

BEHIND THE REFERRAL

Supporting
Coordination
Across Services

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Behind the Referral:

Supporting Coordination Across Services

Supporting survivors of human trafficking may involve many forms of advocacy, direct assistance, and connection to community resources. Some of that work happens during conversations with survivors. Other parts involve coordinating with programs, documenting referrals, maintaining partner information, and supporting next steps when appropriate.

These activities may receive less attention than direct service delivery, but they can play an important role in helping organizations provide thoughtful, survivor-centered support.

The Reality of Referral-Based Work

Each survivor's needs, priorities, and preferences are different. Some may seek support from a single program, while others may choose to connect with several organizations or service providers over time.

Depending on the survivor's goals, coordination may involve:

- Housing programs
- Legal services
- Healthcare providers
- Employment and workforce programs
- Mental health services

- Community-based organizations
- Culturally specific or identity-based services
- Other local, state, or national resources

A referral can help connect a survivor with additional support, but the referral itself is only one part of that process.

What Happens After Referral

A referral does not guarantee that a service will be available, accessible, or ultimately used. Waitlists, eligibility requirements, transportation, cost, safety concerns, and changing priorities may all shape what happens next.

Any follow-up should reflect the survivor's goals, informed consent, safety considerations, and the role of the referring program. In some circumstances, an advocate may support the survivor in identifying next steps or reconnecting with a resource. In others, the survivor may prefer to manage the connection independently.

Confidentiality requirements may also limit what one organization can learn about services provided by another. A referring program may not know whether an appointment occurred or a service was received unless the survivor chooses to share that information or provides

appropriate authorization. Likewise, cases involving minors may require different reporting procedures, confidentiality limits, consent practices, or coordination with agencies.

Since every situation is different, referral documentation should support coordination without creating expectations that conflict with survivor autonomy, privacy, or program responsibilities.

When Referral Information Lives in Too Many Places

Organizations may document referrals and community resources in several places, including:

- Case notes
- Email threads
- Spreadsheets
- Resource directories
- Individual staff records

When information is spread across multiple systems, it may become harder to locate referral details, identify available resources, or understand how an organization is engaging with community partners.

At the same time, not every staff member should have access to every piece of survivor information. Role-based access is an important part of protecting confidentiality. A well-designed system should help organizations centralize appropriate information while allowing

administrators to determine what each staff member can view or manage.

This creates a balance between organizational visibility and the need to limit access based on staff roles, responsibilities, and program policies.

Supporting Follow-Up Without Making Assumptions

Follow-up may be helpful in some referral situations, but it is not always appropriate or possible. The survivor's preferences should guide whether an advocate checks in, offers additional options, or documents further activity.

Rather than attempting to confirm information that another provider may not be able to disclose, organizations can focus on documenting what is within their own role and knowledge. This might include:

- The referral options offered
- The survivor's stated preferences
- Whether the survivor requested additional assistance
- Any follow-up completed with the survivor's consent
- Barriers the survivor shared
- Additional resources discussed

This approach allows advocates to support continuity while respecting confidentiality and survivor choice, keeping in mind that survivors may be asked to repeat their experiences to multiple providers, which can be distressing or even re-traumatizing.

Understanding Community Partnerships

Many anti-trafficking organizations develop relationships with trusted community partners. Keeping current information about those organizations can help advocates identify resources that may align with a survivor's needs and preferences. At an organizational level, programs may also benefit from understanding broader referral activity, such as:

- Which types of services are frequently requested
- Where resource gaps may exist
- Which community organizations are included in the program's referral network
- Where stronger partnerships or updated resource information may be helpful

These insights should be considered carefully and within the limits of available information. A program may be able to document that a referral was offered or made without knowing whether another organization ultimately delivered a service. Even with those limitations, structured referral information can help organizations maintain stronger resource networks and better understand the service landscape around them.

Reducing the Administrative Burden of Coordination

Advocates may carry many details throughout the day: resources to share,

questions to revisit, survivor-requested next steps, and information about local partners. Technology cannot replace professional judgment, survivor choice, or the relationships at the center of advocacy. It can, however, provide a more organized place to document appropriate information.

Vela allows organizations to track referrals to and from community partners while configuring staff access according to each person's role. This can help programs keep referral information organized without assuming that every staff member should see the same information or that every referral requires the same type of follow-up.

Recognizing Coordination as Core Advocacy Work

Coordination is one important part of survivor support. It exists alongside advocacy, crisis response, safety planning, emotional support, and the many other ways programs accompany survivors throughout their journeys.

Treating coordination as core work may include:

- Documenting referrals in a structured way
- Maintaining accurate community resource information
- Supporting survivor-requested follow-up
- Respecting confidentiality and informed consent

- Limiting access to information based on staff roles
- Identifying broader gaps in available services

The goal is to give advocates tools that support informed, respectful, and appropriately documented connections.

Supporting Survivor-Centered Referrals

As survivor needs, community resources, and program partnerships evolve, organizations may need more flexible ways to manage referral information. At Vela, we believe referral coordination should support survivor-centered advocacy. That means helping organizations document referrals, manage partner information, configure staff access, and support next steps that align with the survivor's wishes and the program's role.

When referral information is organized thoughtfully, advocates can spend less time searching across disconnected tools and more time focusing on the survivor-defined support in front of them.

Help Us Support Your Work

Your organization's needs continue to evolve, and Vela is designed to evolve alongside you. If there are ways referral tracking, partner management, or staff access could better support your team, we welcome your feedback. Your insight helps shape a system grounded in the realities of survivor services.

If you are exploring a more thoughtful approach to referral coordination...

Vela helps organizations document referrals to and from community partners, organize resource information, and configure staff access based on each person's role—all while supporting survivor-centered, confidentiality-conscious practices.

See how Vela could support your organization. **Book a demo today.**

Want to learn new ways to simplify your work or explore features you may not be using yet? Visit veladirect.com or reach out to our team. We're always here to help.



Developed with input from advocates at every stage, Vela by Element 74 is a trauma-informed case management and reporting platform built specifically for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking organizations.

info@veladirect.com | (573) 332-7474