Facing Forward, Nine stories about being a survivor of human trafficking in a post-trafficking shelter in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This report describes nine stories of six women and three men who recently exited a human trafficking situation and, at the time of this research, resided in a shelter for foreign victims of trafficking in the Netherlands. It speaks about their hopes and dreams, their fears and frustrations, and describes how they feel social and health care might be improved. The report's aim is to shed more light on service users' views on post-trafficking service provision for everyone directly (e.g. social workers, psychologists and general practitioners) and indirectly (e.g. managers and policymakers) involved with providing care to this group. The main message from the report is that victims of human trafficking in a post-trafficking shelter can be expected to exhibit a strong desire to move forward and establish a meaningful life with a job, a family and friends. This is an important conclusion: it shows that besides the 'trauma'-narrative that is often stressed in the literature as being important among trafficking survivors, the 'future'-narrative is as important and should be taken into account in developing social and health services for this group. Despite the importance of being able to pursue a meaningful life to them, service users in this study were often stunted in doing just that. Through barriers in finding work, education and a place to live, often caused by their residency status, a feeling of being ostracized in Dutch society and shelter policies, service users often felt 'in limbo': standing still, without being able to change that situation. Regardless of this, and
seemingly against all odds, service users still pursued their goals, by engaging in Dutch language courses, participating in vocational skills training and engaging in volunteer work. These activities were described as useful by participants and therefore preferable over other activities. Service users found them useful because they provided them with opportunities to work towards their envisioned futures. Hoping for the fulfilment of their goals and pursuing them in these ways likely allowed service users to better cope with their problems in the present and improved their well-being. For this reason, it is essential that social and health provision for this group supports and facilitates service users' forwards-facing, future-orientated views, in addition to providing trauma-informed services. But do not take our word for it: please read the stories in this report and get to know these men and women, and read about what they, in their own words, feel service provision ought to look like in a post-trafficking shelter.
Last night, 27 years after being trafficked, she became the face of an awards show’s push against domestic violence, speaking at the Grammys before an audience of millions. “Authentic love does not devalue another human being. Authentic love does not silence, shame or abuse,” Axtell said in a spoken-word piece that introduced Katy Perry’s stripped-down rendition of “By the Grace of God.” “Please reach out for help,” Axtell implored. She told the story of her abuse to her mother, who connected her with a local domestic violence shelter. “This conversation saved my life,” Axtell said. She also started working with SafePlace, a domestic violence shelter in her hometown of Austin. That’s where Grammys executive producer Ken Ehrlich heard about Axtell’s activism.