

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

DAY

46

**Is there life after
the Safe House for Survivors
of Modern Slavery?**

Report Produced by the Human Trafficking Foundation
October 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

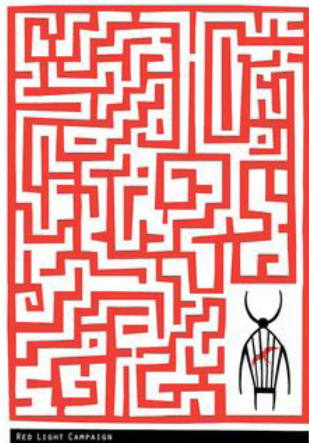
The Survivors, who shared the realities of their lives in order that the system be improved for others

Anthony Steen CBE, whose concern as to what happens to survivors in the UK was the inception for this work

The City Bridge Trust and **Red Light Campaign** for funding this report

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Cover photo by **Sarah Kendall**



FOREWORD

The UK has done much to improve its response to the dreadful crime of Modern Day Slavery - one of the great Human Rights issues of our time. The Prime Minister's recent pledge to put Britain at the forefront of defeating this evil is an important step forward. Last year 3,266 people were identified in the UK as potentially trafficked.¹ These figures have increased annually in the UK since records began. Yet it remains that the UK has no reliable information as to what exactly happens to victims beyond the statutory 45 days recovery and reflection period and no system to make sure that survivors from slavery don't fall back into exploitation.

In 2006 on a Parliamentary visit to Romania, I stumbled for the first time on what Modern Day Slavery looked like, talking with traffickers as well as teenage girls groomed ultimately for the sex trade. In spite of all efforts by NGOs and the Home Office, trafficking in human beings continues to be on the rise, recent estimates put it as high as 13,000 victims in the UK at any one time² and those rescued are quickly replaced by others.

It is against this background that the Poppy Project, a leading service supporting women who had been trafficked for sex or domestic slavery, must be viewed. Poppy was formerly funded by Government to provide over 70 beds in its heyday. Its unexpected closure due to insolvency in October 2015 threw into sharp relief the vulnerability of victims whose vital support had been cut off. In this report Samantha Ferrell Schweppenstedde, a former Poppy employee, follows the stories of 30 women whose accounts shine a light on the wider picture and highlight what actually happens to victims of trafficking after exiting shelters the majority inadequately prepared to function in everyday life.

The Modern Slavery Act focuses attention, amongst other things, on apprehending and convicting traffickers, as well as the work of the Police in this connection. What is still lacking is a focus on the plight of victims to ensure that survivors of trafficking have the best chance possible of making a total recovery. This report is a snapshot, little more, but an important one in highlighting how quickly survivors disappear from our sight once they are left without support.

We hope these stories from the women interviewed and the report's recommendations will help all of us involved in fighting modern day slavery move forward towards a solution.

Anthony Steen
Chairman

¹ <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30255084>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A system that finds victims of modern day slavery, only to abandon them

The UK spends millions each year to provide housing and support to victims of modern day slavery³ during a so-called 45 day “National Referral Mechanism (NRM) recovery and reflection” period – the period when the Home Office makes a decision on whether a person is trafficked or not.

After that decision, Home Office support ends.

It is an irony that this abrupt removal of support so often coincides with the time when a victim is finally formally recognised by the authorities as having been enslaved.

But what happens to victims of trafficking on ‘day 46’ or when this support ends?⁴

It makes no sense to spend millions of pounds finding victims, and then at least a further £4 million⁵ each year supporting these people, only to abandon them, back into a place of vulnerability, with all the same risks that led to them being trafficked in the first place.

This report followed the lives of thirty women, who were previously supported by the Poppy Project.⁶ It tries to understand their difficult journey - whereby a person is brutalised as a trafficked person, then identified by the British authorities and given support and housing. This lasts until (s)he is formally recognised (or rejected) by the system as trafficked. Then they are once again left to make their own way, either forced to return to a country where traffickers are looking for her; or remain, often indefinitely, in a country where she may know no one, sometimes has no access to housing or work, and may not even speak the language.

One survivor described her situation as that of “being thrown from the frying pan to the fire.” Another said, **“I’ve been treated worse than an animal. I was given a positive trafficking decision and then not offered accommodation, even animals get shelter.”**

The 2015 US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, which examines every country’s response to human trafficking found the nature of support in the UK deeply problematic, noting that the *“government did not provide sufficient care for victims following the 45-day reflection period. Authorities have acknowledged NRM ⁷ support is not intended to provide rehabilitation, and noted many victims were still profoundly vulnerable after 45 days. NGOs reported cases of victims returning to prostitution or being re-trafficked due to lack of long-term support.”*⁸

³ Also called human trafficking, which is sometimes mistaken as meaning human smuggling – where the person is not coerced or tricked. This report uses the terms modern day slavery and human trafficking interchangeably

⁴ Sometimes the decision may take longer than 45 days. The uncertainty over the length of decision making and related support is another source of anxiety and practical difficulty reported by victims and those supporting them

⁵ 2015 Report of the Interdepartmental group on Modern Slavery
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/469968/IDMG_Report_Final.pdf
Table 31, page 34

⁶ The Poppy project, part of Eaves housing for women provided specialist support and accommodation to trafficked women in the UK until closing in October 2015.

⁷ National Referral Mechanism, see box on page 10

⁸ <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245365.pdf>

The National Referral Mechanism, or NRM, has been in place in the UK since 2009 and comes out of the Council of Europe Convention for Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. It is a system for identifying victims of trafficking and provides those who are identified at the initial, or 'Reasonable Grounds' stage, as likely to have been trafficked with a 45 day 'rest and reflection period'. After the "rest and reflection period", the Home Office then provides a decision on whether they have been trafficked (called "conclusive grounds") or not.

During the "45 days" leading up to this decision, the potential victim is entitled to support and accommodation in the UK and, if subject to immigration control, can not be removed.

The NRM has come under substantial criticism, much of this is focused around delays in the decision making process, lack of appeal against a negative decision, and the cut off in support at the point of the final stage or 'Conclusive Grounds' decision, on which this report focuses. The NRM was reviewed in 2014 by the Home Office⁹ and a new model of the NRM is being piloted at the time of writing.

'The Poppy Project' was part of Eaves Housing for Women. Established in 2003, it was the first specialist accommodation and support for trafficked women in the UK. It accepted women who it believed were trafficked whether or they were identified by the official system and provided support until the women were ready to move on. In October 2015 Eaves closed due to insolvency resulting in the closure of Poppy.

The demise of the Poppy Project

When the Poppy Project at Eaves suddenly closed in October 2015, the 73 women victims of human trafficking and their children who Poppy were working with were left without support – and in some cases housing – within a matter of two weeks.

The suddenness with which support was terminated – in this case due to Eaves' insolvency – is not dissimilar to the way the funding for victims to stay in a safe house is suddenly halted after a decision is made under the Government's NRM system, which then gives safe houses 14 days to move on victims after they have been formally recognised as a victim of trafficking, and a mere 48 hours for those who are not.

18 victims of trafficking disappeared...

This report involved speaking to 30 of the 73 survivors that Poppy was supporting. Of the 43 not interviewed, 18 were not contactable and were completely unaccounted for.

Some may have simply decided to move on and not respond, but others may well have been re-trafficked. Thirteen of the 18 survivors were deemed by Poppy employees as at very high risk of re-traumatisation and with the lowest levels of independence.

One woman had not attended her Home Office interview and seemed to be missing, as she

⁹ Review of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking November 2014, Home Office https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf

could not be reached by her legal representative or new support worker. In another case, a man answered the personal mobile of one of the former service users and said it was the wrong number. *These are the more ominous-seeming cases, but in each it is difficult to ascertain what exactly has gone on.*

The obstacles other survivors face

The three main themes that emerged as the most commonly voiced support needs of the 30 survivors interviewed were (1) Suitable accommodation (2) On going specialist support and advocacy and lastly (3) Stabilised immigration status. It is worth noting that in the US, victims of trafficking receive a special human trafficking visa that provides a pathway to permanent residency within 3 years, allowing adequate time to recover and to cooperate with authorities if mentally and physically able.¹⁰

The **recommendations** respond to these clear gaps in our support and are, ironically, broadly already recommended, though not yet adhered to, in the Home Office's own 'Review of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking'¹¹:

1. Sustained access to suitable accommodation.

We must ensure survivors of trafficking are prioritised by both NASS asylum processes and the local council for suitable accommodation. This would not reinvent the wheel but rather continue procedures already in place as there is currently a concession within the asylum application process which allows those who are receiving treatment from the Helen Bamber Foundation or Freedom from Torture to remain accommodated in London. Meanwhile Local Authority housing accepts victims of violence can be prioritised for housing. Both of these 'concessions' should be extended to victims of trafficking.

2. Continued provision of specialist support and advocacy

A provision of advice and support should be made available to adult survivors of modern slavery beyond the duration of the 'recovery and reflection period' as is the case in Scotland.

3. Continuity of care

As recommended in the Home Office's 2014 'Review of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking', 'a single management process for trafficking cases should be put in place'.¹² This would ensure that when survivors leave the safe house that appropriate mainstream support is in place.

4. Provision of leave to remain

Recognition as a refugee through the asylum system grants an initial five years of leave to remain in the UK, followed by the opportunity to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Yet recognition of a victim of trafficking through the NRM, by contrast, carries

¹⁰ <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmi-grant-statu>

¹¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf

¹² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf

no right to remain for even a month. This could be resolved by [positive recognition of a victim of trafficking resulting in an automatic grant of a Residence Permit, with at least one year's leave to remain in the UK.](#)

Without such processes in place, victims will continue to disappear. Below are just a few examples of the challenges some survivors faced in the first instance of seeking suitable accommodation. These include the fact that some women with children were given a single room in a shared house, seemingly regardless of how many children they had. Vulnerable women were housed with men they did not know, or living with random acquaintances.

In spite of being survivors and victims of terrible ordeals, and the majority having been formally identified by the Government's NRM as having been trafficked, the women usually had no access to public accommodation, regardless of the council's duty to shelter the victims' children or the mother's status as a potential victim of trafficking.

Some women were even unwilling to take up the NRM "45 days" of specialist accommodation, precisely because they knew they would have to suffer the upheaval of moving again in just under two months.

[One woman who had just had a baby had been moved 4 times in the first 4 months after giving birth,](#) living in various hostels with no cooking facilities.

The instability caused by constantly moving accommodation was one of the most pressing issues the women raised. [The fear of ending up destitute – despite having been newly recognised as a vulnerable victim of trafficking by the Home Office, was a very real one.](#)

The current situation appears untenable and morally unacceptable. If Government is prepared to put in resources to find victims and support them for a short period while we verify if they were trafficked for national crime data, then we must be prepared to properly support these same survivors to safely continue their lives. This means we need to improve provision of support, accommodation and leave to remain from Home Office and local authorities. [Otherwise we are simply rescuing victims, only to effectively return them into the hands of a trafficker, after briefly giving them a glimmer of hope.](#)

INTRODUCTION

In mid-October 2015, staff of the Poppy Project at Eaves learned that Eaves had gone into administration and would be closing its doors by the end of the month. At the time of Eaves' closure, the Poppy Project was actively supporting 73 female victims of trafficking.¹³ Six of these women were being supported in safe house accommodation.

The original remit of this investigatory project was to conduct “an evaluation of the hundred or so survivors of human trafficking known to the former Poppy Project and what sort of help they need to progress their life in the UK,” resulting in “the production of a spread sheet listing individual survivors, what country they came from, when, what their current status in the UK is, in what accommodation they are currently living (NASS, local authority housing or private landlord), and whether they have support workers.” The objectives were thus twofold: 1) “to learn what exactly survivors need, what is available and what is not, and whether there is practical help available for them to enjoy a more fulfilled life” and 2) to identify and facilitate short-term, practical interventions with which the Human Trafficking Foundation could assist via its Victim Fund.

The Poppy Project was the largest independently funded service in the UK, which delivered support and accommodation to female victims of trafficking. At the time of Eaves' closing, Poppy had received over 2600 referrals with a 41% acceptance rate.¹⁴ Access to the project was dependent on a woman meeting certain criteria based on the international definition of trafficking. The Poppy Project had been assessing potential victims of trafficking since 2003 using a robust process to determine whether someone is trafficked. They were experts in assessment of victims of trafficking and did not accept women whom they did not assess to be victims of trafficking.

The Poppy Project supported girls and women over the age of 14 who had been trafficked into or within the UK and who had experienced exploitation as a result of their trafficking situation. Exploitation included sexual exploitation and prostitution, forced labour including domestic slavery, organ harvesting, forced illicit activities or other forms of exploitation as identified by Poppy. Women did not need to enter the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the official government mechanism for identifying victims of human trafficking to receive support from Poppy.

A report was not a part of the initial remit for this project, and this is reflected in the methodology.¹⁵ Nevertheless, given the mere quantity of interviews conducted – over 30 hours of face-to-face time – some very useful information has been gathered which may contribute to the greater conversation as to what female victims of human trafficking require to rebuild their lives, particularly “beyond the safe house” and following the limited ‘reflection and recovery’ period offered by the NRM which can be as little as 45 days. This report thus hopes to contribute a snapshot to this conversation, and may be seen in the context of an informal follow-on to the 2015 Human Trafficking Foundation report, “Beyond the Safe House.”¹⁶

¹³ This number is somewhat lower than the 100+ initially believed due to “double-counting” of women who were receiving support from more than one service, e.g. Acute and Legal.

¹⁴ This is for the time period 2003-2015.

¹⁵ See Annex on page 26

VICTIM PROFILES

The survivors of human trafficking who were interviewed for this project came from a total of 16 different countries. By far the most common country of origin was Nigeria, with over 3 times as many women coming from Nigeria as from the next main source country, which in this case was Uganda. Five countries all equally tied for third: Vietnam, Albania, Pakistan, Jamaica and Morocco. Although the Poppy Project was supporting a small number of EEA nationals at the time of Eaves' closure, none were able to be included in this report. The average amount of time each woman had spent in the UK, including time held in exploitation, was 10 years.

MAIN FINDINGS

Three main themes emerged as the strongest support needs identified by former Poppy service users: suitable accommodation, on-going specialist advocacy and support, and stabilized immigration status. This was in response to the question "what, if anything, do you most wish you could have help or support with right now?" A total of 10 women responded stating primary need for suitable accommodation; 8 most desired continued specialist trafficking support; 6 felt they most needed assistance to stabilize their immigration status. Each of these categories were also further listed among second and third priority needs – for example of the 6 women who named stabilized immigration status as their priority need, 2 also listed suitable accommodation as a close second but are not counted among the 10 here. Each of these three main themes, along with further findings and recommendations, are discussed in more detail below.

SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

The need for suitable accommodation both within and beyond the 'reflection and recovery' period (which is only guaranteed for 45 days) was perceived as the number one most pressing issue by the female survivors of trafficking interviewed for this project. Accommodation situations at time of interview were as follows:

Form of accommodation	Number of survivors residing in this form of accommodation
Supported housing (with Housing Benefit)	7
Social Services ¹⁷	5
Private-rented	4
Government-funded safe house	4
National Asylum Support Service (NASS)	3
Friends/Family	3
Council Housing	2
Temporary Hostel	1
Prison	1

¹⁷ Four women were living with their families in single-room emergency accommodation provided under Section 17 by No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) teams located within social services. The remaining woman was under 21 years of age and in care.

All survivors interviewed were located in London, with the exception of one woman who had been dispersed to a government-funded safe house outside of London and a second who was living in private rented accommodation following release from prison. That the majority of interviewees were located in London is mainly due to their prior links to the Poppy Project, which had become a London-focussed project at the time of its closure. Although those survivors located in London had explicitly chosen to try to remain in the capital, primarily in order to remain linked to specialist services as well as to their personal networks, the unsuitability or instability of accommodation was their primary concern.

Issues of unsuitability primarily arose in the context of Social Services and National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation. As the table above shows, one of the primary forms of accommodation former Poppy service users are accessing in London is via Social Services under Section 17 of the Children's Act (1989). For destitute women with children without recourse to public funds, accommodation is provided via a local No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) team located within Social Services. In every such case interviewed, female survivors and their children were only provided with a single room in a shared house, seemingly regardless of how many children there were. In 3 of the 4 cases, families of 4 were all living together in one room and this lack of space – particularly for the children to play – was the mother's primary and most pressing concern. Women in these cases further reported being treated as illegal immigrants with no entitlement to public accommodation, regardless of the council's duty under Section 17 to shelter their children or the mother's status as a potential victim of trafficking. As one woman said of her children's social worker, ***"[a]ll he wants is for you to leave their house, but they can't really say it."***

It is important to note that some of these women were in the midst of their 'reflection and recovery' period, having been identified as a potential victim of trafficking with a positive Reasonable Grounds decision under the NRM, and thus entitled to government-funded support¹⁸. However, in those cases where women were offered government-funded safe house accommodation – which does not seem to be in every case – some survivors made the decision to reject this offer due to its perceived instability and fear that they would again end up destitute – and reliant on social services NRPF teams – following a Conclusive Grounds decision being made. This is due to government contract funding requiring sub-contractors to move-out survivors within 48 hours of receiving a negative Conclusive Grounds decision and within 14 days in the case of positive decisions.

The fear of ending up destitute following a positive Conclusive Grounds decision – despite having been newly recognized as a vulnerable victim of trafficking – was a real one.

As one woman, who was living in private-rented accommodation at the time of interview, described being released from prison following positive conclusive identification as a victim of trafficking, ***"I've been treated worse than an animal. I was given a positive trafficking decision and then not offered accommodation, even animals get shelter. My probation officer was absolutely shocked."***

In fact, instability in general – the constant moving between forms of accommodation and between boroughs – was again among the most common pressing issues raised.

“In the context of housing, since I left Poppy Project, it’s not good at all. I [had just given birth and] was eating chicken and chips 7 days/week in a hostel [with no cooking facilities]. When the health visitor came to the hostel, she got upset and called the social worker right away, referred me to a housing solicitor. The social worker didn’t do nothing, didn’t fight for me, it was the health visitor. That was in the third week and why they moved me to [X] House. Unless someone complains to them they don’t listen to you [...] I moved 4 times in the first 4 months after giving birth. Some people in this situation would end up in hospital, be depressed more. Sam, these people [working at NASS accommodation] aren’t treating me well. They aren’t treating me well at all.”

Such instability not only adversely affects mental health, but can have a detrimental impact on continuity of care, and more than one interviewee disclosed that they had intentionally not informed their GP or mental health care providers of their changing address out of fear of losing access to highly valued services, particularly once a trusting relationship had been built with a certain doctor.

One mother of 3 further described the difficult experience of one of her children ending up in school in a different borough from the other two and her extreme concern for the disruption of any of them to be pulled out of their respective schools and forced to start over elsewhere again.

SPECIALIST SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

Eight survivors interviewed said they were not currently receiving any professional support, 5 of whom felt they were in need of support but were unable to access this.¹⁹

However, for the 22 women who were accessing some form of support, 10 felt either unsupported or not sufficiently supported. **Therefore out of the 30 survivors who were interviewed, only half felt that they were currently receiving the support they needed.** However when the question was phrased differently and survivors were asked to rank their current support on a scale of 1-3, with 1 being not feeling at all supported, 2 feeling somewhat supported, and 3 feeling very well supported, only 3 survivors responded saying they felt they were currently very well supported. This is in stark contrast to the 16 survivors who on that same scale reported that they felt very well supported 6-months prior whilst in the Poppy Project. However, as the interviewer was a former Poppy Project support worker, there is potential for bias in this response.

Do you feel like you are currently in need of support?	How well do you feel you are being supported currently? (on a scale of 1-3) ²⁰		
Yes	1 – Not at all supported	2 – Somewhat supported	3 – Very well supported
	7	12	3

Among the 11 women who were accessing specialist support around trafficking (4 of whom were in their ‘Rest and Reflection’ period having not yet received a Conclusive Grounds decision on their trafficking referral and so were still living in a government-funded safe house), responses were generally quite positive, as one woman stated, **“I can’t ask for more. I have people who are helping me regularly”**. However some among this same group of respondents were quick to note the differences they perceived in having a specialist support worker versus having an advocate within the NRM. As one survivor put it, **“Poppy Project is the only organization that provides you a [trafficking] report and fights for you,”** a sentiment that was echoed by another, **“[t]hat’s what I feel like I’m missing out – if Poppy were still around, she [support worker] would harass the Home Office and tell them ‘you lot need to make a decision!’”** A third survivor explained,

“I have a safe house support worker but don’t see her often. It’s not like Poppy, you know? If these people were serious they would call the Home Office and chase them up. But these people they don’t do anything, they just sit and wait for a letter, they don’t chase them up.”

¹⁹ For the purposes of this report, solicitors and mental health professionals were not considered to be providing a support worker function, although it is apparent from some interviews that occasionally professionals involved have gone beyond their official remit in order to do so.

²⁰ Four interviewees failed to respond due to difficulty understanding the scale system. These 4 all stated that they felt they were in current need of support.

These independent responses make it clear that this lack of proactive advocacy within the NRM was seen as a crucial gap to survivors of trafficking in the government-funded scheme and other specialist support organisations. This means that following initial identification, survivors want and need experts who can provide them with trafficking reports and advocate for their conclusive identification as victims of human trafficking with leave to remain in the UK. This is particularly true of those victims who had overturned a negative Conclusive Grounds decision, which they had initially received due to lack of advocacy or not enough evidence being submitted by the support worker or First Responder who took the initial referral.

In building a strong model of support, there is always a concern of building dependency and overreliance upon a support worker rather than empowerment. Although some survivors did report feeling helpless without a dedicated support worker, far more survivors reported finding the courage “to be own support worker” when Poppy was gone. For example as one survivor put it,

“No one told me what to do, but [they] helped me to think things through. Now I can think back to those conversations with [my Poppy support worker] and remember how to think through things on my own. It helped to understand, to grow stronger yourself.”

It is clear that many former service users felt empowered to become their own advocates based on the advocacy they had experienced in Poppy,

“I called my mental health [therapist] and said you need to come with me to my Social Services interview, because they take advantage if no one is there. And that is because Poppy has created that strength for me, I use the strength [my support worker] gave every time I get stuck. I want my justice back. I learned that from Poppy Project too, how they speak to Social Services, so I learned the technique. I learned that from Poppy Project, I do emails and have every record. I picked up a lot of strategy from Poppy Project...”

Another young women proudly described how she “self-advocated” to convince her local housing options – who had not encountered the NRM before and had little understanding of trafficking – that victims of trafficking are priority need and managed to secure herself supported accommodation on that basis. However, some survivors equally reported the difficulty they had in managing their cases with less assistance, particularly in terms of contacting the Home Office or their solicitors on their own. This was especially heightened in the cases of those with minimal English-language skills, although this could be due more to lack of interpretation than on the need for a support worker.

Other survivors interviewed highlighted the difference having a dedicated specialist support worker made to their emotional wellbeing. Multiple women who were currently

living in supported or safe house accommodation made the point that support was not about having someone do everything for you, but about a) having someone with whom you could build a relationship and b) having someone who could explain the complexities of your case to you and provide you with the information you need to support yourself.

“I felt really good when supported by Poppy, [my support worker] was fighting very hard for me and accompanying me. I felt stronger, really good like someone was interested in my affairs. Whereas now I feel like my hopes are completely vanished. Now I have help, a room, it’s warm and I have somewhere to stay [...] since Poppy closed I just eat the food and stay there but I don’t know what will happen tomorrow.”

Another explained, ***“I feel like I have to do everything by myself, which makes me more independent, but I have to have information.”*** The importance of continuous support by someone who knows your case and cares about its outcome was brought up time and again: One woman, with serious health problems as result of her trafficking experiences, said ***“Sometimes I’m not well, I’m in a lot of pain and need support. They don’t call to check on me if I’m ok, if I’m at home. The lady is always there in the house but doesn’t check to see if you’re ok even if you’re sick. It’s like living on your own. When I say I’m not well, she says ‘I’m sorry’ and that’s it.”***

Further, one professional who responded to confirm that she was still in contact with the former Poppy service user (who was not interviewed for this report), wrote, ***“[u]nfortunately things went downhill for Leila²¹ once she stopped seeing [a Poppy support worker] from the project - I managed to get her referred to a local service, and she has engaged to an extent with them but she is constantly asking me for [the Poppy support worker’s] number so I don’t think she feels so supported now.”***A different service user explained a potential reason for this, ***“[w]ith Poppy [I] had continuity, can build a relationship, don’t need to go over that information [about what happened in the past]. I think a lot of people abstain to access services because of that.”***

IMMIGRATION STATUS

Of the 30 women who were interviewed, 13 had received some sort of leave to remain in the UK and 15 were waiting for a decision on an application with the Home Office. Of the latter, 8 were still in their statutory 'Recovery and Reflection period' awaiting Conclusive Grounds decisions under the NRM. The remainder had either received a negative NRM decision or received a positive Conclusive Grounds without any leave to remain and were therefore reliant on their status as asylum seeker, etc. Two women did not currently have any application in with the Home Office although both were planning to make fresh applications.

The US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report highlighted the lack of long term immigration options or support in the UK:

“The government did not provide sufficient care for victims following the 45-day reflection period. Authorities have acknowledged NRM support is not intended to provide rehabilitation, and noted many victims were still profoundly vulnerable after 45 days. NGOs reported cases of victims returning to prostitution or being re-trafficked due to lack of long-term support.”

And that

“once a conclusive decision within the NRM system was made, authorities typically deported foreign victims. Long-term legal alternatives to removal to countries where victims might face hardship or retribution were only available through asylum procedures.”²²

Given this lack of security, including the risk of immediate removal from the UK, after as little time as 45 days at which point victims have not begun to rebuild their lives, it is unsurprising that concerns regarding immigration status were listed among the top 3 priority needs. In fact, given the direct link between one's immigration status and entitlement to various forms of accommodation, the most pressing issue of suitable accommodation is thus directly related to immigration status. [Simply put: it is impossible for some victims of trafficking to fully recover without first having some security as to their immigration status.](#)

This means granting positively identified victims of trafficking a certain amount of leave to remain, with clear guidelines around renewal. In the past, this would have affected non-EU victims only but due to changes to the benefits system this now directly affects EEA/ EU victims as well, who are unable to access benefits without additional DLR. The British vote to exit the European Union is likely to further impact upon this.

As is discussed in “Life Beyond the Safe House”,²³ this does not even begin to address the

situation of those who are conclusively recognized as victims of human trafficking but receive no leave to remain in the UK at all. This can be a disaster for many survivors of trafficking, for example, if a victim has been trafficked to pay off a family debt which has increased due to the victim not being paid or paid less than promised. As one survivor, who didn't receive any leave to remain in the UK, interviewed said, ***"I'm very confused, don't understand it and feel very lost, very stressed out. I had been led to believe if received a positive trafficking decision, I would be given leave. I don't understand current situation"*** (paraphrased).

Of the 30 survivors of trafficking who were interviewed, 11 had received leave to remain – this was either discretionary leave to remain via the NRM, or had been granted asylum (usually due to a recognised risk of re-trafficking). Eight of these women, however, had been granted leave for a period of 1 year or less, and that leave had already expired or was about to do so. In each of these cases, application for extension of leave to remain had been made to the Home Office, and in only one case had extension been granted. The remaining 7 remained in limbo, waiting in some cases already for over one year to learn whether or not the Home Office will decide to continue to allow them to stay in the UK.

This waiting period is unsurprisingly impacting upon the women's ability to settle and move on with their lives, with the impact felt most severely in the context of housing and employment.

For example, one woman received one year of discretionary leave and was therefore able to move into specialist supported housing, which was set up to be "second-stage" accommodation with the intention that residents would be ready to move into independent accommodation within one year. However, because her planned move-on date coincided with expiration of her leave to remain, the council has refused to accept her for independent housing. She has now been living in the supposed accommodation for nearly 2 years, despite no longer needing the same level of support and feeling ready for a more independent life, crucially taking up the space from those who may more desperately need access to supported living.

In another case, a woman who had only received 6-months discretionary leave, reported she was forced to remain in temporary accommodation as the council did not want to move her anywhere more long-term due to the fact that her leave would be expiring in less than a year. She has further been struggling to find work despite being work-ready and capable, as potential employers are adverse to hiring someone whose visa is about to expire.

What is interesting about each of these cases is that apart from one woman who had an excellent immigration solicitor and whose leave was extended for a period of 3 years, the Home Office has not made decisions on any of the other applications, even those which were made over one year ago. [It almost seems as if the Home Office intentionally does not want to deal with the question of what to do with victims of trafficking once they have entered mainstream systems of support in the UK.](#) As a consequence, victims are left in limbo and unable to move on from their trafficking.

One issue that was brought up by multiple survivors was what happens once leave to remain has actually been granted. [There is a systemized gap between receiving a positive Conclusive Grounds decision with corresponding leave to remain in the UK, and accessing mainstream housing and benefits.](#) Under current NASS policy, anyone who receives leave to remain is required to vacate their accommodation and has their asylum support payments stopped within 28 days. This is regardless of whether or not they are able to access any further funding such as mainstream benefits or accommodation. Whether moving out from safe house accommodation or NASS, this transition was identified as being unnecessarily difficult, in part because seemingly nothing about the mainstream system is prepared to handle the unique position of victims of trafficking. One survivor gave an example, which illustrated the overall situation quite well, saying she felt like she had been **“thrown from the frying pan into the fire”**:

“It’s crazy, everything being thrown at you at the same time: benefits, housing, national insurance [...] Benefits is quite complicated if you’ve never been to the Job Centre before [...] you have to be prepared for anything they ask for [...] sometimes you can’t remember what medication you’re on or how to spell it. Some of the questions trigger your mind – when did you come to this country? – bam – you remember what you went through... It just triggers bad memories... I cried when I went to the Job Centre. ‘How come you don’t have a bank account and national insurance number if you’ve been in this country 10 years?’ How do you answer somebody back, how can you tell them why? [...] There should be a simplified way, especially if you’ve been trafficked [...] I think it’s good if they know some of the difficulties people are having accessing benefits.”

In a further example, a woman who had been living in NASS accommodation, without outreach trafficking support, received leave to remain and a positive Conclusive Grounds decision, overturning her previous negative Conclusive Grounds decision on the basis of a reconsideration request report written by her support worker at Poppy. [Upon receiving leave to remain as a victim of trafficking, she was kicked out of her NASS accommodation, as per policy, within 28 days and left destitute, nearly becoming homeless.](#) While a charity worker from a migrant and refugee organisation was able to assist her to secure temporary accommodation, her lack of a national insurance number meant that she was unable to apply for Job Seekers Allowance and therefore was left to resort to going to a group of local nuns in order to eat one free meal per day. [This was her situation immediately after having been recognized as a vulnerable victim of human trafficking](#) who was in need of leave to remain in the UK in order to continue accessing support to recover from her experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations of this report are those the survivors voiced as their most pressing needs:

1. **Sustained access to suitable accommodation.** As numerous interviewees reported, fear of disruption due to changes in accommodation – from GPs, counselling and support networks, to children’s schools – was a main concern, in some cases prompting women to choose remaining in unsuitable accommodation over accessing, for example, government-funded safe house support. Although each safe house is run differently the one thing all of these safe houses have in common is that the two most likely move-on pathways for victims of trafficking are either via asylum NASS accommodation or the local council.

A key recommendation is therefore to create a standardised system in which survivors of trafficking are prioritised by both NASS and the local council for suitable accommodation in their local area. There is currently a concession within the NASS application process which allows those who are receiving treatment from the Helen Bamber Foundation or Freedom from Torture to remain accommodated in London – this concession could therefore be extended to any recognised victim of trafficking, with a positive Conclusive Grounds decision. It should additionally allow survivors to “skip” the standard initial accommodation stage in which asylum-seekers generally await dispersal and instead allow them to move directly from the safe house into their “permanent” NASS allocation. In the context of Local Authority housing, as has been the case with domestic violence, victims of trafficking need to be classed as priority need for housing and clear guidance needs to be issued to local authorities on interpretation of the Care Act (2014) regarding those who have been referred into the NRM.

2. **Continued provision of specialist support and advocacy.** The feedback given by survivors in interviews strongly echoes the recommendations made in the Human Trafficking Foundation’s publication “Life Beyond the Safe House.”²⁴ In particular, Principal Recommendation number 2, “that a Model of Advocacy is introduced and made available to adult survivors of modern slavery beyond the duration of the ‘recovery and reflection period’” has been repeated by those interviewees who named continued support and advocacy as their highest priority need.

Victims have further expressed their need for expert advocacy within the NRM system, such as through the provision of detailed expert trafficking reports, a role that would most naturally fall to the First Responder who made the initial NRM referral. Provision of such reports, detailing trafficking indicators and on-going support needs, could easily become a requirement of subcontractors providing government-funded support to victims awaiting NRM decisions. The Home Office ‘Review of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking’, published in November 2014, recommends that there is a provision of ‘support based on an assessment of the individual needs of

the victim. Consideration should be given to entry and exit timescales, support following conclusive identification, and the audit and inspection of support provision.’²⁵

3. **Continuity of care.** As has been shown, there is currently a massive gap in support when survivors receive leave to remain and transition from NASS accommodation or the safe house into mainstream support. While continuity of statutory care is best achieved by the ability to remain in one borough, this need could be further supported by Principal Recommendation 4 in “Life Beyond the Safe House”²⁶ to “develop a Case Transfer Protocol” to make transitions a more streamlined process and, crucially, ensure newly recognized victims of trafficking are not unintentionally left destitute due to common bureaucratic issues such as lack of a National Insurance Number. There is a similar recommendation in the Home Office’s ‘Review of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking’, that ‘a single management process for trafficking cases should be put in place’.²⁷
4. **Provision of leave to remain.** Recognition as a refugee through the asylum system grants an initial five years of leave to remain in the UK, followed by the opportunity to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Recognition of a victim of trafficking through the NRM, by contrast, carries no automatic grant of leave to remain in the UK.

There is a possibility that a Residence Permit may be granted, though this is by no means automatic and usually has to be advocated for. The Residence Permit is usually one-year of discretionary leave to remain, but smaller periods of leave are also granted. The grounds for renewing a Residence Permit are unclear, leading to additional uncertainty for victims.

This could be resolved by positive recognition of a victim of trafficking resulting in an automatic grant of a Residence Permit, with at least one year’s leave to remain in the UK.

A positive Conclusive Grounds decision, as the system currently stands, is for many meaningless without accompanying leave to remain in the UK. Without such leave victims cannot begin to recover from their trafficking experience and to rebuild their lives while they recover. Many are clear that returning to the situation from which they were trafficked is impossible and as such disappear, highly vulnerable to re-exploitation within the UK. If returned, the risk of re-trafficking is high, with all the pre-existing vulnerabilities in place compounded by the trauma and loss of having been trafficked. As this report has evidenced, those who do receive some form of leave to remain work hard to integrate and settle their lives in the UK, only to end up in limbo, waiting to learn whether or not that leave will be extended.

²⁵ Review of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking. Jeremy Oppenheim, November 2014. Published by the Home Office https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf Recommendations, paragraph 2.2.3, page 8

²⁶ http://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Life%20Beyond%20the%20Safe%20House_0.pdf

²⁷ Review of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking. Jeremy Oppenheim, November 2014. Published by the Home Office https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf Recommendations, paragraph 2.2.5, page 9

One of the first statements made since taking office by the UK's Prime Minister Theresa May was that her Government 'will lead the way in defeating modern Slavery'.²⁸ The UK's Modern Slavery Strategy (2014) states that victims are "often requiring a multidisciplinary approach to address both the trauma of coming to terms with their experience and longer-term support to help them to move on and rebuild their lives". And that while "immediate support in safe accommodation is important ... we also need to consider what help we can provide victims so that they can move forward with their lives". It needs to be acknowledged that victims cannot move forward until they have been given the time to recover and access the support and resources that entails.

The Prime Minister Theresa May wrote for the Telegraph about how she met a woman who 'had come to England as a student but was forced into prostitution, imprisoned in a house in south London and regularly abused, including being threatened at gunpoint. When she finally escaped to north London, she was picked up by another gang that systematically exploited her and raped many others in a squalid high-street brothel'.²⁹

This story helps demonstrate how incredibly vulnerable survivors of trafficking are when they escape their situation. Without long term support, survivors of trafficking are vulnerable to repeat exploitation. The Prime Minister names modern slavery as the great human rights issue of our time. We need to do more than identify those who survive this crime. We need to make sure they are never a victim of this heinous crime again.

²⁸ My Government will lead the way in defeating modern slavery Theresa May 30 July 2016, The Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/30/we-will-lead-the-way-in-defeating-modern-slavery/>

18 ²⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/30/we-will-lead-the-way-in-defeating-modern-slavery/>

ANNEX

Methodology

The original remit of this investigatory project was to conduct “an evaluation of the hundred or so survivors of human trafficking known to the former Poppy Project and what sort of help they need to progress their life in the UK,” resulting in “the production of a spread sheet listing individual survivors, what country they came from, when, what their current status in the UK is, in what accommodation they are currently living (NASS, local authority housing or private landlord), and whether they have support workers.” The objectives were thus twofold: 1) “to learn what exactly survivors need, what is available and what is not, and whether there is practical help available for them to enjoy a more fulfilled life” and 2) to identify and facilitate short-term, practical interventions with which the Human Trafficking Foundation could assist via its Victim Fund. All the women who participated signed informed consent forms and agreement to share anonymised and aggregated information was obtained.

As with the staff, service users of the Poppy Project were still shocked and in some cases traumatised having relatively recently learnt that the project would be closing and their support ending and were of course still coping with the very real impacts of this. Therefore, before arranging interviews for this project, each of the former Poppy support workers was contacted to obtain their input on contacting the service users they had formerly supported, namely, whether or not they believed it could be damaging or retraumatising for contact to be made, as well as the service user’s ability to understand the purpose of the meeting, that Poppy is still closed, and that they would not receive casework support from the Human Trafficking Foundation. In the case of 13 former service users, support workers did not feel it would be ethical to make contact and these cases were therefore not included in this investigation.

Attempts were made to contact each of the remaining 60 former service users, which included the following: sending an introductory letter by post, sending an introductory text message, calling twice by phone, and as last resort contacting the last known support worker or legal representative. Out of these 60, 38 were reached directly and a total of 36 interviews were arranged, out of which 5 were cancelled by the survivor at last minute. Therefore a total of 31 interviews were undertaken, however in one case the interviewee agreed to meet and speak, but declined consent to be included in this report and therefore information shared in that conversation is not included here. Two women refused an interview outright, and in each of these cases stated it was because they felt sufficiently settled and wanted to move on with their lives. In addition, 17 professionals responded to confirm that they were still in contact with the survivor in some way, including with regards to those 13 former service users whom support workers did not feel it ethical to contact directly.

Direct contact	Contact via professional	No contact	Total
38	17	18	73

This means that 18 women out of the initial 73 are unaccounted for. Unfortunately it is impossible to interpret the reasons for this, although risk of re-trafficking or further exploitation is certainly a concern.

In some cases, it is likely that the survivor did in fact receive the letter and/or calls but chose not to respond, as is her right. However, in at least one case, Poppy was contacted within weeks of closing with the news that a former service user did not attend her Home Office substantive interview and seemed to be missing, as she could not be reached by her legal representative or new support worker.

A further former service user is believed to have been detained in the fast track for removal. In another case, a man answered the personal mobile of one of the former service users and said it was the wrong number.

These are the more ominous-seeming cases, but in each it is difficult to ascertain what exactly has gone on. However in two further cases, contact had been lost because the last-known representative or support provider had considered the survivor to be sufficiently resettled and thus closed their case.

It is also important to recognise that out of the 13 women who were not directly contacted out of ethical concerns, the whereabouts of only 5 have been confirmed by their last-known legal representative or support worker, meaning the remaining 8 may be similarly “missing”. In fact, it is this group – who was viewed in the eyes of their former support workers to have the highest likelihood of re-traumatisation and lowest levels of understanding – for whom there might be cause for the greatest concern.

Interviews took place either in the interviewee’s accommodation or in a safe public meeting space such as a coffee shop; in a few cases – primarily where interpretation was required or no other option was available – interviews took place at the Human Trafficking Foundation office. Due to the prohibitive cost of office meeting space and occasional risk of meeting in private residences, interviewees were not always able to choose the location where they felt most comfortable meeting; this may potentially have played a factor in some of the last minute cancellations. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to just over 2 hours and interviews that took place in private homes tended to run much longer than those which took place in public locations or even in the Human Trafficking Foundation offices. This is unlikely to be a coincidence, as survivors were likely to feel more at ease in their own living quarters. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, totalling over 30 hours of face-to-face time, and notes were taken by hand. Direct quotes were noted wherever possible and are used throughout this report.

Two interview days were arranged with interpreters for the largest groups of non-English speakers: Albanian and Vietnamese. A total of three women, each of whom spoke a different language, were not invited to participate due to lack of further interpretation due to budget.

Throughout the report, the terms 'survivors', 'victims', 'interviewees', 'former service users' and 'women' are used interchangeably. All interviewees were women who had been identified as having been trafficked by the Poppy Project, regardless of their status under the NRM.

Jess Phillips MP, Vice Chair All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

“This report is a damning indictment of our failure to protect victims of trafficking. How can one not be moved reading about the experiences of survivors of this terrible crime -where female survivors are housed in one room with their children in dangerous, mixed gender accommodation, and pregnant survivors are moved four times in the space of four months. And then there are the survivors who this report was unable to follow, who are likely to have disappeared back into the hellish world they thought they had escaped from. It lays bare the bizarre and cruel nature of our system: Whereby we place resources into identifying victims, and housing them for 45 days while we formally recognise them as trafficked; but once the Home Office confirms they are victims, all support ends and they are left to fend for themselves, often without knowledge of our language, without housing, no friends and family to lean on, and still traumatised, and often sick with long-term health problems as a result of their experiences. This report’s recommendations provide a clear policy pathway on how to tackle this serious, often fatal, gap in the system.”

Helen Grant MP, Human Trafficking Foundation Trustee

“Our Prime Minister has led the way in the fight against slavery, with the Modern Slavery Act and her recent commitment to prioritise this crime as the leading human rights issue of our generation. While this country now leads the way in this area there is still more to do, as this report sadly reveals. Without long-term support provision in place, victims of trafficking will continue to go missing, as a quarter did in this report, or end up destitute, or in unsuitable, unstable accommodation and at real risk of re-trafficking. As this report asks, what is the point of rescuing victims and giving them hope, if we only then return them to a place of vulnerability where they are likely to be trafficked again?”

Corrie Wilson MP, Vice Chair APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

“I welcome this report’s valuable contribution in the fight against slavery. It’s shocking that we have no idea what happens to victims after we identify them. This report gives us a sometimes sad, at other times very worrying, snapshot of what happened to some of the survivors Poppy worked with. We will never know what became of 18 of those women Poppy supported, who have simply disappeared, but with the help of this report we can begin to discuss what policies could help prevent a repeat of this tragedy. Scotland already provides continued advocacy and support after victims are identified in the NRM. It is time for the rest of the UK to do the same.”