

Final Research Report
**Evaluability Assessment of a Metropolitan Network Service Delivery Model to Connect
Trafficked Persons with a Full Range of Victim Services**

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INTRODUCTION

Survivors of human trafficking in the U.S. have myriad short-term needs (e.g., transitional housing, health care) and longer-term needs, such as mental health care, legal services, child welfare services, case management, housing, and vocational training.^{1,2} Because of the service complexity, as well as the need for these services to be trauma-informed (i.e., survivors may lack trust of authority figures and institutions), seamless coordination for a survivor can be extremely challenging. As a result, there are often gaps between what a trafficking survivor needs and the services that are provided.¹⁻⁴ Research on collaborative network models that bridge these gaps is sparse, yet emerging.⁵ Furthermore, the emerging evaluations of human trafficking intervention courts (HTICs) have focused on criminal justice (CJ) system outcomes rather than qualitative outcomes; e.g., did survivors receive the services they need?^{2,4,5}

The current study examined the Buffalo City Human Trafficking Intervention Hub Court (BCC HTIC) and its network of partners to describe the model as it currently functions and the evaluability of this approach for improving outcomes for survivors of human trafficking through improved coordination of social services. We used questions from an evaluability assessment checklist to guide our inquiries and analysis.⁶ For the purposes of this evaluability assessment, the BCC HTIC and its partner organizations and agencies are informally referred to as the “Buffalo network.” The goals of this study were to conduct a formative evaluability assessment of this novel, metropolitan systems network model in the greater Buffalo, New York region designed to connect probable human trafficking victims (identified through the CJ system) with social and victim services, and to determine if sufficient, high-quality data is accessible to evaluate the impact of the Buffalo network approach, centered by the BCC HTIC. In addition, the goal of the evaluability assessment was to develop foundational materials that could help support and inform an eventual outcome evaluation of a metropolitan area human trafficking victim service delivery model. The study set out to answer several broad research questions:

- 1) How is the Greater Buffalo network structured, in terms of relative formality, governance, communication, data systems, and tracking referrals?
- 2) What (network) data are available regarding the case history of each survivor served and what are the data access mechanisms and burden to provide data? What is the potential for developing secure protocols to recruit and interview survivors to investigate services received and outcomes?
- 3) Is there an implementation plan for this network model of victim services that can be documented for replication in other metropolitan areas?
- 4) What are the key measures necessary to conduct a rigorous outcome evaluation of this and similar network models of victim service programs?

As a product of this research, a program Implementation Guide has been created¹, and a summary of this evaluability assessment prepared for peer review.

METHODS

Overview of Buffalo Network Service Delivery Model

Recognizing that some individuals who appear in the court system may be in need of protection from human trafficking (just as some justice-involved individuals are diverted to drug or mental health treatment courts, veterans courts, etc.⁷), human trafficking intervention courts have been established as another form of problem-solving court.⁸ The Buffalo City Human Trafficking Intervention Hub Court (BCC HTIC) was established in October 2013 with the goal of identifying and diverting human trafficking victims who were arrested and awaiting conviction. Situated in Erie County, New York, the BCC HTIC serves defendants from six

¹ See Program Implementation and Evaluation Guide on the NORC project page: <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/BuffaloNetworkEvaluabilityAssessment/HumanTraffickingInterventionCourtsMetropolitanNetworkServiceDeliveryModel.pdf>

adjoining Western New York counties. Consistent with the trauma-informed choices made in the BCC HTIC, defendants will be referred to as clients here forth.

The BCC HTIC has two main goals: 1) connect human trafficking survivors and those at high risk of trafficking with critical recovery services such as trauma/mental health counseling and case management, health care, housing, and substance use treatment, and 2) help clients avoid criminal convictions by dismissing or reducing charges. Individuals referred to the HTIC are fully informed about the program and given the choice to participate or not (those who do not want to participate in the program are sentenced per usual processes). All clients are required to engage in some type of services (whether just meeting with an advocate to make a plan or taking further steps), determined by their own comfort level. Only certain types of cases require court mandates (for client safety reasons, e.g., high risk of overdose).

Since its inception in 2013, BCC HTIC has seen over 300 cases. BCC HTIC accepts cases with many types of charges, including assault, larceny, and drug charges as well as prostitution charges. BCC HTIC follows a holistic, client-driven, and trauma-informed approach wherein each client is treated as an individual with unique circumstances and needs. Although it functions, procedurally, similar to a regular criminal court, the BCC HTIC operates through a safety lens when working with survivors. The staff in the BCC HTIC are specially trained to recognize red flags of trafficking, including traffickers and ‘johns”, that present in the court and also to respond to the needs of survivors where their safety may be compromised (e.g., instead of issuing a warrant for a “failure to appear” to court, the court will deploy resources in the community to help locate a survivor without a punitive response). Survivors can be connected to a variety of Buffalo service providers based on their needs, and BCC HTIC maintains partnerships with many local organizations and agencies to connect survivors with tailored, individualized plans for recovery to help human trafficking survivors achieve stability while resolving criminal charges. Partners within this network include law enforcement, legal service

providers, treatment and medical care services, housing, and education and job training service agencies.

The International Institute of Buffalo (IIB) serves as the primary intensive case management referral source for BCC HTIC. IIB is one of the leading HT victim services agencies in the Buffalo area. Since 2007, IIB has provided an estimated 1,500 domestic violence and HT survivors with myriad essential services using a holistic, trauma-informed approach.

IIB, law enforcement agencies, and several other partners interact through regular participation in the Western District of New York Human Trafficking Task Force (WDNYHTTF) (<https://wnytrafficking.org/>). HTIC personnel (i.e., the Judge, the Resource Coordinator, or any other judiciary personnel) cannot participate in the WDNYHTTF given that it is a prosecutorial based team, and HTIC must remain impartial.

Data Collection Instruments and Supplemental Materials

Two semi-structured interview guides were developed to support in-depth key informant interviews with representatives of the Buffalo network partnership agencies and human trafficking survivors. The partner interview guide (see [Implementation Guide](#)) covered topics including services provided to survivors, network structure, referral process, partnerships, data collection and data systems used to track survivors, and protocols and processes for working with survivors. The survivor interview guide (see [Implementation Guide](#)) addressed survivor experiences with trafficking services, awareness of services, satisfaction with HTIC, barriers and facilitators to accessing services, and potential willingness to use or recommend trafficking services. The interview guide also included a section on survivors' potential willingness to participate in future research interviews, hesitations to being recorded or observed during interviews, and important considerations for HTIC evaluation researchers. Supplemental materials were also developed for survivor interviews and distributed to participants either before interviews or during the interview for easy reference. This included a participant information sheet with details about the purpose of the project and interview and a list of

