

What can Churches do to help individuals who have been exploited?

Someone coming out of a situation of trafficking or other exploitation is loved by God, made in His image and infinitely precious. Right now, (s)he may be deeply traumatised and damaged. His/her journey to wholeness may be hard. But local Church can help.

How? By doing what local Church does best,

- Providing a loving, safe community... for the long term.
- Saying “you’re welcome, we’re glad you’re here, we love you.” No matter what.
- Listening without judging.
- Treating his/her story with great discretion but standing with the person in prayer and support as (s)he journeys to freedom.
- Helping the individual to draw close to his/her Heavenly Father who loves him/her infinitely and can restore completely.

Of course, it’s not quite that simple. A trafficking survivor, like many of us, including an addict, ex-prisoner, homeless person or someone who has experienced other abuse, has multiple barriers to overcome. (S)he may not behave “properly”, (s)he may not be totally safe. (S)he may go backwards a few times before making big steps towards freedom. But God wants to restore him/her completely. We need to be patient... and wise. And we should also remember that we are all broken and fallen.

Top tips

Every local Church needs a good safeguarding policy. It is naïve to think that any Christian could not behave inappropriately. Plus, when befriending individuals with multiple issues, you may well discover information that must be passed on to the authorities in order to stop an emergency. If you have not done this already, get a safeguarding policy sorted.

Partner with a local ministry and/or the authorities. Don’t try to be experts in specialist matters like specific counselling, protection from traffickers, addiction recovery or law. Get to know what experts are nearby.

Train a group of people who will be happy to befriend anyone with multiple issues to deal with, including a trafficking survivor. Ask experts to provide specific training on how best to be the friends that these people need, what to expect in terms of difficulties, how to listen well and empower an individual to explore options for the future etc.

If you don’t have one already, create a pastoral prayer team who can be trusted to pray for difficult pastoral issues in complete discretion and without being shocked.

Be hopeful

A hurting person needs hope. We have the hope of Christ, and (s)he needs more of that too. While we know that restoration may take a long while, we keep our eyes fixed on Christ and trust in His power to help someone recover.

Do not underestimate the impact of loving and praying friends or simple opportunities to be treated “normally”. When someone has felt totally worthless or unable to trust anyone for so long, (s)he can feel paralysed. But if you help the person begin to see that their context is changing, if you give him/her unconditional love and hope, then the possibility of change seems more achievable.