

**Jennifer Richardson Keynote Speech**  
**Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference**  
**4-6 April 2022**

**Introduction:**

Good afternoon everyone,

Thank you very much for the kind introduction.

I am honoured to have been invited to this conference, and to have the pleasure of speaking with you all today.

As was noted in my introduction, I have been working in the anti-human trafficking sector for over 25 years, but I have really been in this space since I was 13 years old.

In my time doing this work, I've had the opportunity to work in several different roles.

I have been a frontline worker, managed an innovative multi-sectoral (child protection and police) intervention and enforcement team, developed intensive specialized anti-human trafficking curriculum, which has been used all across Canada for over 15 years now, developed a risk assessment screening tool to identify what stage of exploitation a child victim is likely to be in, led the oversight and coordination of provincial anti-human trafficking strategies, conducted anti-human trafficking research, led the creation of novel legislation to help protect children and better support survivors, and chair Ontario's Human Trafficking Lived Experience Roundtable, which is the first of its kind in Canada.

I am dedicated and passionate about supporting survivors of human trafficking not only because I have lived experience of being trafficked, but also because I have seen the trauma caused by traffickers, and no child should ever experience that type of abuse. I have also firsthand felt the lack of response from the child welfare sector and watched the lack of awareness within that sector for 30 years, which having been a child welfare worker for many years, still to this day breaks my heart. The lack of understanding within the child welfare sector should be a national shame to every country that has a child welfare system, because research over the last 30-40 years has pointed to this sector being overwhelmed with children at risk of exploitation but also children being exploited, with little response from this sector.

I will speak to you today from all of my viewpoints, a social worker, government bureaucrat, and my lived experience of being trafficked.

I stand with all of you and I hope that together as global stewards in the anti-human trafficking sector that we can work to build a safety net that will one day protect every child and person from being victimized by human trafficking.

I began my career in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. For those of you who have not been, Winnipeg's population is relatively small (approximately 750,000), and it is the urban hub of the entire province. Winnipeg is also known as a hub for child sexual exploitation.

Manitoba was also the first of the Canadian province, in 2002 to have a dedicated anti-human trafficking strategy.

In 2008, I designed a specialized team of police and child welfare workers to identify trafficked children through missing persons reports, and to locate those children when missing. Ontario has adopted this model calling those units CARE Teams, which stands for Children and Risk of Exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation and human trafficking are an issue of child abuse. I have found that typically, when people consider child sexual abuse, their instinct is to consider either third-party or familial sexual abuse, but rarely do they include child sexual exploitation in this definition. The result of this is that often victims of child sexual exploitation are often not treated with the same as other victims of child sexual abuse, and the interventions to protect and support them are not the same either.

For survivors, the result of this can be the internalization of self-blame. This is further compounding the messages that traffickers are telling these children everyday, that they "chose" to be exploited (which is impossible) or are treated with scorn or judgment and that they are not worthy to deserve protection.

That's why in Manitoba and now in Ontario, child sexual exploitation is imbedded in legislation as a child protection issue. In so doing, any circumstances of child sexual exploitation warrant child welfare involvement and helps to better support intervention for children who are exploited in trafficking situations.

Leveraging child welfare legislation and the offence provisions within is a promising practice because you are not having to prove the human trafficking, you are proving the interference or the harbouring of a child, and more importantly, do not require the testimony of a child, it is the workers or police that provide that evidence to the courts.

Having an ability to respond quickly, is a promising practice, having dedicated policy, programming, and procedures related to children who go frequently missing is a measurable way in which we can reduce to flow of children into the hands of traffickers and this crime. Research demonstrates that going chronically missing or absconding

strongly correlates with a child's experience of sexual exploitation. The StreetReach team in Manitoba and now the CARE Units in Ontario are created with the express purpose of locating, intervening, and bringing children who have gone missing as a result of their experience of exploitation to a place of safety.

For us in Canada, this work also is connected to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

For policymakers in the room today, I urge you all to explicitly imbed child sexual exploitation into your child sexual abuse legislation and to develop dedicated responses to children and youth who go chronically missing due to their experience of being exploited.

The next promising practice is to support **leadership opportunities** for survivors. Survivors are best positioned to make decisions about policies, programs, and initiatives for survivors. This could look like creating dedicated positions on your Board of Directors or other governance structures for survivors, as well as supporting survivors to hold decision-making roles and supervisory roles. All too often I have seen people with lived experience design programs, operate programs that are running well and meeting the needs of people, only to be removed when they question a policy or procedure that doesn't fit for the population. Leadership positions must be created for people with lived experience, because without them, programs will not have the richness they deserve.

There are many more promising practices I could speak to but my time is limited so lastly, I will say I am proud of the leadership Ontario has demonstrated in the anti-human trafficking sector, and I am especially pleased by the consistent dedication Ontario has shown to centering survivors in this work. Ontario has the largest dedicated anti-human trafficking strategy in Canada, which includes an investment of \$307 million dollars for specialized CARE Teams, specialized residential supports only for trafficked children, specialized prosecutors, and joint task force police teams, along with dedicated funding for Indigenous and community led supports that are designed specifically for trafficked people and children. Since its formation, the HT LER has been a critical component of all facets of Ontario's response to human trafficking.

Thank you.