APPLICATION OF HARM REDUCTION PRINCIPLES TO ANTI-TRAFFICKING WORK: TIPS FOR ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES

What is Harm Reduction?

On an Individual Level: Harm reduction expands choices, increases access and promotes opportunities to assist people being safer, particularly when engaging in culturally stigmatized behavior like drug use or trading sex.

On an Institutional Level: Harm reduction aims to shift organizations/systems (and our broader culture) to be safer for both individuals and communities.

How Can A Harm Reduction Approach Help Trafficking Survivors?

Society, and the systems within it, have historically increased harm to people who use drugs or engage in trading sex through oppressive policies and stigmatizing culture.

The National Harm Reduction Coalition's Principles of Harm Reduction call for non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources, ensuring that those affected have a real voice in the creation of policies and programs designed to serve them, and recognition that poverty, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination, and other social inequities affect people's vulnerability to and capacity for dealing with harm (see *www.harmreduction.org*).

Anti-trafficking advocates can incorporate harm reduction principles and practices by:

- Consider that trading sex is not, in itself, inherently harmful; rather, that systems of oppression (misogyny, racism, transphobia, etc.) are where the harm lies, as these systems are used to justify or excuse harm against those who trade sex;
- Meeting people where they are at, but not leaving them there, which refers to acknowledging that each person comes from a different set of experiences, motivations, and systems of belief, and that, as service providers, we should use our own access and privileges to help people reach whatever goals they set for themselves;
- Avoiding placing judgment on individuals in order to assist them in reducing the harm or dangers that may result from culturally stigmatized behaviors like drug use and trading sex;
- Acknowledging the significance of *any* positive change;
- Providing accurate information in a way that exceeds baseline ethical obligations;
- Being creative and flexible when providing services;
- Engaging in radical love; and,
- Helping redistribute power by prioritizing systemic change in our work and ensuring that the people who are impacted by a particular set of policies *always* have a voice in their creation.

Harm Reduction Resources:

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies, and advocates for harm reduction as part of a broader movement for social justice.

- Website: https://baltimoreharmreduction.org/
- Email: admin@baltimoreharmreduction.org
- Phone: 410-205-5143

Maryland Harm Reduction Action Network (MHRAN) consists of individuals and organizations committed to promoting the health, dignity, and safety of people who use drugs by educating about, advocating for, and promoting the use of harm reduction principles. To join the state-wide MHRAN listserv, please email BHRC.

BRIDGES Coalition works to end overdose and criminalization by promoting safe spaces, dignity, health, and justice for people who use drugs (https://baltimoreharmreduction.org/bridges-coalition/).

This tip sheet was created as part of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project (HTPP), a collaboration between the University of Baltimore School of Law and Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS).

Recommendations on this tip sheet are adapted from the HTPP webinar:

"Principles of Harm Reduction and its Application to Anti-Trafficking Work"

featuring guest presenters Rajani Gudlavalleti (Director of Mobilization), Harriet Smith (Director of Education), and Owen O'Keefe (Community Outreach Coordinator) from Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition.

The webinar is available at: www.mvlslaw.org/ht

For more information about the HTPP, please visit the website above or contact:

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