attention about trafficking that's not so accurate. So I'm constantly surprised by



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how many just sort of like random community members get in touch with me, and I'm always excited about that, because, of course, we want anyone and everyone to be involved in anti-trafficking work. And if, if those folks are coming with misinformation, that's okay. We hope to be a space where people can gain more information. So, for instance, religious groups tend to be more engaged in anti-trafficking work, then then I experienced them being engaged in domestic and sexual violence work. I get a lot of like college students reaching out to me, service organizations and service clubs that have heard about this issue and want to know what they can do. Yeah, so just more grassroots and sort of like individual interest in the issue than I have experienced before.

Meg: That's so interesting and also really cool. I love that like as you name, there are so many folks reaching out and wanting to get connected to, you know, good information, good services, good resources. That's really exciting. Speaking of which, you recently launched a human trafficking prevention toolkit. Can you tell us a little bit more about this resource, like what it is? How people can use it?

Claire: Yeah, yeah, first of all, I'll just say that this is a toolkit that was conceived of by folks working in our collaborative before I joined the County in our Prevention and Public Awareness Subcommittee, and those were mostly community based folks, people working in anti-violence prevention work in community based organizations and nonprofits, people who also provide services to kids, both prevention and intervention services. So it wasn't my brainchild. It really grew out of this mostly community based engaged network and subcommittee. And so when I joined on they had already done some reviews of other toolkits that were out there just to kinda get a sense of what were what are other states and organizations saying is best practice when people are doing anti-trafficking prevention. And through that process of reviewing other other, not curriculums, but toolkits, like guidelines, this group decided that they wanted to develop one that was specific to Oregon that would include some of the same information that other toolkits had used in other States, but really tailored it to be really relevant and unique to Oregon, and and expanded on some of those other toolkits. And so, since I've been here, we've been developing that content, getting permissions from some of those other people to use aspects of their toolkits in our own. And then, more recently, we were able to hire someone with lived experience to be our graphic designer, which is really exciting. And now we're at the point where we're just finalizing that design, and pretty soon it will be available to the whole state and even nationally to everyone for free, as a resource that you can go to when you're saying 'we think our community needs to do anti trafficking prevention, but how do we know the difference between a good curriculum and a bad one. How do we develop a curriculum that's informed by our unique community, and that relies on what are best practices that won't increase the possibility of more trafficking, but will actually prevent trafficking from happening in our communities in the future?'

Meg: I know you named that this was like this started before your time. I'm curious. If you could speak to kind of like what, what led this group of people to wanting to create a toolkit like, why does something like this resource matter to to Oregon and to your communities?

Claire: I think there's a couple of reasons. One is that anti-trafficking work has really been siloed from anti domestic and sexual violence work. And it, I think there's a lot of historical reasons for that that I



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won't go into, and actually, there is a little bit of that in the toolkit which is cool. There's a lot of complex reasons why anti-trafficking work has been siloed. I guess what I will name as part of that is there's so much stigma around trading sex that the approach to dealing with trafficking issues in our community has really been different in some pretty unfortunate ways, historically. And so I know that this group who initiated this toolkit was concerned about that siloing, and that there's been a big push in the county to integrate anti-trafficking work into anti-domestic and sexual violence work both on the services end, the intervention side, but also the prevention side, because really they're so deeply intertwined and related. So that was part of it is just to be like, how can we pull this in this type of prevention into the world of domestic, anti-domestic, and sorry, domestic and sexual violence prevention? And then, on top of that, I think we've seen a lot of really problematic prevention efforts happening in the anti-trafficking world that this group felt like we really needed to address and say. Given some of this anti-trafficking history, some of the stigma, and, like racism that has gone along with anti-trafficking work, some of the really puritanical beliefs around trading sex, and the difference between sex works and sex trafficking, and the way that trickles down to what strategies people use when they're trying to prevent it. These are things that we're really concerned about, that we're seeing crop up in different ways in Oregon, and we would like to create a more definitive toolkit that really aligns anti-trafficking work with the best practices we know are true of all types of prevention, but maybe also address some of these issues unique to trading sex and anti-trafficking history.

Meg: Yeah, that's super helpful. And you, you very explicitly named, like the the pieces around differences between trading sex and sex trafficking. I'm curious, does the Toolkit also address like labor trafficking, and some of the other dynamics outside of maybe just like sex trafficking.

Claire: Definitely, we hone in on the sex trafficking stuff. The history of anti-sex trafficking works specifically because it does have such a unique and I would say, like problematic history. But we definitely talk deeply about labor trafficking as well. We talk a lot about sort of the way labor trafficking has intersected with colonialism and and slavery in the United States, and anti-immigrant policies in the United States, also the genocide and trafficking of native and indigenous people, and the ways that that has created a unique landscape that is conducive to both sex trafficking and labor trafficking in our state and in our country.

Meg: Thank you. What, when, whenever you take on a project like this, but also just, I think, generally when it comes to anti-trafficking conversations, movements, efforts going on in our communities and state right now, it feels like we have a pretty steep learning curve going on collectively as people right now. So I'm curious, what lessons did this group, did you all learn, where did you struggle along the way in creating this thing, what successes have you observed, what made you think differently? That's a lot of questions.

Claire: Well, I can just share that, for myself, I definitely found the learning curve into understanding the anti-trafficking history and movement pretty steep, coming from the domestic and sexual violence world. And I hope this Toolkit can maybe make that learning curve a little bit less steep for other people, cause it's packaged in a really like thoughtful way, and we tried to, for accessibility reasons, reduce the grade level of the language as much as we could. I mean, I think one of the challenges that we faced in



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this toolkit is choosing what to not include, because there's so much you could include. Even just up to a week ago we were like, should we be talking about the Japanese Internment Camps. And it was like, No, no, no, we're too far along to add more stuff, but it's hard. It's really hard not to add more things because there's so much complex history and intersectional identities and experiences that are important, and part of the story of trafficking in Oregon and in the US. So it took a lot of heavy and deep conversation for us to to decide like, what things do we want to get a little more detailed about and what things do we need to leave out? I mean, we even made decisions like to talk a little bit about like the environment, and like environmental race racism and things like this and the ways that that has impacted trafficking because of migration, right? Like you could write a whole toolkit just about that. So it's really hard to, you want, like, part of our goal with the toolkit is we want to help people move away from black and white thinking about trafficking, which is where some people want to stay, because it's easier to feel hopeful sometimes I think, and easier to feel like your impact makes a difference, and to kind of stay in that savior mode when you think of things as being very simplistic. But the truth is, the story of labor and sex trafficking is incredibly nuanced, and the path to ending it and preventing it is also very nuanced and complex. So we really wanted to support that as much as possible. I think something else that came up for us as we're learning it, is just how little information and good data there is on anti-trafficking work. I still don't really understand why we have so few numbers, and such bad research and studies about trafficking. But when you're trying to create a toolkit that hopefully to some degree is evidence-based, and and there's very little evidence and data, it's really challenging both on the intervention side and on the prevention side. And of course there's a lot to say, and we do say in our toolkit, leaning also heavily on on your toolkit, Meg, that your organization created, that evidence base isn't everything because evidence base excludes a lot of practice-based prevention that we know is super effective, and lots of communities have been doing anti-trafficking prevention in their own ways without data for a long time. But data does matter. And in the anti-trafficking world there's a huge lack of data, and there's a lot of biased data where people have developed data to suit suit and shore up their own beliefs and opinions. So that was another big challenge we came across. But I do think we had success naming that transparently, and talking about some of these differences between, when is it important, or what is important, about evidence-based prevention, and also what is important about acknowledging and shoring up kinds of prevention that might not yet have a lot of data, but are legitimate, nonetheless.

Meg: That's so interesting. And I think, I think that there's, especially when it comes to prevention, there's kind of this like mental hurdle that people often need to get over around, well, like, how do you measure change when it comes to an absence of violence? Right? People get stuck in thinking like, well, it's hard to measure something that doesn't happen, so what do we do? And I think that that stops so much of that good data stops so much of the like learning about and understanding like, what are the things that actually make our communities healthier and safer that are going to protect against, you know, violence, abuse, trafficking all these different things, and that's where that nuance right? That that history is so important. And we can't, we can't separate all those like historical environmental contexts in order to just be like, Oh, just like, don't do the thing. Just don't traffic people, or just like don't do this other thing right? And so it's just such a fascinating thing of like, how do we create those



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spaces for people to have their their entry point into like good information and good strategies, to, to make our communities healthier and safer, that are going to prevent, you know, multiple forms of trafficking and and really have that impact, because I think, even in the like, some of the like, higher up data world, we're just kind of lost in that like cycle so often, of just like what doesn't happen. How do we even like think about this? Right? Like what even constitutes trafficking at times, I think people get really muddy in that as well.

Claire: Yeah, definitely, and I think that also starts getting into whether people are willing to do work that doesn't have an obvious outcome of like rescuing, even if it's like pre-rescuing. And also work that takes a long time, because real prevention as you and I know is not about one time workshop. It's often about like long term relationships and programming and community, and like, it takes it takes effort to get get folks to a place where they feel motivated and inspired, to support that kind of prevention versus a type of prevention where maybe they feel that they did something good and can get a pat on the back. And that's something that we come across is people creating prevention curriculums that are first of all, often not primary prevention. They're like more awareness raising, and, you know, might be like shocking, getting a workshop to shock shock teens about trafficking and telling them about why all pornography is trafficking and, I think those folks may leave that workshop feeling like they did something because it was really maybe they got a big reaction emotionally, or it had a lot of like exciting words. So they like, really, you know feel a sense of accomplishment. But I think real trafficking prevention often takes time and is slow and has subtle you know, and moments of that are less subtle. But in my experience with prevention there's a lot of subtle moments where you're like we're just plugging along with this thing and building relationships slowly. And it takes time and there's a lot of trust that that's that's the kind of deep work, and that you have to set aside your ego around feeling like you were the one who fixed the problem.

Meg: Yeah, I often, I often think about how, what I often say, of like being human centered like centering people's humanity in, in how we do our work is is, and just how we exist right? It's such a key part of present prevention, and also like modeling our own humanity. And I think that if we just like rush to that like we did the shock and awe, or we did this the one off thing, or we did this whatever. We miss that opportunity to like, really, not just like understand, like the complexities of human beings, all they're carrying with them, intergenerationally, current context, presently what they're carrying with them, but also being able to like, really connect on that really human level and make sure that, like those stories, are honored right? There are so many people who have experienced trafficking, and their voices do matter, right, and their experiences matter, and so often when we're like, Oh, let me just come in and like scare all the teens, we miss the fact that, like people are human beings with like real experiences that matter more than maybe statistics that are not well researched or informed. Yeah.

Claire: Definitely.

Meg: Is there anything else you want to add to about this resource, about the work you all are doing before sharing where people can access the resource?



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Claire: Well, I think I already I haven't said this directly, and I think I was already sort of naming this, which is one thing that we, you know, wanted to make clear when we were making this toolkit is that domestic and sexual violence prevention is trafficking prevention, that all interpersonal violence shares root causes. And so whenever prevention is addressing those root causes, it's preventing all those types of violence, and we don't need to create these hyper special strategies for trafficking. If we're really, truly doing primary prevention and addressing those root causes, we are preventing trafficking. That being said, I think some of the things that are unique to this tool kit that are still really useful for somebody who wants to have expertise on trafficking and might wanna do some specific tailoring of their primary prevention strategy to some of the unique dynamics that are happening in worlds where trafficking occurs in in th those dynamics. I think we just tried to add a lot of, as I said, that historical context of like, how does the anti-trafficking movement, how did it look grow and look different than the domestic and sexual violence movement? What has trafficking looked like historically in the US and in Oregon and what does that look like today? And what are some of the things that are feeding into that? And then just some other things for people to look forward to. We definitely have some sections on like how to evaluate your prevention program as best you're able. Also like how to get your community involved in creating it, so that you're not doing it alone, and especially naming that like, yeah, we want survivors of trafficking, labor and sex trafficking to be involved in the creation of anti-trafficking programs. That's essential. Because you know, people with lived, experience know what would have worked for them or what's happening in their communities that led to to that risk or the flourishing of trafficking in their communities. So those are some of the things I'm really excited about. That somebody who maybe is familiar with some kinds of prevention, but hasn't done a lot of anti-trafficking work before can look to and can figure out how to incorporate into their sort of philosophical approach and informed approach to prevention work. And then there's a like a bibliography and a lot of resources at the end, too. So there's opportunities for people to learn further which I highly encourage cause like, I said, my learning curve has been steep, and I've had to seek out a lot of information and sift through a lot of like problematic stuff to find stuff that felt ethical and survivor-led, that I felt like I could rely on. So hopefully we've done that some of work some of that work ahead of time for people so that they can go directly to some good resources.

Meg: As you all were developing this resource, I'm curious where you know, I think there are a lot of people who might say, like this is coming from Multnomah County. That context is is different than you know - I grew up in northeastern Oregon in a tiny town, and so people, I think, often like ascribe some exceptionalism one way or the other, whether it's like rural Oregon or or urban Oregon. And you you talked about really wanting to highlight the context in the State. And like what this actually looks like in the State. Is there, how, like is this resource only useful for people in Multnomah County like, how is it useful for people outside of the urban centers in the State?

Claire: Yeah, we definitely tried to to derive and like, bring out history that is statewide, not just relevant to the Portland or to the Metro areas of Oregon. There's a lot as I shared in there about, like the history of indigenous people in this country and indigenous people in Oregon, which is often rural areas. Of course, there's like urban, indigenous people. And that's a specific experience. But we name some of that non-urban experience talking about things like the Oregon constitution and how that has



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influenced the world of trafficking. That's obviously gonna be relevant to our entire state. And we do have moments where we wanna name specifically, some of the unique ways that trafficking can happen in rural areas, particularly thinking about labor trafficking, which is where a lot of our, you know, a lot of our agricultural trafficking happens in rural areas in Oregon. So I do think there's a lot of good like background and historical context that's gonna be relevant both to urban areas and to rural areas in Oregon.

Meg: Thank you. So how can people access this resource and also get connected to to the that real, meaningful, human trafficking response and prevention efforts across the state?

Claire: Yeah. So there's a couple of ways I can encourage people to to get in touch and see this resource once it comes out which should be really soon. One is by getting on my email list. And I can share, we have generic email that will be useful and be in use even if I leave and that is sex.trafficking@multco.us. That, people can email me there, either just to get the toolkit once it's out or to join our collaborative email list. I send out a monthly newsletter. We have quarterly meetings that anyone is invited to who has an interest in anti-trafficking work in Multnomah County. So that's one place to go. The other place is to our website. We have a unique website that I've created, and that's where the toolkit, a PDF of it, will be downloadable for free for anyone who's interested. And that website is www.multco.us/dv/sex-trafficking. And you can also just Google, molten county sex tracking, and it's the first website that will come up. So if that was confusing to you, that web address, you can easily find it, just with your Google search as well.

Meg: Thank you so much for your time today, Claire.

Claire: Yeah, thanks for having me, Meg.