



# Rapid Referral

Summary of Referrals and Observations — 2018

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## ABOUT RAPID REFERRAL

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For over a decade of working in the anti-trafficking victim services arena, The Samaritan Women was hearing a constant lament from law enforcement and social workers that they were spending hours (days) on the phone trying to locate shelter placement for victims of human trafficking. Most victim service professionals must cobble together their own networks, as there is no single, comprehensive database of shelters specific to trafficking, and the landscape of providers is constantly changing.

Our 2017 PRACTICES study, a survey of 59 residential providers for victims of domestic human trafficking, yielded that most client referrals to residential treatment were coming not through referrals from the national hotline, federal or state police, hospitals, or Child Protective Services, but from interpersonal connections between agencies. The study also showed that most of these agencies were receiving referrals that were “not a fit” for their program definition and most of these agencies experienced 50% (or more) vacancy rates during the year. Clearly there is a gap between the popular numbers quoted about victims of trafficking and exploitation needing residential placement, and actual individuals being connected with available services.

Therefore, to address this gap, in 2018 The Samaritan Women Institute for Shelter Care and the National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance created the Rapid Referral process. This approach puts the burden of response on the residential agency instead of the Referrer. In this initial trial of the system, we have seen placement secured within 1-4 business days, although not all placements were reported back.

### THE RAPID REFERRAL PROCESS:

1. A Referring Agency completes a simple, non-identifying form (see Appendix) and sends it to the central Rapid Referral email box, which is constantly monitored by a member of the Institute for Shelter Care.
2. Incoming referrals are reviewed within an hour of receipt, and checked for completeness and coherence. If the referral form includes incongruous information or provokes significant question, a member of the Institute will contact the Referrer to discuss the application further.
3. Once the referral is a confident one, it is emailed to a list of 130+ active shelter programs, some of which are members of the National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance. Most referrals are disseminated to our shelter list within 2 hours.
4. Any shelter program that has availability and sees a fit with the candidate's information, then contacts the Referrer to take the process to the next step.
5. Once the candidate is placed, the accepting agency is asked to contact the Institute to close the application.

What follows is a summary of the referrals made through this system in 2018.



## REFERRAL SOURCES

In March 2018 we pilot tested the Rapid Referral form with four applicants who were referred to us via phone. We rolled out the online form in early July and between July 13 and December 31, 2018 (26 weeks), 56 rapid referrals were received. An average of two per week is manageable, however, 28% percent of all referrals (17 referrals) came in during the month of December and 18% (11 referrals) were received in November 2018. There was no formal marketing of the Rapid Referral system. Its availability was posted on The Samaritan Women and National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance websites and there was word-of-mouth awareness of the tool by the members of the Sheltered Alliance.

Number of Referrals	State(s) Originating Referral
11	WA
7	PA, VA
6	FL, TX
3	DE, NC
2	DC, MT, MD, AL, GA
1	AR, MA, KS, SC, IL, CO, IN

Even so, in this short period of time referrals were received from 18 states and Washington, D.C. The state with the highest number of referrals was Washington (11). It's perhaps worth noting that there are two agencies in the National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance based in Washington and both utilized the Rapid Referral system. The second most frequent states of origination were Pennsylvania and Virginia (7 each) and the third, Texas and Florida (6 each).

Forty-two percent of referrals were made by social workers or victim advocates and 30% came from other Human Trafficking agencies or task forces. Law enforcement only accounted for 5% of the referrals, but again, the system had not been promoted to any referral group outside of the Alliance.

A third of these candidates (17) were known to their Referrer for a week or less, most often, one day. In one exceptional case, the Referring Agency had known the candidate for five years.

## CANDIDATE PROFILE<sup>1</sup>

Sixty-two percent of referrals were looking for placement ASAP and 18% sought placement within the week. More study needs to go into why there is such a sense of urgency, particularly juxtaposed against the datapoint that most referrals are somewhat distanced from the trafficking situation. We theorize that there may be more urgency on the part of the Referring Agency, perhaps due to agency limitations or protocols.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the form does not disclose who provided the information. In some cases, the information may have been provided by the Candidate; in other cases, the Referrer may have completed the form on the Candidate's behalf.



The average age of these 60 candidates was 30; the mode age was 24. Age distributions appear in the corresponding table. There were no minors referred for placement through this system during 2018. The number of referrals over the age of 35 (16 individuals) presents a challenge, as several shelter programs advertise a cut-off for clients over the age of 35;

Age range	Number	Percentage
18-21	6	10%
22-29	26	43%
30-39	16	27%
40-49	12	20%

however, we did not hear back that any of these 16 individuals were denied placement.

All but one of the candidates referred during this timeframe were reported as female (one noted as hermaphrodite) and 88% were US Citizens.

Ninety-eight percent of applications checked the box affirming a victim of human trafficking, 94% specifically as victims of sex trafficking (3 declined to respond). In November the form was amended to include options indicating how the candidate was verified as a victim of trafficking. This amendment was made because there was some question as to the referrers’ familiarity with trafficking and their ability to accurately screen for a trafficking situation. Twenty-one of the referrals were in this sample that had the additional question. Of those, 43% (9) indicated the candidate met screening criteria and 29% (6) indicated that the trafficking was self-disclosed only.

Three individuals referred were pregnant. Two individuals were actively self-injuring and 4 were reported as at-risk for suicide. Seventy-two percent had at least 30 days’ clean; 67% were on prescribed pharmacology and 33% were recorded as having severe psychiatric issues. Eighty-two percent reported having no immediate health concerns. The data points associated with physical or mental wellness need to be cautiously interpreted, however, as self-disclosures, not professionally-derived and conclusive.

## LEGAL SITUATION

Five of these referrals had a trafficker in custody and one-third (20) had an open or pending case. Fewer than 10% (only 4) of the candidates were currently on parole or probation themselves.

Most of these candidates have a notable gap from their last trafficking exposure, averaging 8 months. With one exception, the average distance from trafficking experience was 4.7 months. Eight individuals were currently incarcerated when the form was submitted, which may also account for the gap of time between exploitation and referral. Still, it’s interesting to note that the majority of referrals were not in an “emergency placement” situation based on trafficking or active exploitation.

**4.7** months:  
Average distance  
from trafficking  
situation



## PLACEMENT SOUGHT

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Ninety-five percent of candidates were willing to accept placement out of state and 54% of referring agencies were willing to provide transportation to the placement agency. This small data set seems to substantiate other studies that have asserted long-term housing as the most acute need for survivors. Among this group, most were seeking placement for two years or more (58%) or one year (40%). In terms of supervision levels requested:

38% requested Low – Candidate can live in independent housing and is not at risk; Candidate would benefit from daily or weekly check-ins with staff

47% requested Moderate – Candidate would benefit from supervision within the housing situation; Candidate can handle off-campus privileges; phone/computer access would not pose a threat to this Candidate

10% requested High – Candidate would do best under 24/7/365 supervision with restricted outside communications

87%

would accept placement in a faith-based shelter program

Given that many human trafficking shelter programs in the U.S. are operated as faith-based agencies (specifically, Christian), we wanted to determine if a Candidate would be resistant to placement if the agency identified as Christian. Eighty-seven percent indicated that they would be willing to be placed in a Christian shelter program.



## Observations and Areas of Improvement

### Screening for Trafficking and Exploitation

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- There is some concern that the Rapid Referral process is being used to solve *any* placement problem, not solely for those who require care that is specialized to victims of trafficking, prostitution, or exploitation. Among this pool of applications in 2018, we reviewed at least eight applications (and spoke with the Referrer directly), that gave us pause in terms of credibility for trafficking. These referrals proceeded in the process, but we are tracking certain patterns that may need to be addressed later.
- There is also reason to think that some agencies may be using the Rapid Referral system to secure housing because no more appropriate options exist for their clients. For example, one candidate who was not under threat, had enough clean time, was not on any medications, and was described as “highly independent, resourceful, intelligent and just in need of stable, long-term housing while she follows through on her goals” may not need a therapeutic residential program, but rather independent housing. Another, a 40-year old woman with a long drug use history, 4 days clean, had a self-reported “two weeks of prostitution” but no trafficking details. She may have been better served by a substance abuse program.

“Some Referring Agencies have tried to push us to take high mental health patients or drug and alcohol patients where we can’t prove trafficking even existed. Some of the participants have even told us that *they were told to say* they have been sex trafficked, so they get a bed. Referring agencies have exhausted their resources so they put heavy pressure on residential homes to take their candidates.”

-KIM, SHELTER DIRECTOR

### Training for Referring Agencies

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- Sixteen referrals were submitted after less than a week of experience with the Candidate. This presents a challenge for shelters because the information offered on the application often has not yet been verified by a third party. One Candidate had only been known to the Referring Agency a day and was adamant about being “immediately relocated out of state,” — and the Referring Agency offered to financially cover it. When we asked the Referrer if she had checked to see if the Candidate had any open warrants or legal obligations, the Referrer said, “We didn’t look; we didn’t want to invade her privacy.” This Referrer clearly did not understand that certain information is in the public domain, and that her agency could have been guilty of helping the candidate evade the law. Some frontline service providers may require more training and time to obtain (and verify) a Candidate’s information.

- In our priority to protect the anonymity of the candidates, the Rapid Referral form has inherent limitations. We are unable to ask about a candidate's specific medical or mental health history which may have bearing on placement. This system is highly reliant on the shelter agencies having qualified personnel to ask follow-up questions and discern those responses.

### Pipeline and Process

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- Over half of the referrals in this sample were received in the last two months of 2018, and without any promotion of the service. Each referral was reviewed by a trained victim services professional and/or survivor leader, and follow-up conversation with the Referrer occurred in approximately half of the cases, averaging an hour's investment in each referral. To properly scale this system and prevent a degradation in quality, additional personnel will need to be trained to support this process.
- One design flaw in the system is that there is not a closed loop to the process. We rely on the agency that accepts the Candidate to contact us and let us know that successful placement has occurred. Still, many agencies reached out to the Institute to let us know that successful placement was realized. With higher levels of automation, this could be more reliably ascertained.



## Next Steps

1. The Rapid Referral process will be formally offered to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations' Victim Advocacy Specialists (90+ across the U.S.) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations' Victim Specialists. These two agencies have specific focus on human trafficking cases and personnel trained for victim identification.
2. A video-based training will be created;
  - a. for referring agencies to teach personnel how to conduct an effective screening for trafficking and how to complete the form;
  - b. for residential shelter staff to teach them how to review the form for effective placement.

These training videos will be housed on the Institute and Alliance websites.

3. Approximately 20% of the referrals were for candidates that were currently in a human trafficking shelter program but were being displaced for some reason. The form has been amended to include a question about any prior placements of the individual.
4. The Institute should implement a step to close the process that verifies a candidate has been placed. In lieu of an automated solution, this may require contacting the agencies to follow up. This could be a time-intensive endeavor.

## Appendix



### RAPID REFERRAL APPLICATION

Please email the completed form to [referral@shelteredalliance.org](mailto:referral@shelteredalliance.org)

By completing this application, you are agreeing to allow the National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance to circulate this application amongst its member agencies for the expressed purpose of facilitating a residential placement for your Candidate. **ALL INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL** within the Alliance network. You will be contacted directly by any agency that has availability and is willing to consider your Candidate. This application will be good for 30 days.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Referrer

What is your relationship to the Candidate?

- Law Enforcement   
  Legal Counsel   
  Social Worker/Case Manager   
  Court Official  
 Safe House or Trafficking Shelter   
  Anti-Trafficking Agency/Task Force   
  Friend/Family member

Referrer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known the Candidate? \_\_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_\_ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ days

By what date do you need placement: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Candidate Information

DO NOT put identifying information on this application. Your Candidate will only be identified within this Network by the person's 3 initials and age, for example: AGW21

First Initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

If under 18, please specify:

- Emancipated   
  Ward of Court/State   
  About to Age-Out   
  Parent/Guardian willing to grant temporary custody   
  Parent/Guardian willing to transfer legal guardianship

Gender: Male  Female  Trans

Candidate is: US Citizen  Legal Foreign National  Undocumented Foreign National

Candidate is currently residing in: City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Candidate able and willing to relocate out of State?  Yes  No

Will your agency/the Candidate fund the cost of relocation?  Yes  No

Does the Candidate have any means to pay for placement (insurance, family support, disability, etc.)? Explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix

## Legal

- Yes  No Is the Candidate a victim of trafficking (either exploited as a minor, or as an adult through the means of force, fraud, or coercion), prostitution, or other forms of sexual exploitation?
- What is the nature of the trafficking? Labor Trafficking  Sex Trafficking  Both
- How was the trafficking activity verified?
- Candidate is a minor; verification not required  Trafficking was verified by Law Enforcement or Court Official
- Candidate met screening criteria for trafficking  Trafficking was disclosed by Candidate only
- Trafficking cannot be verified
- How recently was s/he in a trafficking situation? \_\_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_\_ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ days
- Yes  No Is the Candidate a victim of prostitution, or other forms of sexual exploitation?
- Yes  No Does the Candidate have any outstanding warrants or legal obligations? (We advise that you conduct a public domain case search to verify.)
- Yes  No Is the trafficker(s) in custody?
- Yes  No Is there an open or pending case against the trafficker?
- Yes  No Is the Candidate currently incarcerated? If yes, date of release? \_\_\_\_\_
- Yes  No Is (or will) the Candidate be on parole/probation?
- Yes  No Is the Candidate a high flight risk?

## Health

- Yes  No  N/A Is there a chance she could be pregnant?
- Yes  No  N/A Is the Candidate actively self-injuring?
- Yes  No Is the Candidate a suicide risk?
- Yes  No  N/A Does the Candidate have at least 30 days sobriety/clean time?
- Yes  No  N/A Is the Candidate on prescribed pharmacology for mental illness?
- Yes  No  N/A Does the Candidate have severe psychiatric issues?
- Yes  No Does the Candidate have any immediate health concerns or physical limitations?

## Placement

Level of Supervision Recommended:

- Low** - Candidate can live in independent housing and is not at risk of relapse; Candidate would benefit from daily or weekly check-ins with staff
- Moderate** - Candidate would benefit from supervision within the housing situation; Candidate can handle off-campus privileges; phone/computer access would not pose a threat to this Candidate
- High** - Candidate would do best under 24/7/365 supervision with restricted outside communications

Duration of Placement needed:

- up to 30 days  up to 3 months  up to 1 year  up to 2 years  2 years or more  undetermined

- Yes  No Does the Candidate need a program that accepts dependent child(ren)?
- Yes  No Is the Candidate willing to participate in a Christian program?
- Yes  No Has this Candidate previously (or currently) been in a trafficking shelter program?
- If yes, which program? \_\_\_\_\_

What else is pertinent to the placement of this Candidate?

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