



VIRGINIA TECH  
**TRANSPORTATION  
INSTITUTE**

# **BE A HIGHWAY HERO**

## **SEE SOMETHING? SAY SOMETHING!**

**CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING  
AMONG THE CMV COMMUNITY**

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# Highway Transportation and Human Trafficking

- Trucking can play a key role in facilitating HT as well as disrupting it
  - Distributed nature of the trucking industry/isolation of truck stops
  - Truck drivers can be “eyes and ears” of the highway
- 82% of survivors encountered some form of transportation during their trafficking (*Polaris, 2018*)
- 58% of the potential sex trafficking incidents at truck stops (2007-2017) were reported by truck drivers. (*Polaris, 2018*)
- Among 13,600 truck drivers surveyed, 7% reported witnessing 3,044 sex trafficking incidents within the previous 3 yrs. (*Truckers Against Trafficking, 2022*)



# How CMV Drivers Can Combat Human Trafficking

- Movement: Traffickers often make first physical contact with victims at rest areas, transit areas, or ports of entry
  - Truck drivers frequently travel the same routes and may encounter exploitation or suspicious activities
- Exploitation: Sex trafficking at truck stops/rest areas due to remote locations and demographics passing through
  - Male truckers often the target of traffickers
- Exit: Opportunities for victims to escape often occur at truck/rest stops
  - Victims need immediate support

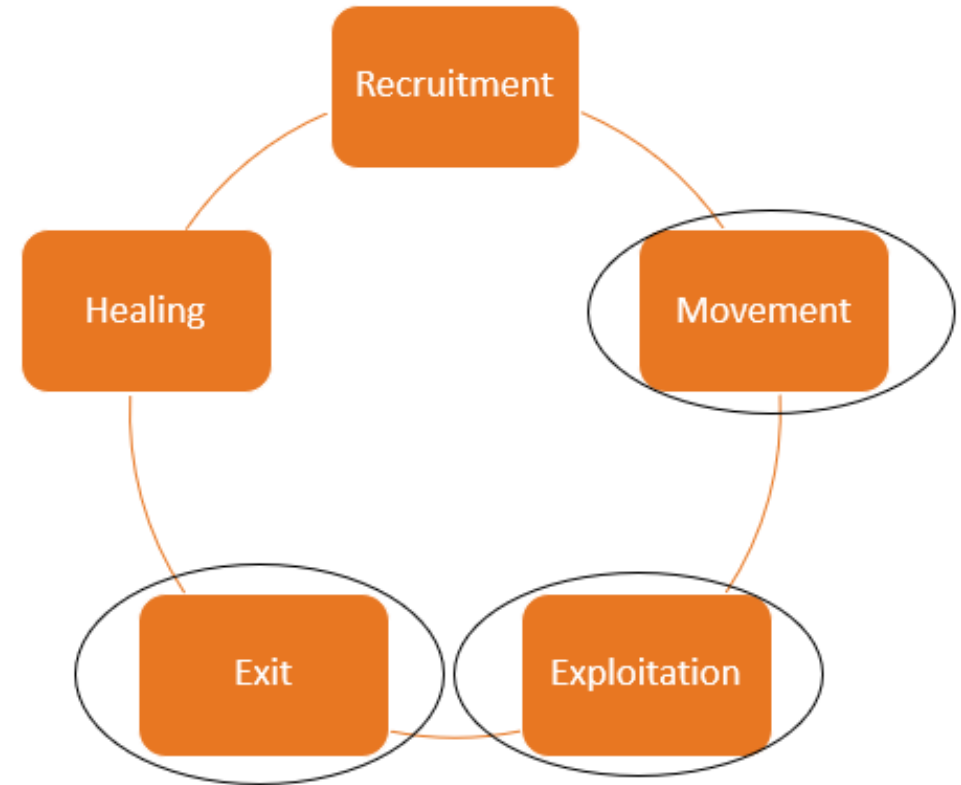


Figure 2. Five Stages of Human Trafficking

# Awareness and Training Programs for Trucking Professionals



Federal, State, and local DOTs and non-profit orgs can combat HT in 4 ways

1. Awareness
2. Training
3. Regional partnerships/collaborations
4. Data collection



VIRGINIA NEWS

**VSP launches 'Operation Safe Passage' to deter and raise awareness of human trafficking**



# Needs

- Feedback on existing HT training programs
- Increase completion of TAT HT training in the State of Virginia

Table 1. Number of individuals trained by TAT in Virginia as of October 2024

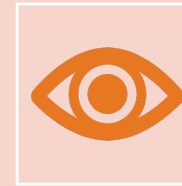
	Truck and Bus Companies	CDL Schools	School Transportation	Other
Number of Individuals	15,208	493	2,283	658

- Collect data to assess, improve, and support focused HT education and awareness campaigns
- Increase awareness, accessibility, and utilization of existing resources

# Study Goals



Increase awareness of HT in the trucking community



Empower more drivers to recognize and report suspected HT



Educate  
Disseminate information  
Develop a project website to serve as a central resource center

# Approach



DISCOVERY AND DATA  
COLLECTION



IDENTIFY STRENGTHS, GAPS  
AND NEEDS



DEVELOP PUBLIC AWARENESS  
AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

# Discovery and Data Collection

Synthesize existing literature, trainings, resources, materials, and policies on HT and trucking

- Non-profit organizations
- Federal and local government agencies
- Law enforcement

*Result: Comprehensive literature review*

Interviews with industry and subject matter experts

- Fleets, drivers, transportation industry (n=11)
- Training providers (n=2)
- Survivors (n=8)
- Social service providers (n=8)
- Law enforcement (n=7)

*Result: Content analysis of >34 hours of interviews*





# Identify Strengths, Gaps, and Needs

## HT Trainings, Awareness and Outreach Initiatives

- Fleet and driver experiences and opinions of training
- Motivations for getting involved and completing training
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Likes and dislikes
- Effectiveness
- Information gaps
- Application in daily operations and practices
- Recommendations for improvement
- Recommend to other fleets and industry groups

## HT Education and Guidance

- Current issues and trends
- Tips for recognizing HT
- Debunking stereotypes
- How to respond (do's and don'ts)
- Recommended reporting protocols
- Effective outreach and communication strategies
- Survivor stories

*There's a big misconception of what human trafficking is. Unfortunately, Hollywood- all those people have instilled and made people afraid of their kids getting taken out of a shopping cart and forced into the sex trade instead of being afraid your 15-year-old daughter is talking to someone on social media and getting groomed by a potential trafficker.*

*-Law Enforcement*



# Key Findings and Takeaways: HT Training

A variety of trainings and resources are available

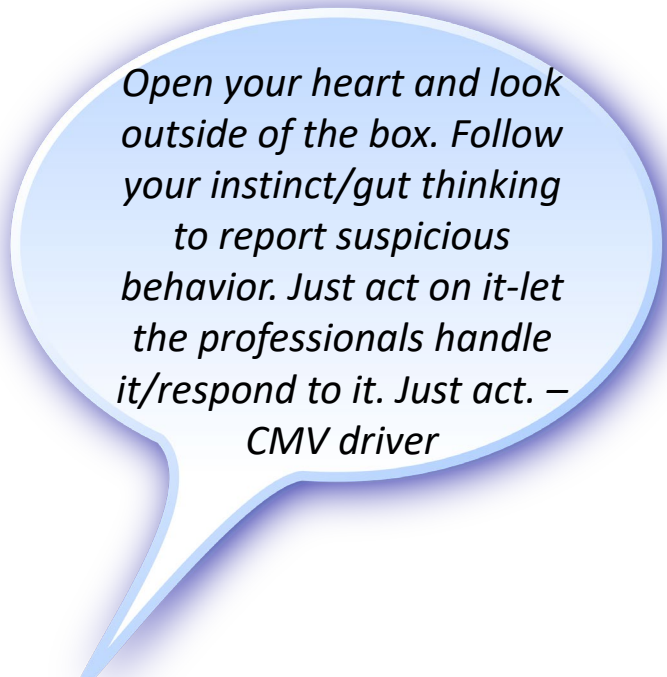
- target different populations and occupations
- most are free and publicly available

TAT is the most popular training used in the CMV industry. Likes include:

- ✓ Defines types of HT
- ✓ Debunks myths and stereotypes
- ✓ Length of training (30 mins)
- ✓ Easy to understand
- ✓ Formats (self-guided or instructor/classroom led)
- ✓ Easy integration into LMS and accessibility
- ✓ Regularly updated to stay current on issues and trends (TAT app)
- ✓ Realistic scenarios to understand the complexities of situations and how to react
- ✓ Survivor stories are powerful and engaging
- ✓ Wallet cards and stickers serve as constant reminders

Suggestions for improvement

- More interactive, scenario-based training
- Quizzes and assessments to reinforce learning and gauge understanding
- More information on labor trafficking
- Non-digital resources to engage older drivers
- More awareness of the TAT app
- Engage CDL schools to maximize reach



*Open your heart and look outside of the box. Follow your instinct/gut thinking to report suspicious behavior. Just act on it-let the professionals handle it/respond to it. Just act. – CMV driver*

# Key findings: Current issues and trends

Happening in all 50 states, including wealthy areas; does not discriminate by SES, gender, etc.	HT is not just a sex worker issue and not all sex workers are HT victims	Digital platforms and sextortion (i.e. social media, Snapchat, illicit message boards, gaming)	Remote trafficking (control from across state lines)
Cashless transactions (i.e. Venmo, CashApp, etc.)	Child trafficking usually perpetrated by someone the child knows <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•90% of commercial child sexual exploitation starts within victims' own home*</li></ul>	Familial trafficking is prevalent; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•37% of trafficking survivors experienced familial trafficking (<i>Polaris Project, 2018</i>)</li></ul>	Illicit massage parlors (labor and sex trafficking)
Spikes around major, large-scale events (i.e. athletic and political events)	LGBTQ and males increasingly targeted as victims	Inadequate resources for survivors <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Can dissuade them from exiting and cause re-entry</li></ul>	Awareness and prosecution are increasing!



# Key Findings-Law Enforcement

- Improved and wide-spread training for LE needed to better recognize and assist HT victims
  - Survivors reported negative interactions with LE
  - Incorporate survivor perspective in training development
- Survivor interactions often challenging
  - Active addiction
  - Denial
  - Distrust fueled by traffickers
- Goal is to avoid arrest but get them services
  - Victim arrest may be a necessary legal step in order to access services/recovery programs
  - Provide options; participation must be voluntary
- Victim support and programs are most effective when LE, prosecution, and resource providers work together
  - Trauma-informed and survivor-centric approach
- Survivor liaisons to gain trust and rapport with victims

*It means being survivor focused. Trauma informed is essential. Taking it down to what does the survivor need? Asking them. Sometimes they can't answer that because they've never been asked that or they don't know where to start from square one. It does require wrap around services: Law enforcement, medical professionals. -Survivor and Social Service Provider*

# Develop public awareness and education campaign



- Highway Hero Website
  - Resource for information to educate and increase awareness of human trafficking
  - Empower the trucking community and the public to identify and report potential trafficking situations and support victims and survivors
  - Point to key trainings, resources, materials
  - Survivor resources and stories
- Posters, flyers, and brochures
  - Disseminate at major truck stops and rest areas across Virginia
- Digital outreach
  - Social media
  - Podcasts
- Developing ideas for Human Trafficking Awareness Month  
(January 2025)



JANUARY  
**HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING**  
PREVENTION MONTH





# Next Steps

## Evaluate Campaign across 5 primary metrics:

1. Number of truck and rest stops, gas stations, fleet terminals, and other high-traffic driver locations who agree to become regional partners and disseminate outreach materials;
2. Distribution of materials to regional partners;
3. User traffic and engagement on [Highway Heroes | Virginia Tech Transportation Institute](#);
4. User engagement with social media accounts; and
5. Interactions, connections, and collaborations with social media influencers, podcasts, etc. to disseminate facts and information about human trafficking.

## 2-phase approach to Implement and Evaluate Campaign

- Opportunity to implement changes in design, approach, outreach, or other elements during Phase 2

Title

*Thank You!*

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