



# Technology Use Report

A Survey of Residential Programs Across the Nation

October 2020

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The Samaritan Women Institute for Shelter Care conducts regular surveys, site visits, and interviews with those who operate residential programs serving victims of exploitation and trafficking. Our mission in these endeavors is to provide evidence-based reporting that will inform the decisions and practices of shelter providers so that we can continue to improve the quality of care offered to survivors.

We do this work at no cost to the agencies who benefit from these studies.

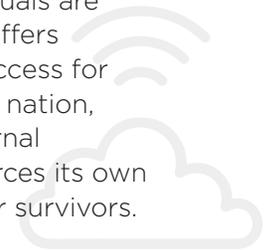
If your agency has participated in any of our studies, again we thank you. You are contributing to a national body of work and collective understanding to benefit survivors anywhere



## Introduction

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Technology is the way of the world. In the past 10 years, technology has advanced to where we carry the breadth of human knowledge around in our pockets, we are able to contact anyone at any time no matter where they are, and we can connect with people from all over the globe. Having access to technology is so ubiquitous that it almost seems unthinkable that someone should go without access to a cell phone or a means to connect to the Internet. However, there are those for whom the world has not been kind, for whom the Internet has been a tool of exploitation, and for whom the ability to connect with strangers has been detrimental rather than enriching. Among these individuals are survivors of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. This report offers recommendations of practice for trafficking shelters in regards to technology access for their residents using a collaboration of existing policies from shelters across the nation, recommendations from justice professionals who work with survivors, and external research pertinent to these issues. Ultimately, each agency establishes and enforces its own protocols. Our hope is that this study advances conversation on what is best for survivors.



## Method

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Anecdotally, we knew there was a wide range of opinions on technology access for survivors. So to conduct this study, The Samaritan Women - Institute for Shelter Care distributed two separate surveys. The first survey was sent in March 2020 via email to 140 agencies nationwide that provide residential care to survivors of domestic sex trafficking. Responses were collected using SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey and analytic tool. There were 43 questions, and the survey took an average of 17 minutes to complete. Respondents were not compensated for their entries and no personal identifying information was collected. The survey was active for 10 weeks and 32 agencies responded.

The second survey was sent to justice professionals who specifically work in the field of human trafficking from our existing contacts list and was also posted through the Conference on Crimes Against Women web portal. The survey was sent out in April 2020 and was left open for 10 weeks. It contained 28 questions and took an average of 11 minutes to complete. Respondents were not compensated for their contributions and no personal identifying information was collected. Twenty-five individuals from across the spectrum of legal services responded to the survey.





## Respondents

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### Shelter Homes

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**Fourteen states are represented in this sample of residential shelters:**

CA - 6	KS - 2	MN - 1
TN - 3	DC - 1	LA - 1
MO - 1	TX - 5	FL - 2
MD - 1	NV - 2	IL - 1
MA - 2	PA - 1	

#### Respondent's role:

44% Program Director/Coordinator  
31% Executive Directors

A case manager and intake supervisor represented one respondent each.

#### The number of years these agencies have been serving survivors:

≤ 2 years	-	3
6-8 years	-	6
12-14 years	-	1
3-5 years	-	11
9-11 years	-	5
15+ years	-	6

### Justice Professionals

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**Among the justice professionals that responded, 10 states are represented:**

CO - 1	KS - 1	MA - 1
PA - 5	TX - 6	DC - 1
KY - 1	OH - 4	SC - 1
VA - 1	FL - 3	

#### Respondent's role with victims of sexual exploitation/trafficking:

4% Arresting Officer  
32% Investigator/Detective  
30% Victim Advocate  
20% Prosecuting Attorney  
10% Parole/Probation Officer  
4% Specialized Docket Coordinator for HT

#### The 25 responding justice professionals have collectively 220 years of experience serving victims of human trafficking.

The average number of years that respondents spent working specifically in this field is 9 years, with the least amount of time being 2 years, and the greatest amount of time being 24 years.



## Shelter Homes

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### Program Type and Duration:

- 16% Stabilization Program - 3-6 months of residential care, usually to determine course of action
- 81% Restorative Program - 12+ months of residential care with goal of social re-entry
- 3% Independent Housing - Independent supportive housing with accountability

### Type of Victim Served:

- 22% Verified sex trafficking
- 66% Sex trafficking and/or prostitution/sexual exploitation in any form
- 12% Any form of trafficking

### Age Served:

- 22% Minors age 14 years and under
- 28% Minors age 15-17 years
- 91% Young adults age 18-21 years
- 84% Adults age 22-35 years
- 72% Adults age 36 and over
- 16% Adults with child(ren)

## Justice Professionals

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### Agency Affiliations:

- 19% Federal Bureau of Investigations
- 19% Police Department
- 14% US Department of Homeland Security
- 14% Municipal Court
- 10% District Attorney
- 10% Attorney General
- 9% State Court
- 5% Child Advocacy Center

### Type of Victim Served:

- 4% Only verified sex trafficking
- 32% Sex trafficking and/or prostitution/sexual exploitation in any form
- 64% Any form of trafficking

### Age Served:

- 16% Minors only
- 12% Adults only
- 72% All demographics

## Shelter Homes

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### Gender Served:

- 0% Male only
- 87% Female only
- 12% Both male and female
- 16% Non-binary

## Justice Professionals

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### Genders Served:

- 100% All genders served

### Geographic Reach:

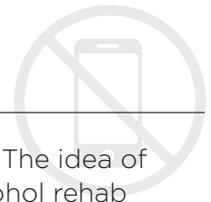
- 34% Domestic only
- 0% Foreign national only
- 69% Domestic and foreign nationals
- 31% Undocumented /Asylee/Refugee

### Geographic Reach:

- 3% Only survivors victimized in the state
- 97% Survivors from any state

## Blackout Periods for New Residents

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A blackout period is a time in which the agency or program restricts certain privileges. The idea of a blackout period is not unique to shelter care. It is a common practice in drug and alcohol rehab facilities across the nation. Regarding the vital importance of blackout periods, Addictions.com states:

*“Patients in addiction rehab actually have a rare opportunity: they are able to think about what they want out of life without the myriad distractions people usually experience on a daily basis. This is not only rare and, in some ways, enjoyable, it is also necessary because people who have been abusing drugs and have decided to seek help are at a crossroads in life. They need to have the daily issues they experience stripped away so they can truly get to the root of the problem and decide where they want to go from here.”<sup>1</sup>*

Valley Recovery Center in Sacramento, CA states, “Part of recovery is developing a sense of identity. The blackout period allows the client a chance to focus on his own sobriety and self-healing.”<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the self is a common goal for blackout periods across recovery centers. Another value is giving the residents a safe place to detox from drugs or alcohol while removing them from the stresses of life which may bring on an urge to go back to the substances from which they have

<sup>1</sup> “Blockout Time: What Is It and Why Is It Vital to Addiction Treatment?” Addictions, 10 Apr. 2019, [www.addictions.com/blog/blockout-time-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-vital-to-addiction-treatment/](http://www.addictions.com/blog/blockout-time-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-vital-to-addiction-treatment/).

<sup>2</sup> Valley Recovery, Center. “The Blackout Period Explained.” Valley Recovery Center, 5 Mar. 2018, [valleyrecovery.com/the-blackout-period-explained/](http://valleyrecovery.com/the-blackout-period-explained/).



sought to free themselves. While survivors of trafficking may or may not be detoxing from drugs or alcohol, they almost always need to detox from harmful relationships that may have contributed to, or directly facilitated, their trafficking situation. Lucy Brown, a neuroscientist at Yeshiva University asserts, “Social attachment may be understood as a behavioral addiction, whereby the subject becomes addicted to another individual and the cues that predict social reward.”<sup>3</sup> When comparing drug addiction to relationship addiction, it is evident that the dynamics between trafficker and victims are similar. As some residents have quipped, “Heroin was my pimp.”

For those working in shelter care, the idea of a trauma bond is nothing new. It is common for an exploited individual to make excuses for the abuse suffered at the hands of an abuser, or to genuinely have feelings of love or loyalty to them. One would think that, once freed from the trafficker’s control, a survivor would not even think about looking back. However, it is not unusual for trafficked persons to reach out, or even return to, their traffickers once they have left, even if they initially chose to leave the situation on their own. Dr. Becca Johnson states that, “[c]omplex trauma ... results in emotional dysregulation, loss of safety and the ability to detect or respond to danger cues,” and that survivors are, “at higher risk for self-destructive and risk-taking behaviors, revictimization, and experience difficulties with interpersonal and intimate relationships.”<sup>4</sup> All of these are risk factors for retrogression among those removed from their trafficking situation. A blackout period in which a survivor is limited from reaching out to the trafficker, or anyone who may have contact with the trafficker, can help to mitigate these trauma responses and give the survivor a chance to see that s/he is safe and cared for in the residential environment.

To better understand this phenomenon, we can look to recommendations from therapists who specialize in recovery from abusive relationships. Ann Stoneson, a trauma counselor and founder of Labyrinth Healing in Austin, TX illustrates, “recovering from a romantic relationship looks a lot like recovery from addiction,” and recommends, “a full detox needs to last a minimum of a full eight weeks of no contact.”<sup>5</sup> For those survivors who were seduced into their trafficking situation by someone pretending to give them the love they may not have had anywhere else, the blackout period becomes an invaluable window of opportunity to reflect on that relationship and recognize its harmful nature. Without contact, the trafficker is unable to influence the victim, make excuses for unhealthy behavior, promise change, or reassure of their love. Providing psychoeducation during this time will simultaneously increase their understanding of what happened to them and build on this window of opportunity and invite new thinking. Taking time to build new friendships with other residents will likewise help a new survivor understand that their situation is not unique and give him/her the opportunity to learn from survivors that are further along in their journey to recovery.

Survivors may need to detox from unhealthy family relationships as well. Even if family members were not the traffickers, there may be reason to believe the survivor’s upbringing and familial relationships

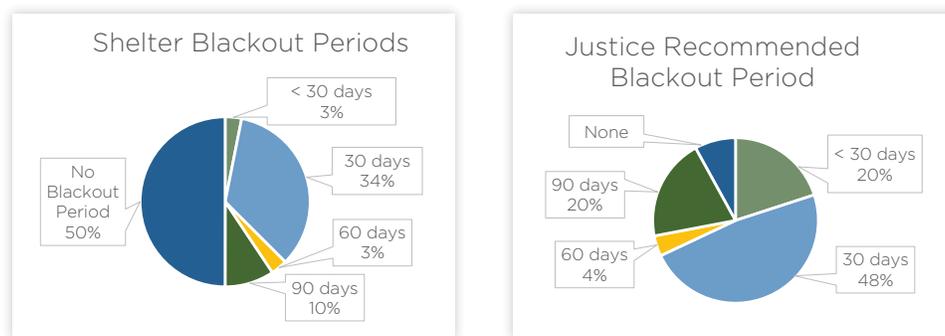
3 Earp, Sandberg, Savulescu, Wearczyk. “If I Could Just Stop Loving You: Anti-Love Biotechnology and the Ethics of a Chemical Breakup.” *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 13(11): 3-17, 3013.

4 Johnson, Becca C. “Aftercare for Survivors of Human Trafficking.” *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* 39(4): 370-389, 2012.

5 Stoneson, Ann. “The Relationship Detox.” Labyrinth Healing Blog, 2020, <https://labyrinthhealing.com/blog/the-relationship-detox>.

were precursor to the exploitation and may have contributed to that trajectory. It is also worth considering that the dynamics within the family may not initially be the most positive influence on psychological healing and growth. A blackout period in which contact with family members is limited, or restricted, can be beneficial to some survivors. For those survivors with healthy family ties, contact can be beneficial. Determining the level of safety and helpfulness of these relationships, however, can be difficult. It is up to the shelter to decide what is best for each of their residents. Whether they are detoxing from relationships with traffickers or with family members, the blackout period may give the new survivor the opportunity to focus on self, to learn about healthy relationships, and develop safe interactions with the supportive people in the shelter home.

This survey found that half of the shelter homes did not require a black-out period, but only 8% of justice professionals regarded No Black-Out as preferred. Ninety-two percent of justice professionals recognize that some time for “cooling off” is beneficial; they only differed in the amount of time that would be prescribed. Between the justice professionals and those shelters who do practice a black-out period, 30 days garnered the most consensus.



## Who is a Safe Contact?

Of the organizations that utilize a blackout period, 23% do not allow the new resident to have any outside contact, 35% only allow contact with legal and medical entities as necessary, and 42% allow contact with one or more safe contact(s). Of justice respondents, over half or 53% recommend that outside contact be restricted and supervised, 27% recommend a resident only be allowed communication with one safe contact, and 40% recommend contact only with legal and medical entities during the blackout period. This guidance then demands that the shelter have some process by which a contact is determined to be “safe.”

As mentioned above, family members can sometimes be unhealthy influences for survivors entering into residential care. The 2019 Nation Human Trafficking Hotline Data Report offered that the #2 form

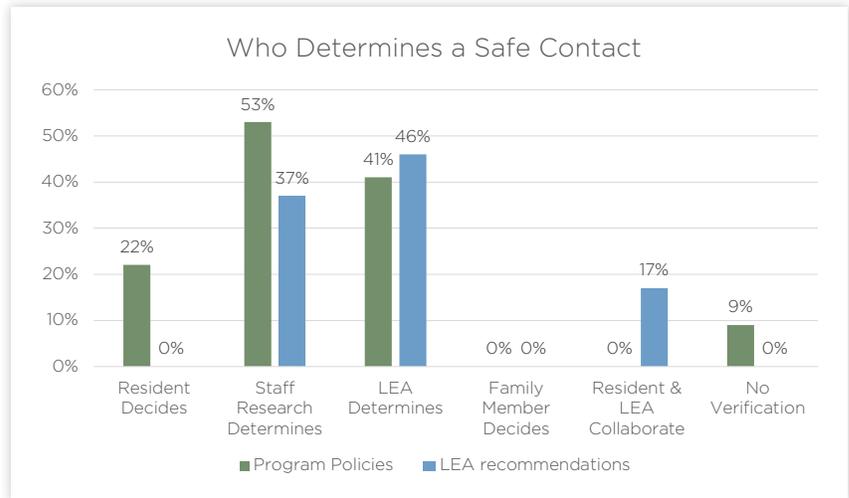


of recruitment into trafficking was family members.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that neither the shelter agencies nor the justice professionals rely on family members to determine who is a safe contact.

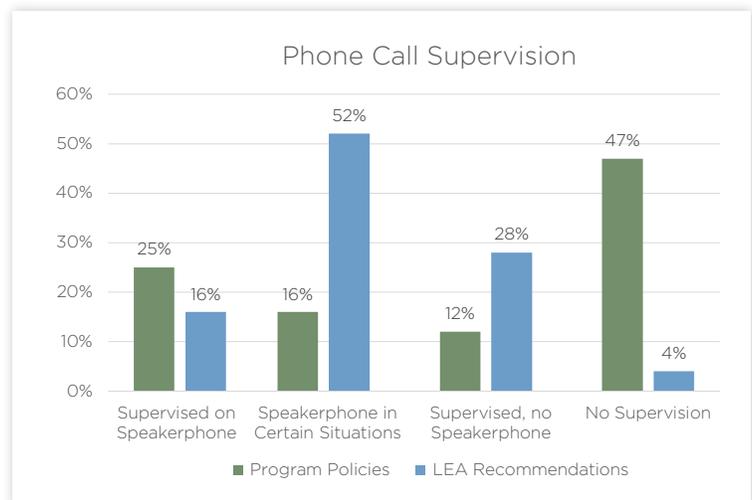
The greatest trust for determining safe contacts seems to be with the legal entity (investigator, attorney, GAL, etc.) involved in the survivor's case. However, not every survivor referred to a shelter agency will have a legal representative. In such

placements, it becomes the work of the shelter agency to diligently research contacts and make a subjective determination as to whether or not they seem safe for the resident. Methods for determining safe contacts can involve discussing the nature of the relationships with the survivor, conducting a state case search, checking the National Sex Offender Registry, a local state courts search, a Google search, social media search, or looking through the client's case notes from a legal representative or prior placements. It is important and respectful, however, to confine the research to public domain information and sources that the agency has been given approval to review.

A few shelter agencies responded that they allow residents to identify their own safe contacts. It is significant to note that all responding justice professionals and most shelter agencies recommend against this method of determination. One shelter shared this anecdote that caused them to change their policy: "a resident claimed a certain contact was her lawyer, yet later it came to light that he was a man who had frequently purchased sex from her." This example is not to suggest new residents cannot be trusted but it is reasonable to assume that, at the beginning of their journey, residents may not yet be equipped to make healthy decisions. Residents,



*It is important to note that neither the shelter agencies nor the justice professionals rely on family members to determine who is a safe contact.*



<sup>6</sup> <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>

of course, should be allowed to specify whom they would like to contact; however, it is necessary to make an effort to protect the survivor, which may include making a judgment call about how an individual may aid or detract from the survivor's healing and recovery.

In addition to determining safe contacts, both surveys asked about phone call supervision and opinions varied in two notable areas: law enforcement rarely thought that the "no supervision" approach was advised, and most recommended that calls on speakerphone were the best approach.

Of the shelters that supervise resident phone calls, most stated that a supervisor could interrupt/end a phone call early for any of the following reasons:

72% If the contact becomes verbally abusive or aggressive
76% If the resident displays signs of being emotionally distressed
60% If the phone is passed to an unidentified person
68% If the contact is misrepresented
68% If there is talk of criminal activity
76% If the resident discloses any identifying information about other residents



As a shelter agency, there is a difficult line to walk between giving residents the choice that they have heretofore been denied and providing the safety for which they have turned to the agency to provide. Two common goals across residential programs are to build self-esteem and teach healthy boundaries so that residents can learn to make good choices for themselves. It may be safe to say that some residents do not enter a residential program with those skills intact and may require assistance in making healthy and safe choices. As they grow in self-esteem and personal boundaries, residents will increase in their ability to analyze which relationships are healthy and which relationships should not be pursued. Regulating phone conversations, particularly in the very beginning of a survivor's recovery journey, is one of the many policies a shelter agency should develop when considering how to create a safe environment.

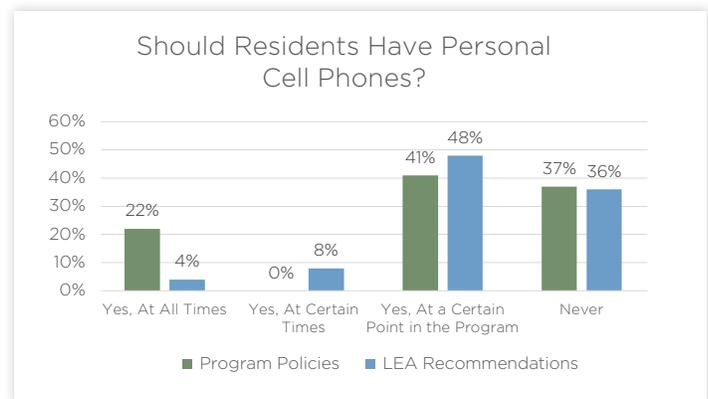
Trafficking shelters are not the only agencies that restrict and monitor resident phone calls. Facilities that provide inpatient or residential mental health services generally do not allow patients to keep personal cell phones. If a reason is given in the facility's description of rules and regulations, it always pertains to the patient paying more time and attention to recovery. Phone calls are allowed in supervised areas, usually at restricted times during the day with a limit on duration. Jails, prisons, and other detention centers similarly restrict and monitor phone calls in order to ensure that inmates are not conducting criminal activities with outside contacts. Monitoring phone calls in the trafficking shelter setting blends both of these purposes together. Survivors are not criminals and should not be treated as such. Instead, shelters must recognize that residents often come with ties to unhealthy relationships. Restricting and monitoring phone calls, particularly in the beginning phases of recovery, serves the dual purpose of giving the resident more time to focus on recovery while receiving help in recognizing, navigating, or disconnecting from unhealthy relationships.

## Cell Phone Use

One of the major debates in shelter care is the use of cell phones: should residents be able to keep their personal cell phones while in a program? Are cell phones withheld until a certain point in the program or are they not allowed at all? As with all topics in this research, the issue of cell phone use demands that shelters tread the fine line between giving survivors voice and choice versus providing the safety and healing for which they have turned to the shelter. It is important to note when discussing this policy that residential candidates should be aware of such restrictions *before* choosing to enter the program. No matter what the policies, the best way for shelters to provide voice and choice for survivors considering their program is to be upfront about rules. The ultimate dignity is in allowing the candidates to choose whether they think the program is a good fit for their needs.

The majority of shelter programs and justice professionals agree that residents should be allowed a personal cell phone when they reach

a certain point in the program. This goes along with the earlier discussion of residents learning self-esteem, boundary setting, and improving their mental health before being given the responsibility of determining with which family and friends they want to engage. As residents become more equipped to handle relationships in a healthy way, and end relationships that are detrimental to their mental and physical health, they will then have the chance to practice what they have learned while still in a supportive environment.



*We had a 16-year old survivor who had a terrible relationship with her mother. She was desperate for her mother to show her attention and affection, but her emotional walls were so high that within 3 minutes of getting on the phone, the two of them would be screaming and name-calling. After a few weeks of cutting those toxic calls short and dealing with the emotional carnage, we began to teach the daughter a new pattern. She was asked to rehearse the first 5 minutes of her call, starting with "Hello Mother, how was your day?"*

*Her phone call day came and even though it took every bit of strength, she forced out those words. Her mother was speechless, and then started to cry. She said to her daughter, "You've never asked me that before. Actually, I had a hard day, and I was dreading this call. Do you really want to hear about my day?"*

*And a wall started to come down between them. It was a start.*



The survey for shelter agencies asked if their program policies on cell phone use have changed over time, and what contributed to that decision. Twelve percent indicated that the policy changed from allowing cell phones to *not* allowing cell phones. The most common reason was that residents were reaching out to unhealthy/unsafe people. One agency stated that a resident purchased drugs and alcohol from someone she met through her phone on social media, and another stated that cell phones distracted residents from focusing on themselves. One agency shared that, when personal cell phones were allowed, one resident was receiving constant hostile and demeaning messages from family. Staff members were not aware of this and were therefore unable to help the resident navigate the verbal and emotional abuse.

Another 12% of agencies indicated that their policy changed from not allowing cell phones to allowing them. Two shelters gave the reason that they added, or became entirely, transitional housing in which residents were allowed to go off campus and needed cell phones. Other reasons given were that the agency felt they were taking choices away from survivors, and that not having cell phones was a safety issue. One program shared that one of their residents was on a bus and discovered that her trafficker had located her. Because the resident had a cell phone, she was able to call the police who intercepted the trafficker. Though it does require quite a bit of trust in the resident, allowing cell phones for, or providing cell phones to residents who go off campus increases the sense of safety for both the resident and the agency.

Of the 44% of programs that indicated they have always allowed cell phones, two agencies stated that they did not change the policy but did tighten up their restrictions. One agency stated that they increased the program level in which residents could have cell phones. Thirty-one percent of programs indicated that they have never allowed cell phones. One agency stated:

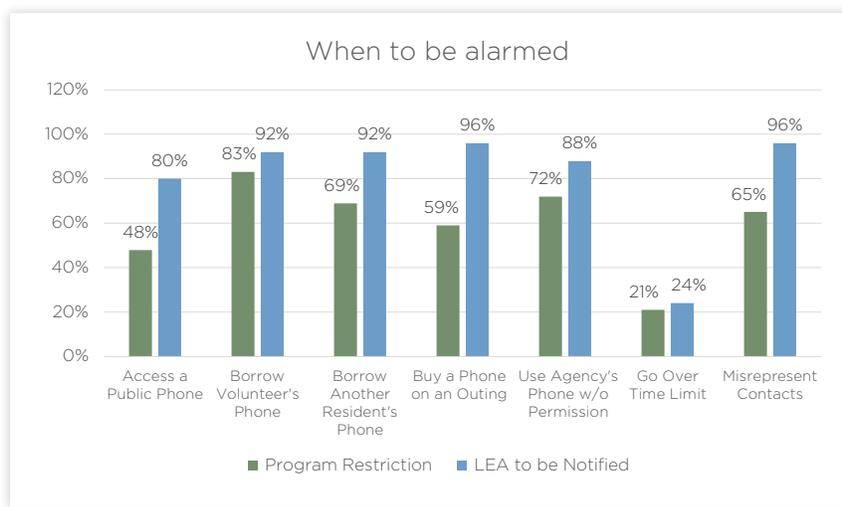
*“The women in our Recovery program often state that they are glad to not have access to cell phones or social media because it helps them to stay grounded and focused and to create separation from their past. We always let potential clients know upfront about our cell phone policy so that there is no room for confusion or misunderstanding once they arrive. Some individuals may make the decision not to come to our program because they do not wish to give up technology, but that is their choice! We have found it to be a helpful policy overall.”*

Of all program policies, not being allowed a cell phone may seem like one of the most difficult in our culture of hyper-connectivity. This policy, and related policies, must be considered in the light of the unique circumstances residents have survived and the life they are trying to leave behind. Above all else, the top concern is always the safety of individual and the household as a whole. The goal for not allowing a personal cell phone is not to completely disconnect residents from the outside world, but to help them navigate communication as they work towards personal development. With that in mind, we will dig a little deeper into phone use policies before moving on to other technology related policies.

For those agencies that do not allow personal cell phones or prohibit them until a certain point in the program, the majority (75%) have a house phone in the residence. Other options are a case management phone owned by the organization (13%), a phone in the administrative office (8%), or a staff member’s cell phone (4%). Forty percent allow calls to be made twice a week, another 40% allow calls once a day, and 20% allow calls once a week. For the phone call length, the most common time

allotment is 30 minutes (36%) with 9% stating that call length depends on who the contact is and another 9% stating that it depends on the resident’s level in the program.

The survey sent to residential programs asked about other phone restrictions the program has in place. Responses come both from agencies that do and those that do not allow personal cell phones. A parallel question was posed on the survey sent to justice professionals which asked if they would want to be notified should their client do any of the following. Notice that justice professionals determine these scenarios to be more alarming than shelters in every case.



In addition to the above scenarios, 96% of justice professionals responded that they would want to be notified if their client contacted an incarcerated person. Forty five percent of justice professionals indicated that phone use policies would influence their decision to place a client in a shelter. The reasons given fit into two categories: phone use as a safety issue and as a concern for compromising an investigation. One respondent summed up those concerns by stating, “access to phones needs to keep in mind the ability of perpetrators or any other contacts to tamper with evidence and interfere with investigations, in spite of a resident’s belief that outside contact is beneficial.” Of course, not all residents will have an active investigation. It is best to work with a resident’s legal advisor when determining outside contact for those that do have an open case.

“Access to phones needs to keep in mind the ability of perpetrators or any other contacts to tamper with evidence and interfere with investigations, in spite of a resident’s belief that outside contact is beneficial.”

- Law Enforcement Officer

## Music and Personal Music Devices

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Music can influence how people think, feel, communicate, and interact with the world. For those recovering from the trauma of trafficking, music can be both an essential healing tool and a negative influence which can keep them tied to the life from which they are trying to escape. Rap and hip-hop are usually the first genres that come to mind when guarding against music that glorifies trafficking and violence against women; however, they are not the only offending genres.

Rap music's most popular songs glorifying commercial sexual exploitation are "P.I.M.P." by 50 Cent and "Big Pimpin'" by Jay-Z. Both songs are essentially how-to guides for men who would like to exploit women for profit. P.I.M.P. gives a somewhat more concise run through of how to recruit and traffic vulnerable women and when performing the song live, 50 Cent and Snoop Dogg did so using young women on leashes as props. Three 6 Mafia won an Academy Award for Best Original Song for "It's Hard Out Here for A Pimp" in which the singer describes how he makes money by sexually exploiting women on "the track." These are not obscure songs, even those who do not listen to rap music are likely to know at least one, if not all three. There are hundreds of songs peppering the genre that glorify the sexual exploitation of, and violence against, women. A recent example is a song produced by Cardi B entitled WAP, which refers to women as Hos. A detective specializing in sex trafficking states, "pop culture has successfully glamorized the sex trade industry and warped the harsh reality of this life."<sup>7</sup> That success can be seen in the general acceptance of lyrics such as these not just by male listeners, but also female.

In an interview with Women's E-News, Rachel Lloyd, Executive Director of a mentoring agency for girls and young women, asserts that the tolerance of pimping due to its glorification in rap music is actively endangering already vulnerable young people. Lloyd considers this type of music, "one of the threats – along with poverty and single-parent homes – facing the girls she mentors." Lloyd, and other experts in the field, explain that girls are conditioned to brush aside imagery of "hos" and of male violence against women by saying things like "'they are not talking about me' or 'some girls are like that.'" In making excuses for the mistreatment heard in songs such as these, young girls are not only being desensitized to abuse but are essentially being conditioned to make excuses for abusers, and even traffickers, in their own life. To drive the point home, the article ends with this powerful quote from Lloyd:

*"It's out of control. Some girls who come into the agency like the song 'P.I.M.P. ... These are girls who have been raped, on the street, and/or incarcerated. They are girls who know the life on one hand and yet are immune and accept the images. We're trying to educate girls and help them get out (of the life) and we're fighting against a media tide."<sup>8</sup>*

In a 2010 interview with the Wall Street Journal, 10 years after Big Pimpin' was released, Jay-Z laments the message his song sends. Of his own song he asks, "What kind of an animal would say this sort

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<sup>7</sup> Dempsey, J. and Forst, L. *An Introduction to Policing*, 8th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016. (p.138)

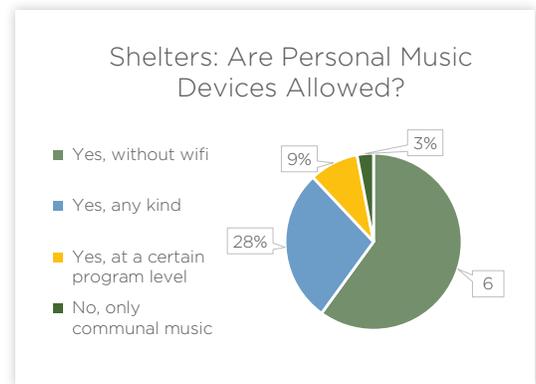
<sup>8</sup> Thompson, C. *Experts: Hottest Hip Hop Glorifies Pimping*. Women's E-News, Nov. 9, 2003: <https://womensenews.org/2003/11/experts-hottest-hip-hop-glorifies-pimping/>



of thing?” He goes on to state that, “all hip-hop needs now is love.”<sup>9</sup> Yet rap and hip-hop continue to glorify human trafficking and violence against women and are not the only genres that do. Songs normalizing sexual abuse can be found across genres. Pop has Robin Thicke’s ‘Blurred Lines’ and Justin Bieber’s ‘What Do You Mean’ both of which reinforce the idea that “no” does not always mean “no.” Two examples from Country music are Brad Paisley’s ‘I’m Still a Guy’, which enforces the idea that men just can’t control themselves, and Reba McEntire’s ‘Fancy’, in which a mother dresses up her “half-grown kid” and sends her out to find a man to pay her expenses. This leads to the titular character being sexually trafficked for 15 years. Classic and alternative rock are also rife with songs promoting similar messages, songs such as The Beatles’ ‘Run For Your Life,’ U2’s ‘Mysterious Ways,’ Beastie Boys’ ‘Girls,’ Maroon 5’s ‘Animals,’ and many more. There is a plethora of songs across genres that normalize male violence against women. These songs affect the way that girls and young women think about themselves and how to relate to the opposite sex. They also affect how boys and young men think about women and how to relate to them.

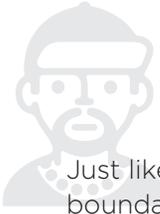
What can shelter programs do to mitigate the effects of negative messaging in music? Justice professionals and shelters had similar responses to allowing personal music devices in a shelter residence. Fifty-five percent of justice professionals said that personal music devices without Wi-Fi would be acceptable, while 10% said yes as long as the music type was monitored, and another 5% recommended no personal music devices throughout the program. Thirty percent stated that any type of personal music device could be allowed.

Twenty-seven respondents from shelter programs stated positive and negative aspects of allowing personal music devices. The responses are grouped into the following themes:



Positives	Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good coping tool</li> <li>• Can be calming/healing</li> <li>• De-escalation</li> <li>• Self-care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downloading / listening to inappropriate music or music that triggers negative thought patterns</li> <li>• Can lead to arguments: stealing or accusations of stealing a device, breaking devices</li> <li>• Disruptive: Used during group time to disengage</li> </ul>

9 Jurgensen, J. *Rapper Jay-Z on His New Book 'Decoded'*. The Wall Street Journal, Oct. 21, 2010: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304023804575566644176961542>



Just like learning healthy boundaries with contacts, survivors should also take time to learn healthy boundaries with music and media. One agency stated that they notice a change in residents who start listening to trap<sup>10</sup> music again. This can be related to a recovering alcoholic listening to music that glorifies substance abuse and intoxication. An alcoholic must change his perspective on the role of substance use in his life, he must realize that his life will be better without the control of alcohol. Likewise, in shelter care, programming must help survivors, especially female survivors, to change the perspective of themselves that they may have gained from the influence of music and the culture around it. They must realize that they are not “just a ho” and that their life can be better without the control of a gang, or a pimp, or the numerous forces that bind people to “the life.” If a survivor is trying to change her perspective and think of herself as a complete and worthy individual, listening to music and messaging that tells her otherwise can be a significant hindrance. One way to combat this is to talk with survivors about messaging in popular music. So often, people will know the words to songs but never fully process the message behind the words. One agency reported that while driving residents on outings, the staff person would turn down the radio and explain the meaning of a particular song to residents, often pointing out the disrespectful nature of the lyrics and reminding the residents that they deserve to be spoken to and treated with respect.” Teaching survivors the practice of discernment, of truly listening to lyrics and analyzing their meaning, can be a valuable life skill.

Nineteen agencies stated that they restrict the type of music residents listen to either communally or on their personal devices. Some agencies restrict only communal music to prevent triggering negative thoughts or feelings in other residents, knowing that they may not speak up if certain music makes them uncomfortable. One agency provides personal music devices with positive music already loaded. There are agencies that have a library of music from which residents can choose when putting music on personal devices. Some agencies only allow Christian music, which is a one way to eliminate harmful music but may not be practical for a non-Christian shelter agency. If employing a “selected music only” rule is not feasible, what other restrictions can be put in place to ensure that survivors are exposed to healthy messaging in their music? Responding agencies were able to give short answers and most gave the same categories of restrictions: no profanity, sexual or violent content, drug or alcohol references, misogynist lyrics, criminal references, and most of all, no glorifying trafficking.

As mentioned earlier, the goal is to help model and teach personal discernment about what are stressors in one’s life. Ask survivors who have listened to those songs how it shapes their view of themselves, others, or the trauma that they have been through. Likewise, have a list of artists that create empowering and positive music and be ready to talk about their messaging, why it is healthier, and how residents can relate to it. Even if music is unrestricted, shelter agencies can help residents form healthy boundaries with music and the messages to which they expose themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> “trap” comes from the term “trap house,” a place where drugs are sold and often trafficking takes place

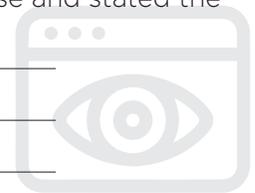
## Computer and Internet Use

Computer access is an unavoidable part of our modern world. Computers and Internet access can open up whole new worlds of education and employment for survivors in shelter programs but can also put them at risk for re-traumatization and revictimization. It is widely known that the anonymity and deindividualization offered by the Internet increases the likelihood of verbal aggression towards others. Inhibition is lowered due to the perceived lack of consequences for the perpetrator.<sup>11</sup> This lack of inhibition also shows up in the form of sexual aggression, referred to as “Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence” or TFSV. Researchers at Griffith University in Australia found that, “the Internet is an amplifier for sexual aggression, however, it may play a larger, unique role in individuals’ decision to perpetrate TFSV.”<sup>12</sup> This study looked at six areas in which “toxic disinhibition” created by anonymity on the Internet: “sexual aggression, online sexual harassment, image-based sexual harassment, cyberstalking, gender-and-sexuality-based harassment, and sexual assault and/or coercion.”<sup>13</sup> To see the majority of these in play, one need only read the comments section on YouTube videos, particularly those of female content creators.

Even if residents themselves are not the target--though depending on the ways in which they engage with the Internet there is a high likelihood that they will be--it does not take much effort to find sexually violent or aggressive speech which can certainly trigger negative feelings in someone who has experienced it. As with music, it is important to equip survivors with an understanding of what abusive behavior they may come across online and the best way to handle such abuse.

Of responding shelter agencies, 44% do not allow residents to have personal laptops or devices which connect to the Internet, 28% allow personal laptops at a certain level in the program, 22% allow personal laptops with no restrictions on use, and 6% allow personal laptops but restrict use. All agencies responded having computers provided by the organization for resident use and stated the following policies regarding resident use:

34%	Time is restricted, and use is monitored
22%	Policy depends on the resident’s program level
22%	Time is unrestricted, and use is not monitored
16%	Use is for academics only and is supervised
6%	Time is restricted but use is unmonitored
50%	Internet use is monitored by software such as NetNanny or Qustodio



<sup>11</sup> Kramer, N. Rosner, L. “Verbal Venting in the Social Web: Effects of Anonymity and Group Norms on Aggressive Language Use in Online Comments”. *Sage Journals* 2(3) (Aug 16, 2016): <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116664220>

<sup>12</sup> Zhong, L. (et al.). “An Exploratory Study of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence in Online Romantic Interactions: Can the Internet’s Toxic Disinhibition Exacerbate Sexual Aggression?” *Computers in Human Behavior* 108 (2020).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



Of responding justice professionals, 35% stated that survivors should not have personal laptops but should be allowed to use computers owned by the organization, 30% stated that survivors could have personal laptops as long as there were restrictions, 25% stated that personal laptops could be allowed at a certain level in the program, and 10% stated that survivors should not have access to computers at any point. Responses were split when asked if a shelter's computer and Internet use policy would influence their decision to place a survivor there. The main reason given for not placing a resident in a shelter program that allows Internet access is that unmonitored Internet use is a safety issue. One justice professional stated that "controlling access is critical to recovery." About a quarter of respondents stated that their opinion on the computer and Internet policy would depend upon the needs of the victim they were placing.

## Social Media Use

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Social media is one of the methods used to groom and recruit vulnerable young people into trafficking. Apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and SnapChat allow strangers to private message other users with minimal restrictions. Users can block other users on these apps but younger people may not know how to handle an aggressive stranger, may feel they need to be polite, or may even like that someone is paying attention to them and wants to be their friend. A 37-year-old mother poses as teen and pre-teen girls on Instagram to help catch and report pedophiles to the FBI. In a news article about her work, she demonstrated the aggressiveness of adult men toward children: within one minute of posting a photo of herself modified to appear as an 11-year-old child, 15 messages from adult men appeared in her inbox. She went on to show examples of overly sexual messages and images, requests for nude photos, and requests to talk over video.<sup>14</sup>

As horrifying as it is to know that predators search for children over social media for personal gratification, it is important to recognize that traffickers seek out vulnerable individuals of all ages and genders through the same medium. Polaris, along with 27 survivors of human trafficking, composed a comprehensive study on the intersection of social media and human trafficking. Both sex trafficking, through online relationships, and labor trafficking, through fake job posts, recruitment happen through an array of social media sites. New apps and sites are constantly being developed and the more social media and chat platforms that come into existence, the wider traffickers' hunting grounds become. The report goes on to describe how social media is further used to sell victims once they are recruited. Dating sites may seem like obvious platforms, but less obvious platforms—such as Facebook and Instagram—are also common places to post ads selling sex. The report states, "[s]ometimes the advertisements are on the traffickers' personal accounts but often victims are forced to own the actual posting, using an account under their name."<sup>15</sup> Even if survivors have positive relationships with

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14 Ryan, S. "I'm a 37-Year-Old Mom & I Spent Seven Days Online as an 11-Year-Old Girl. Here's What I Learned." *Medium.com*, Dec 13, 2019: [https://medium.com/@sloane\\_ryan/im-a-37-year-old-mom-i-spent-seven-days-online-as-an-11-year-old-girl-here-s-what-i-learned-9825e81c8e7d](https://medium.com/@sloane_ryan/im-a-37-year-old-mom-i-spent-seven-days-online-as-an-11-year-old-girl-here-s-what-i-learned-9825e81c8e7d)

15 Polaris. "On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking: Social Media." *Polarisproject.org*, July 2018: <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap->



social media, in that they keep up with family and friends, there is a high probability that they have experienced the exploitative nature of social media as well.

Along with being a tool for exploitation, social media can also be a tool for growth and healing. The Polaris report wraps up survivor narratives with a discussion of how victims can use social media to get help when in a trafficking situations, connect with other survivors to build a support system, and reach out to others who are currently experiencing trafficking. One agency responding to our survey noted that their residents are able to build relationships with other survivors through the use of social media, which has aided in the healing process.

When deciding on social media use in their residential program, agencies must consider both the harmful and the helpful sides of social media. As with previously discussed policies, survivors should be given time to learn about healthy versus unhealthy relationships, setting healthy boundaries, and Internet/social media safety and awareness before having free reign over social media accounts. Again, this may seem to teeter on the line of taking away survivor voice and choice, but it is important to remember that many survivors have not had the opportunity to learn the safe use of these tools and, because of this, have been severely injured by them. Regulating social media use until a survivor is well equipped to use these tools to her advantage is a way to protect against re-exploitation. The survivor's voice and choice come with knowing the program's Internet and social media restrictions up front before choosing the program. With these things in mind, we will look at social media policies from responding shelter agencies in combination with recommendations from responding justice professionals.



The survey asked if shelter agencies had any requirements for a new resident's social media accounts when s/he first arrives. The majority (69%) have no requirements, while some require the new resident to disclose all social media accounts (9%) or shut down their accounts all together (9%). Responding justice professionals preferred that residents either disclosed all social media accounts (63%) or shut down all their accounts (21%). Other requirements include turning off location services on all devices that connect to the Internet, signing a confidentiality policy agreement, or creating a new email address. One shelter agency indicated that they help residents go through their social media to identify and delete unsafe contacts when they reach the program level in which they may have social media access again. The vast majority (93%) of responding agencies do not allow residents to post pictures or share information that will identify other residents, staff or volunteers, the property, or reveal the city or state in which the program is located. One agency will allow residents to refer to each other by a nickname on social media and one agency allows photos of other residents to be posted.

Ninety-four percent of all responding justice professionals recommend against allowing residents to post pictures of other residents whether there are identifying features, posting pictures of staff or volunteers, and posting pictures of the shelter home or the grounds. Eighty-two percent recommend residents not be allowed to mention other residents either by their real name or a nick name. Seventy-six percent recommend residents not be allowed to disclose the city or state of the shelter program, or that they be allowed to discuss the program at all. Sixty-seven percent stated that a shelter



program's social media policy would influence their decision to place a resident there. The main reason given for this influence is that social media use is a safety concern including the ease with which old contacts would be able to find the resident. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that their decision would be based on the individual needs of the survivor. One legal professional commented, "Social media likely played a role in victimization and should be treated as an addiction, something that needs to be closely examined, restricted initially, and then something that the victim learns to use safely and to their benefit."

## Technology Access Overall Assessment



One shelter agency stated that restricted technology access is the key to safety, and the majority of responding agencies agree. Safety is the number one value that leads them to limit technology access. This includes safety from predators and traffickers, "drug buddies," and toxic relationships including familial. All residents can feel safer knowing that other residents cannot disclose the location to any unsafe people. Another agency stated that keeping residents distanced from unhealthy relationships helps reduce their thoughts of going back to 'the life.' Fewer distractions and increased focus on the program, self-growth, and recovery is another frequently indicated positive outcome of restricted technology access. Other agencies mentioned that the policies reduce stress and drama and helps the residents to think in new ways.

Safety is also listed as a positive outcome for shelter agencies that do allow technology access. Particularly when residents go off campus to work or attend school, having a cell phone allows them to call for help, communicate with the agency and their job, and helps the agency know where their residents are at any given time. Other benefits listed include access to therapeutic and educational resources that are available online and which may be otherwise difficult to access. Residents can take college courses online and begin to build new, healthy connections with other students and other survivors.

For agencies with unrestricted technology access, and those that gradually allow access, the greatest challenge is making sure the residents are being responsible. It can be difficult to monitor for violations of confidentiality of both the property and the other residents and staff. It is challenging to hold residents accountable and ensure that they are not posting ads online or conversing with johns or traffickers. One agency stated "it takes a lot of trust," to give residents unsupervised access to technology. When developing policies that allow access to the Internet and social media, shelter agencies must consider methods of accountability for safe Internet practices and methods to ensure that residents are abiding by the confidentiality policies in place to protect the residence and other occupants.

The two main challenges reported by agencies with restricted technology access are residents sneaking in phones and residents leaving because of the policies. Without access to a phone or the Internet, residents can feel disconnected or isolated. Hyper-connectivity is an addiction similar to drug addiction and younger residents who have had a cell phone and social media access for the majority of their lives may feel an even more acute sensation of withdrawal. Along with getting residents to



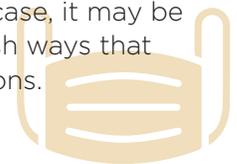
commit to the policy, staff and volunteer buy in can also be challenging. Agencies should anticipate this possibility when designing policies and develop a method for reinforcing the positive outcomes as well as a way to assist residents who may be experiencing technology withdrawal. Just like an addicted person trying to overcome his/her addiction, survivors who have chosen a program with restricted technology access will still occasionally experience withdrawal and will need assistance in strengthening their resolve and refocusing their thoughts.

One agency responded that their policy is to have restrictions in the beginning that are gradually lessened over time. The positive outcome of this method is that, as residents move along in the program and restrictions are reduced, they can feel a sense of accomplishment and responsibility. The same agency stated that allowing volunteers to connect with residents over social media increases residents' accountability while also creating a wider support system. Staff, volunteers, and residents themselves need to have a vision of the bigger picture of growth and healing rather than narrowing their vision to the seemingly punitive nature of restrictive policies. When the bigger picture is clear and well understood, it will be easier to point everyone back to it in moments where the loss of connectivity feels particularly poignant. Increased allowances as residents move up in the program can also be a motivator. As more privileges are given, residents can feel a sense of accomplishment and may even be encouraged to continue their growth through the implementation of skills learned during the period without technology access.

## Technology Use During Quarantine

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During the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, state lockdowns and social distancing orders necessitated a shift in technology use within trafficking shelters, regardless of pre-lockdown restrictions. Even programs with the most liberal technology use policies had to navigate new technology related experiences such as tele-counseling and tele-health sessions. One of the biggest concerns for shelter programs during the lockdowns was the need to support video conferencing. As therapy sessions and college courses moved online, residents are required to be on camera on a computer. The shelter must navigate any security or identity concerns with this format. The experience of interacting via video might also evoke memories for those who were exploited through video or webcam. Sanctuary for Families<sup>16</sup> recommends that those interacting with survivors through webcam consider their surroundings, recommending that, "service providers do not videoconference from their bed," or, "a bedroom setting." The authors also stress the importance of the camera angle, stating that, "when your device is below you, it can look like a survivor is looking at you from your lap, which can be extremely triggering." The program director can speak to a service provider about these issues in advance of meetings but there is little that can be done about online classes. In this case, it may be best to discuss the format with residents before attending online classes and establish ways that residential supervisors can help residents mitigate and work through negative emotions.



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16 Eduardo, C. "A Guide for Survivors of Sex Trafficking During COVID-19." Sanctuary for Families. (March 2020). Accessed: <https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/trafficking-covid19/>

Perhaps the most challenging for shelters to navigate was the sudden change in rules, or the need to create conditional rules. “Why”, a resident might challenge, “is it now okay to video chat with my therapist, but it is not okay for me to video chat with my boyfriend?” Residents who already felt disconnected from their social connections may have had those feelings accentuated. At the time of this report, the nation is still under some level of restriction and so shelters—and survivors—continue to adjust.

## Consequences for Policy Violations

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When asked if violation of technology policies could result in expulsion from the program, 68% of agencies responded yes, but with three primary caveats. Thirty-three percent stated that expulsion would only be considered after repeat offenses. Warnings are issued for first, and sometimes second, offenses. Sixty-two percent stated that violation of technology rules could lead to expulsion if the security of the home or other residents was jeopardized. Finally, 19% said that expulsion would depend on the severity of the violation, such as if the resident stole the phone while on an outing. It is important to recognize that making mistakes can be part of the growing process for everyone, not just survivors. However, survivors come with a unique set of learned reactions and survival behaviors. Sometimes residents will push boundaries to see if those who claim to care about them will leave, just as they have felt abandoned by others in the past. By giving residents second chances on mistakes that do not threaten the safety of other residents, they can see that they are safe and will not be abandoned. When designing a shelter program, it is important to keep this in mind for policy violations.

## Critical Policy Recommendations

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When asked for key policy recommendations for technology access in shelter programs, responding agencies most frequently cited the value of restricted access to cell phones and the importance of a blackout period. Limited and monitored access to the Internet was the next most emphasized policy. Other agencies stated that computer and television access should be monitored, and that social media access should not be allowed. Agencies that have limited restrictions on technology access recommend requiring residents to turn off location services on their devices. Other recommendations include limiting phone time and not allowing residents to take pictures or videos of staff, volunteers, or other residents.

Responding justice professionals most frequently stated the increased vulnerability of residents who have unrestricted or unmonitored access to technology. One respondent stated that access should be granted with time, but not right away. A similar response was that unlimited technology access “is usually the downfall of a resident who does not have a long length of treatment.” Another recommendation is for agencies to work with each resident’s legal team to choose the policies that are the best fit for each individual. One respondent stated that it is best for residents to learn to use technology safely then be allowed to access technology so they can feel somewhat as though they have a normal life.

The needs of each resident in a shelter program can vary greatly. Though it can be challenging to have residents conform to rules that may not necessarily be essential to their personal recovery, it is infinitely more challenging to have a separate set of rules for each individual resident, which must be known and enforced by each staff member and volunteer in the residential home. Several responding agencies stated that their policy decisions are based on the type of clients they serve, meaning that, at least in the area of technology access, their needs are very similar. Some agencies serve only minors and therefore have much more restrictive policies whereas those agencies which provide a social-reentry program have far fewer restrictions. When developing program policies, it is important to consider the overarching needs of the population that will be served.

## Conclusion

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The preeminent responsibility of any trafficking shelter is to protect individual residents and the household. Technology access and usage is a part of those security and safety considerations. Though on the surface, some of these practices seem counter-cultural, even restrictive, there is often a defensible rationale behind each policy. Temporary restrictions are in place partly for individual residents who need to disconnect from unhealthy relationships, from how they were exploited, and to make space for the cultivation of new experiences. The other part is for the security of the whole residence, everyone can be assured that no one else can disclose their location or engage in nefarious activity. Justice professionals also benefit from knowing that their client is in a secure placement during legal proceedings or while completing their probation requirements.

As technology rapidly advances, new methods and platforms for trafficking vulnerable individuals are already presenting. Shelter service providers must stay versed in the role of technology in exploitation and in the social networks of the people we serve. As technology use expands, there will be new ways that relationships are formed and maintained, for better or for worse. Understanding these new relationship patterns will give shelter staff the tools needed to help their residents navigate and disconnect from unhealthy people in their lives. What makes for an important conclusion to this study is the reminder that all these technologies are merely tools, that can be used for good or for evil. The greatest action a shelter can take to protect and acclimate residents is to teach them about proper and safe use of these tools, thereby building up their own discernment and agency so by the time they are faced with navigating this technological world on their own, they are better equipped.