

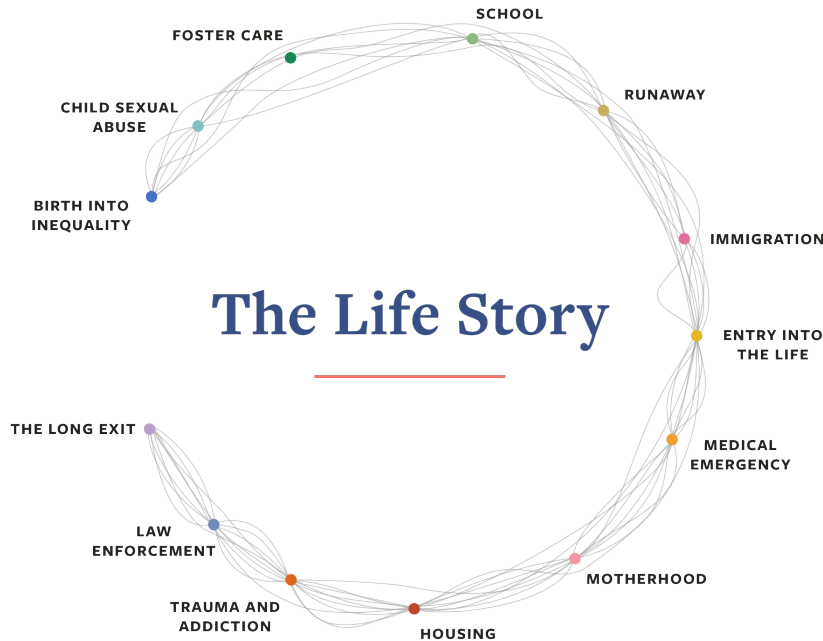
The Life Story

MOMENTS OF CHANGE.

Sharing the voices of survivors of sexual exploitation. Revealing the opportunities we all have to create a better world for girls and women.

THE LIFE

**Some call it sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, sex work, prostitution.
But many survivors just call it the Life.**



Some people assume that entry into “the Life” is a choice, or the culmination of “bad decisions.”

The reality is that varying and complex paths have led her to this moment.

The sex trade is a voracious industry that relies on the availability of girls and women—especially those most marginalized—to feed demand.

Traffickers go to great lengths to procure and profit from vulnerable girls and women.

Life circumstances can also coerce women and girls into the Life.

They are much harder to see than a trafficker or pimp, especially when they arise from systemic discrimination.



Society needs to shift its view of prostitution. Prostitution and pimping have become glamorized. We need to stop blaming victims or questioning ‘how did you get yourself into that?’

– ANDREA, SURVIVOR AND ADVOCATE



So many factors are at play. Early sexual abuse, generational trauma, economic status... Just being a person of color—there’s an X on your back.

– NE’COLE, SURVIVOR AND SERVICE PROVIDER

The Life Story

MOMENTS OF CHANGE.

Sharing the voices of survivors of sexual exploitation. Revealing the opportunities we all have to create a better world for girls and women.

THE LIFE

STEPS TOWARD CHANGE

How can we create a better safety net for all girls and women at risk of entering the Life while shrinking the sex trade that exploits them?

Strengthen safety nets.

School systems can make trafficking awareness as visible as drug and alcohol warnings. Child welfare can better support girls who are at-risk. Police officers can identify sexual exploitation where drugs or gang activity unfolds. Emergency rooms can better identify victims and ensure that they are not re-traumatized when seeking help.

Re-examine flawed assumptions.

Our culture assumes that all women in the sex trade chose to be there, with no regard for the dearth of other options or the on-ramps that increased the likelihood of their entry into the sex trade. When we learn about failed safety nets, systemic discrimination and underlying trauma, the assumption of “choice” looks quite different. Our communities and social systems can do a better job of ensuring that survivors are treated with dignity and compassion.

Reduce harm by reducing demand.

Across the US, counties and cities are seeking to reduce the number of women exposed to the harm of the sex trade by deterring those who buy sex and holding accountable those who sell others for sex. The criminal justice system can do its part by holding buyers accountable and signaling a shift in culture that it is no longer socially acceptable to buy sex.

Join forces across systems.

Individuals, including those working within our social systems, have the potential to better understand, destigmatize, support and empower those who have been exploited. The sex trade is predicated on discrimination, poverty, racism, sexism, transphobia and xenophobia. If everyone can work together to take steps large and small, we can build a world where all girls and women are able to reach their full potential.

WHO CAN SHIFT THE SYSTEM?

Girls and women enter the Life through a series of small, cumulative steps. Breaking free can be extremely challenging. But each social system they encounter can be an important moment for survivors to experience the compassion and access the resources necessary to begin a new chapter in their lives.

SCHOOLS

EMERGENCY ROOMS

LAW ENFORCEMENT

HOTELS

TRANSIT INDUSTRY

SHELTERS

LEGISLATORS AND POLICY MAKERS

THERAPISTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

FUNDERS

“

They didn't stop my voice. I call myself a survivor because I can tell my story to others in hopes that they would not be afraid.

– BOBETTE, SURVIVOR AND ADVOCATE

”

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The Life Story: Moments of Change shines a light on the realities of women in the sex trade, elevates their voices and experiences and highlights opportunity for change. This material is meant to inform and inspire those who work across the intersections of education, housing, public health, mental health and addiction services, economic and racial justice, and many other areas. **Learn more at:**

THELIFESTORY.ORG