

conversations of
EMPOWERMENT

Survivor
Alliance



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I am a journalist and researcher from Asia and have been a volunteer with the Survivor Alliance since 2018. My work with the Alliance majorly involves interviewing survivor leaders for our member spotlight series.

To those who I have had the opportunity to interact with over the past months, thank you for your time, for speaking to us about your journeys of designing policies and products, building resilient businesses, chapters, and survivor communities, documenting, counselling, lobbying, consulting, researching, mentoring, and, as one leader put it, of finding sisterhood.

To those who are reading these pages for the first time, here, you will find powerful voices from around the globe, including the voices of activists, artists, and founders involved in anti-slavery efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, the United Kingdom, the USA, and India. Each leader has spoken to us about context and barriers and shared their professional expertise and advice for policymakers, service providers, researchers, and activists - whoever you may be - on unifying efforts, designing programs, survivor inclusion, and more.

My sincere gratitude to the staff at the worldwide Survivor Alliance. To Minh, Maria and Nancy, thank you for everything.

Best,

Satvika Kherra

Tina Sommie

A survivor leader, podcaster, brand ambassador, professional hairstylist, and business owner. Tina believes that we are empowered when we realize the power we have inside and start to recognize our strength.

Tina, what work are you currently engaged in?

Outside of being a fellow for the Survivor Alliance Atlanta chapter, I am also employed at Breaking Free, a survivor-led nonprofit in St. Paul, Minnesota.

At Breaking Free, I am the receptionist, phone technician, and Donations Coordinator. It's a special and unique job because I wear a few different hats, but our main focus is to end all forms of trafficking and prostitution. As the only survivor-led organization in Minnesota, we work closely with clients. We find them advocacy, housing, and connect them with other resources they need. I also have a podcast called Naming Jane Doe, where I talk about and interview survivors and share their stories of triumph and overcoming obstacles. I want people to see that survivors are resilient and tenacious.

One of my sponsors is a clothing company called Don't Be Pimped, so I am a brand ambassador for their clothing company. On top of all of that, I'm also a professional hairstylist and run an online business. One of my favorite things about my online business is that you don't need any prior experience to be involved, so survivors with different backgrounds can all get training to be successful. I love being involved in so many things!

What inspires you the most in your work?

Being able to assist people in their journey to healing. I truly believe that we all can overcome the obstacles that face us, with a little help from others. I want to show others that the path isn't linear, but full of ups and downs, and we can learn from each of them. It's amazing to be a part of the movement in such a hands-on way, even as I got through my own healing.

What does the term 'empowerment' mean to you?

Empowerment is taking control of your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. When we realize the power we have inside and start to recognize our strength, we are empowered. I spent much of my life feeling like it was happening TO me, and now realize it was happening FOR me.
share their purpose and speak their truth.

Can you tell us an example or story of when you found your work personally rewarding?

I knew that this was the right path for me when I started sharing my experience on social media, and so many people reached out with their own stories, feeling grateful that someone was willing to be so open. They felt like they could come to me and trust that I could give advice or just be an ear to listen. It also gave me a way to help people share their stories in a way that inspires and empowers them. Some have even been featured on my podcast because they were ready to

What is your advice for other survivor leaders on their journey to empowering their communities?

Be open, honest, and fill your cup first. There is nothing selfish about making sure that you are able to pour into others. I see many mentors draining themselves, trying to give more than they have, and we can't build sustainable assistance that way. Find a support buddy to hold you accountable for the tasks you need and be a reminder, when you're wearing thin, that you need to give yourself some grace. This work isn't easy, but it's worth it.

Can you tell us about how the Survivor Alliance fits into your goals?

Survivor Alliance has opened up so many doors for me. Not only have I been able to enhance my professional skills, but I have been able to create incredible relationships that I would never have had. I can connect skills to all my different activities, and I can always grow! It has been such a fun experience, and I feel so fortunate to be a part of the alliance.



Nancy



Nancy believes that empowering survivors means giving them voices, choices, freedom, and chances. Here are snippets from our talk with her.

Hello, Nancy! Lovely speaking with you today. Could you start by telling us more about your role at Survivor Alliance?

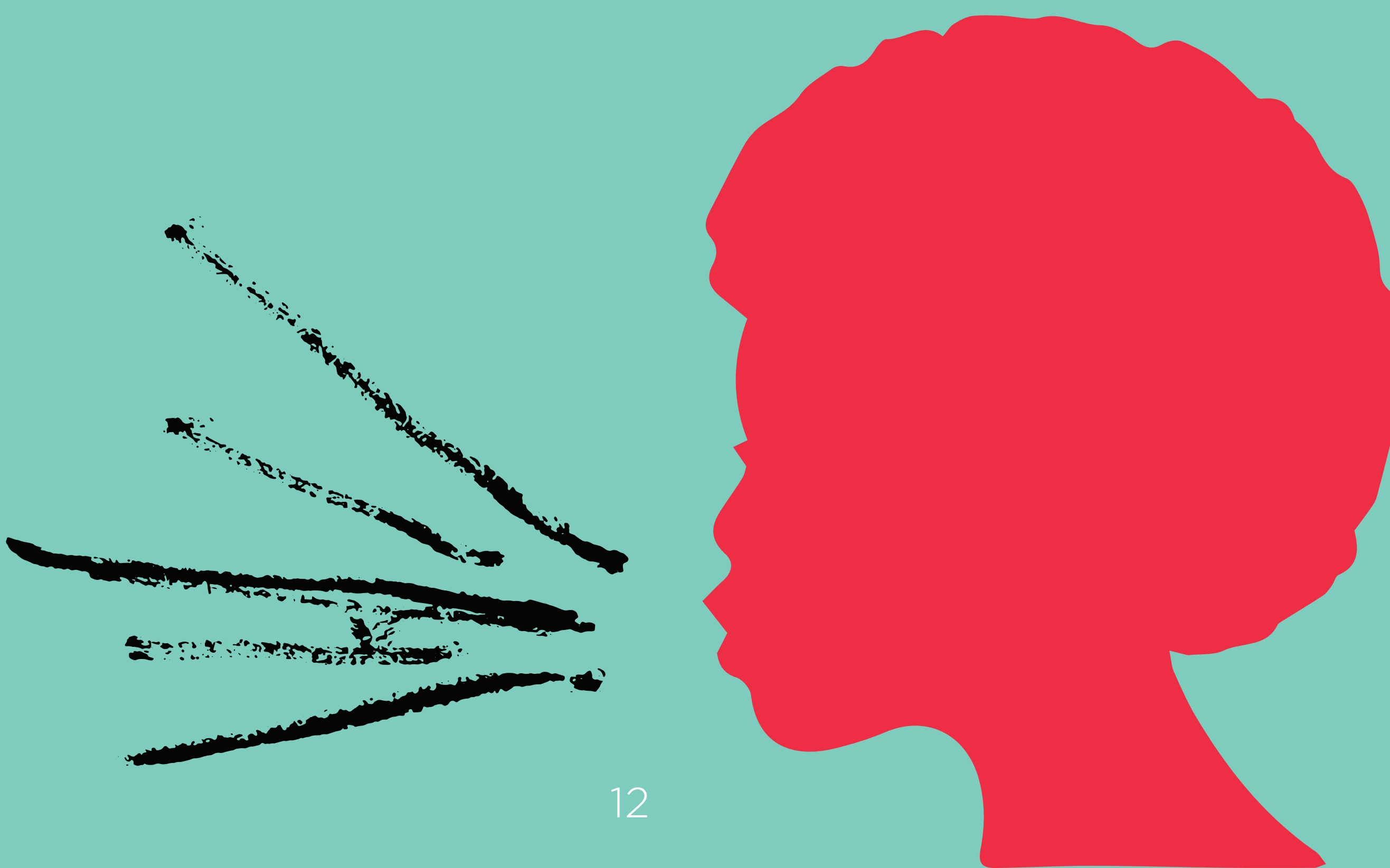
Hello! Yes. My role at Survivor Alliance is to support survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery. It involves seeing them through personal visits and sometimes just calling to find out -

Tell us more about your community. Also, how has Survivor Alliance's work benefited your community?

At the moment, a few organisations know about us. I am trying to widen our network by going to different meetings and spaces to talk about our work. My college - the first time we had a meeting - gave us the space and support we needed. In general, my community and college are very much in support of us. They give us the right platforms for speaking to students.

On the other hand, we have not influenced the council as much so far, but this is my goal - to get the space and support that we need.

So, yes! I work with Survivor Alliance to speak to and influence other organisations and people. I let them know that we are here and need the right opportunity to be able to amplify our voices.



What drives you or inspires you to work in empowering survivors?

What drives me the most is knowing that there is so much to do - especially in respect to how the government operates and treats survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

It drives me because I want our voices to be heard! The government says, “oh we are doing this for survivors.” We, who are the survivors, cannot see the impact. I want to raise my voice and say, “no, we are here and what you are saying is not actually happening.”

The other thing that drives me is knowing there is no other survivor-led group here. There are all these other organisations who are talking on behalf of survivors. But, most of the time, they are not saying what we want to say and how we want to say it.

What does “empowerment” mean to you?

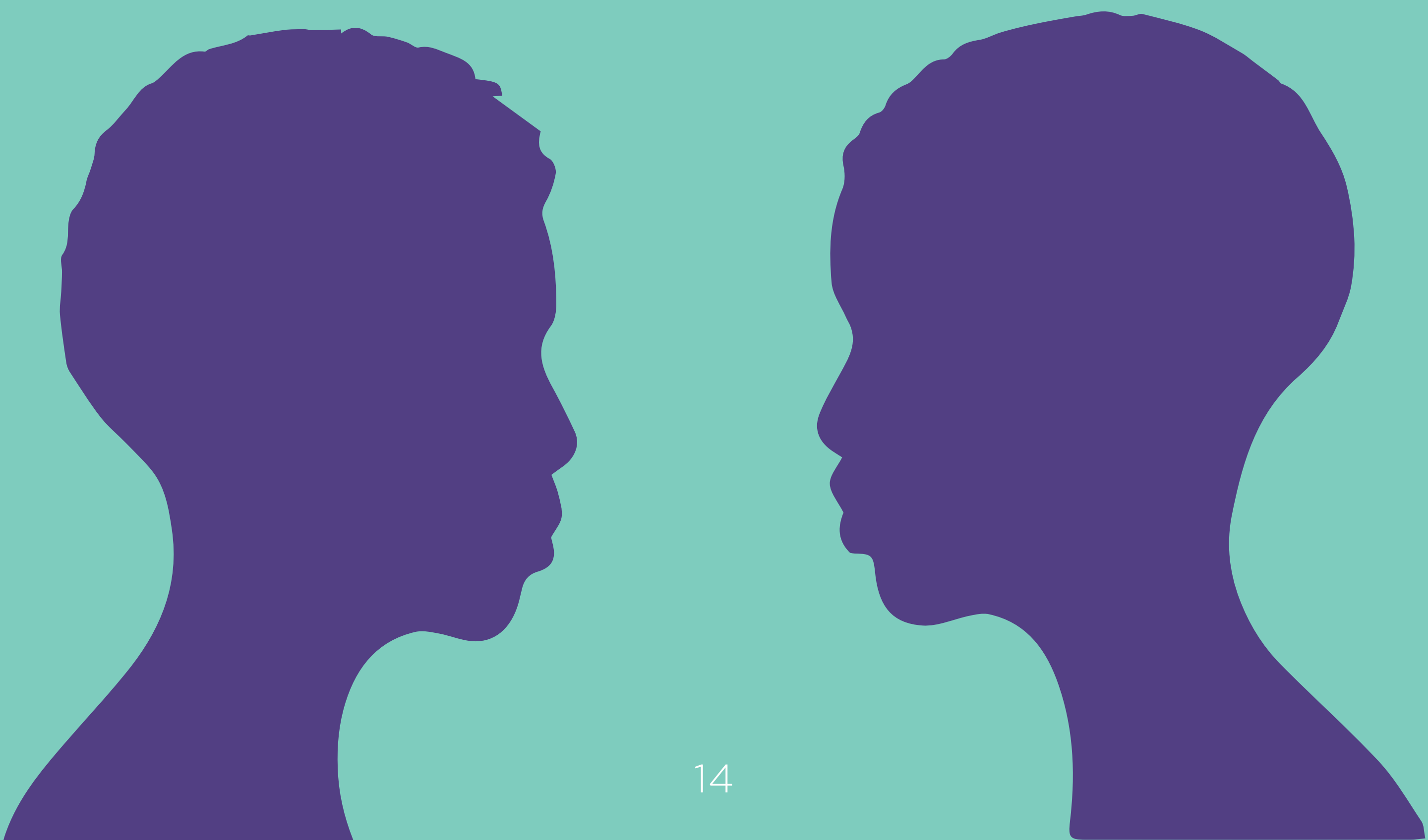
The term “empowerment” means giving people voices and choices. It means giving people freedom and chances - including the space and opportunity to do what they think they can do.

Could you share with us a story or example of when you found your work personally rewarding?

At the talks that I have done so far, people have come up and said, “you were born to do this!” And I have been like, “no I almost passed out standing there!” (laughs) The one thing that I always feel is the most rewarding for me is the one-on-one talks. I like being close to the survivor and interacting and sharing with her/them/him. They normally don’t keep friends because of the traumatic experiences that they have gone through. Other people don’t understand them and don’t know how to support or be a friend to them.

When I come into their lives, they see me as a friend that they could keep.

Regardless of whether they keep other friends, they keep me in their lives. For me, this is the most rewarding moment.



What is your advice for other survivor leaders?

Those who are on the journey to empower their own communities. My advice would be that don't always be "professional" with other survivors. We have so many professionals out there. When we go to the GP and during other appointments. Even when we go to the advocacy office or to the home office, we meet professionals.

I don't want to see a Survivor Alliance leader approaching me as a "professional". Go beyond being a professional and be a friend. Most survivors here don't have a family residing in the same country. I don't have family in this country. Actually, all the survivors that I have come across don't have family in this country. If it is possible for you, be like a sister or a brother to them.

My other advice is that we need to go the extra mile for those who need support. If you want to be a sister or a brother, you have to go the extra mile for a sister or brother.

Lastly, be active in your community and get involved in other groups. If possible, volunteer for other groups or the causes that interest you.

How did you hear about Survivor Alliance?

I heard about Survivor Alliance from an outreach case worker who comes to visit me at the house. She said, “oh, there’s this group I’ve heard about. I know you really want to do more things. This group is worth going for.”

At first, I was a bit reluctant because there are so many other organisations out here that I worked with, and I didn’t like the way that they operated. I had another obstacle which is that I don’t have internet here and couldn’t register. She said she could register me, and we could see how it goes.

How does your work at Survivor Alliance fit into your career or personal goals?

It fits in nicely in the sense that my goal was to work towards involving people in conversations, giving, supporting, interacting, and sharing - really working closely with people. Survivor Alliance falls nicely into that as with survivors you have to be ready to help, interact, and give (whether time or resources). I try to support them in many ways including going with them to appointments or checking-in on them if they are having a bad day.

Anything else that we should know about you?

I love to sing! Mostly to myself! (laughs)



Martin Pole

Martin Pole is a survivor leader whose determined efforts have led to the rescue of over 5,000 victims of human trafficking and the arrest of over 2,000 human traffickers in India.

Martin, could you tell us about your work with your community?

Currently, I am involved in finding out victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, especially victims of sex trafficking who are minors. After identifying them, I work closely with the police in rescue operations. If we want to see the numbers reduce, then empowering people is essential. On receiving funding in the near future, I will implement programs through my organisation - dedicated to empowering survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

Till date, I have rescued over 5,000 victims of human trafficking, assisted the police in the arrest of over 2,000 traffickers, and testified in more than 300 cases so that victims can get justice.

What inspires you the most in your work?

When I see a victim of human trafficking who has got justice, received proper rehabilitation and reintegration support and is now empowered.

What does empowerment mean to you?

When a survivor is self-dependent, and society respects their rights and dignity.



Could you tell us about a time when you found your work personally rewarding?

There are many stories! I feel rewarded when I see a victim of human trafficking living a normal life.

What is your advice for other survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

I just want to say that whatever you do, have a clear vision!

Think about this - what are we going to do? Why are we doing it and for whom? And finally, create a landmark example for others so that they can be inspired to do the same.

Thanks for sharing, Martin. Can you tell us more about how the Survivor Alliance fits into your goals?

Whenever an alliance is created for a common vision, there is a mission that needs to be accomplished. There are many survivors across the world who are voiceless and oppressed and need support. If they get this support and become leaders, then they will bring changes to the lives of survivors. Because they are coming from the grassroots, they know the pain that a survivor in the community has faced. I believe raising a leader from the same community that you work with has a great impact.

Tammy



Tammy is a beachcomber who loves watching the warm hues of a sunset. She is a passionate survivor leader who believes that empowering people means ensuring their voices, needs, and choices are heard.

Here are snippets from our conversation.

Tammy, can you tell us about your work with your community?

I work for an organization here in Hawaii, and we do a lot of work in prevention. We go into public and private schools - at the high-school and middle-school levels - and raise awareness on sex trafficking in Hawaii. I also provide peer support, which is similar to one-to-one mentoring, but it is different in the sense that it prepares you for a mentor. The person might be in crisis or just not ready for that one-to-one mentor, and this is where I come in. I sometimes work with law enforcement officials like recently I did a presentation, in partnership with Homeland Security, on sex trafficking in Hawaii.

Here, I could add my voice as a survivor. It was such an honor to be invited to speak to that level of law enforcement, such as the Chiefs of Police across the United States.



Can you tell us a bit more about the community you work with in Hawaii?

In Hawaii, we find that there are a lot of run-away children. I don't like to use statistical data because numbers tend to change. But it's quite a high figure. One of the statistics that is often used is that within 48 hours of being away from home, the youth will be approached for a sexual favor in return for something that is considered to be of value. This, therefore, is sex trafficking. We also have a lot of homeless youth who are living in tents on the beaches or in parks. We find that they are facing the same form of exploitation in return for food, drugs, or a place to stay.

Arizona State University did a study where they put up an ad on Backpage (when it was still active). It was a fake advertisement for an underage person. They had hundreds of hits on that. When they analyzed the data, they found that one in 11 men in Hawaii are going online to buy sex. It doesn't mean they purchase it, but they are looking at advertisements. It is not only the tourists but also the locals. We know this because they have the local area code displayed on their numbers.

Even after Backpage, the exploitation has continued online through applications like Tinder, Snapchat, and Facebook.

What drives you the most in your work?

My own experiences. I was trafficked at the age of 15. I did not fully realize then what was happening to me. I just thought that I had made the wrong choice. Because of this, I did not receive the services that I should have like counseling. As an adult, I returned to it.

I know what I thought then and the dangers that I faced, including the violence. If I identify youth today that have faced this kind of exploitation, I don't want them to think it is the destiny of their lives. I want them to find a path to healing and know that there is a community that cares deeply about them.

What does the term “empowerment” mean to you?

Empowerment means ensuring that the voices, needs, and likes and dislikes of the people I work with are my priority (and for them to be able to voice this).



What would be your advice to other survivor leaders?

When we work with individuals, we should want them to move to the next stage in their healing. This could be knowing that they survived something horrific; something that for whatever reasons they were able to overcome.

We should not pressure people to work in the movement. However, if they choose to, we should come together and support them. We should speak to them about what has helped us to heal or self-care. Sharing information with others is important.

And another aspect is celebrating. This is when we move from being survivors to thrivers. I feel that I am thriving in my life today. I am doing things that sometimes I feel are humanly impossible to do, but somehow, because of the grace of God, I have been able to after overcoming a lot of hardship and obstacles.

How did you find out about Survivor Alliance? How does Survivor Alliance fit into your personal or professional goals?

I received an invitation to join the Survivor Alliance. It has been helpful to be a part of it because I want to expand my knowledge and also contribute. I want to collaborate with people and learn from what has worked for them.

I also want to share what has worked for me. Even though Hawaii is a paradise, we have a lot of work to do here in terms of preventing the exploitation of children.

We would love to know more about you. What are your interests and hobbies?

I am a beachcomber. I love walking along the beach and looking for seashells. I love putting my feet in the sand and saltwater in the morning - when the sun is rising or setting. There is a time when the sky is orange, pink, or purple, and I think about the masterpiece that we live in.

I also have a dog who I love snuggling with! Pet therapy has been very important to me in life.

I love my family and friends. I love being a wife to my husband and a mom to my son. I love having this community around me. It propels me to work harder.



Keith

Keith, could you tell us about your work with your community?

Yes. Currently, I am in the process of making connections with the police in the UK. I want to work alongside them as a counsellor for survivors of violence. While the police are working closely with survivors, not many survivors are actually part of the counselling process. I have been through interviews with authorities as well, and I remember that I was very scared. Involving survivors ensures that victims can be at ease. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

We have a small community, and I am trying to push for more awareness campaigns, in different languages, at hotels or staff quarters so that victims know there is help available. I am also approaching companies that build port-a-loos. If a person sees a notice with a number to a charity here, they might find it easier to seek help.

Another part of my work is ensuring schools speak to students about human trafficking and modern slavery. Children are naive; I was also naive when I was a victim of modern slavery.

It took me a long time to get where I have now in life. I was scared to tell people about it. The more that the issue is discussed, the easier it might be for victims to open up about it to other people.

Keith, what inspires you the most in your work?

I have helped quite a few people - even those that have experienced childhood trauma. When I see that I am doing something that makes a person happy or feel alive again, I feel inspired. I never ask for anything in return. I only want to help more people.

If I can help one person, that is good. If I can help ten, that is amazing. If this reaches a hundred people, then I am doing marvellous work. My work every day pushes me to learn more about the experiences of survivors of modern slavery, human trafficking, domestic violence, and other forms of violence. I feel empowered through my work. It is my calling.

One of my goals is to connect with Tyson Fury. He is a heavyweight champion and is known as the Gypsy King. He is an ambassador for mental health. Tyson Fury comes from a Gypsy community. The Gypsy community will listen to him.

If he spoke about the issue and said this is what is happening, it can make a world of difference. Gypsy communities do not live by the law of the land, but if he says trafficking and modern slavery is wrong, people will listen, and it could help innocent people.

What does empowerment mean to you?

Authorities do not always listen to survivors. I am trying to get the point across that although we are people seen as involved in a crime, we are the victims. We know a lot about what goes on, and we should be an integral part of support services. Being listened to as a survivor of something horrific is empowerment. It is giving people that hope.

Could you tell us about a time when you found your work personally rewarding?

I was held captive and forced into hard labour by a group of Gypsies. There was another person with me there. He had been held captive for about 26 years.

One evening, I felt this urge to pick up the phone and call him. He was about to attempt suicide. I begged him not to do it. He told me not to tell anyone about it. He said he could not cope with the stress and pressure.

This is why survivors should be heard.

I managed to get off the phone and call the authorities. The next day, I got a hold of him over the phone. When I heard his voice, and as he thanked me, I realised that I could make a difference. We keep in touch till date.

This was one of the most important moments of my life.

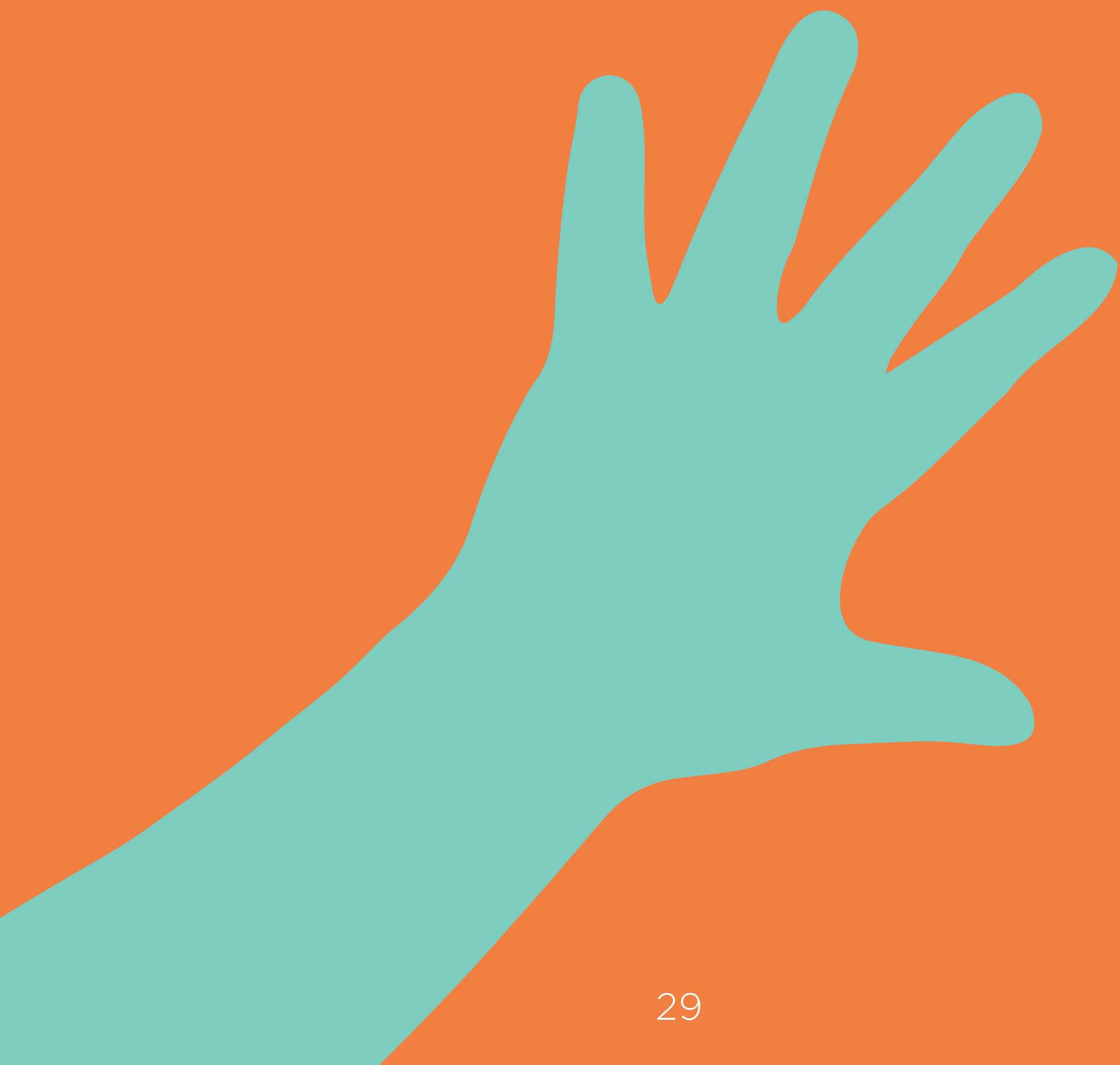
What is your advice for other leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

Straight talking. Do not dress it up. Survivors should be speaking in front of Members of Parliament or press members and telling it as it is. It is what it is.

Thank you so much for speaking with us, Keith.

We would love to hear about some of your hobbies or interests.

I love listening to music. I am a massive hip-hop fan. I spend a lot of time with my son. I have also recently started fishing which has been quite relaxing!



Jarrai

Jarrai is a survivor leader who launched a Survivor Alliance chapter in Nottingham city. She says empowering people in our role as leaders at times involves just being there and giving a listening ear or calling and saying, “I hope you are okay.”

Hello, Jarrai! Lovely to speak with you. Could you tell us about your work with your community?

I have started a Survivor Alliance chapter in Nottingham. The main objective of the chapter is to bring together survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery; the chapter exists to support ourselves and provides an environment or space where we can talk about and help each other with our trauma. I have been working on it since April last year and launched the chapter in August with help from Maria at the Survivor Alliance. In the past, I have also conducted surveys for organisations in the anti-trafficking field.

How has the journey of building the chapter been so far?

It is not an easy journey. To be honest, you need to push yourself every day as I am also dealing with trauma. It's not easy to help others when you are not feeling very okay. Bringing the group together can be a challenge. People have different reasons why they cannot come sometimes. That's why we are survivors; we have difficulties on a daily basis.

However, I am determined to help people as much as I can by bringing them together, talking about our issues, and seeing how we can help each other - no matter the difficulties. I have been doing a lot of work to keep us moving. We have had several meetings as well - about two or three so far. Now, we are determined to meet once every month so that we can see how we can move forward with our chapter.

What inspires you the most in your work?

What inspires me the most is touching people's lives every day. I am motivated by my previous profession too. I am a nurse, so I am a carer. I love to care for people. It motivates me to see that I am doing something for someone else.



What does the term ‘empowerment’ mean to you?

It means a lot to me. I need to empower myself before empowering other people. I need to do something good for myself before I go out and change or help people’s lives and help them move forward or pursue something that they want to do - whether in terms of skills, academics, or professions that they want to pursue. If they want to jump, I help them jump, for example. If they want to cry, I listen to them cry. Just being there and giving a listening ear to someone or just calling and saying, “I hope you are okay” - even that is empowering.

Can you tell us an example or story of when you found your work personally rewarding?

The most rewarding time was when I decided to start this chapter and also when we successfully launched it. I applied for funding and received it. It was amazing and rewarding as I believe that I am doing something positive for myself and for others.

What is your advice for other survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

I would say to them that it’s not easy to bring people together. It’s a challenge, but no matter what, it should not stop us from doing what we think is good for us and for others.

I appeal to all survivor leaders to continue their hard work. It's not easy if you are dealing with trauma and are involved in many activities. However, as leaders, we should be determined.

How did you find Survivor Alliance? Can you tell us more about how it fits into your goals?

I got involved when I first came here to Nottingham. I went to various organisations to look for support for my case, for example. Later, I found out about Mojatu Foundation. They were supporting me with my difficulties. They said, "you know what, Survivor Alliance is a good place for you," based on my story and trauma.

I have been part of many organisations, but I don't find anything interesting about most of them because they don't relate to me. So, when I got to know about the Survivor Alliance, I thought, "this is the best place for me." This is what I was looking for. I got in touch with Minh to see what they do, their values, and more; it inspired me.

Can you tell us about your hobbies?

I like watching movies, and I love reading!

Malaika



Malaika Oringo, a mentor, educator, speaker, and lobbyist, based in the Netherlands. Malaika is the founder of Footprint to Freedom - a survivor-led foundation that provides 'restorative training to help survivors reclaim their freedom and prevent revictimisation.

Malaika, could you tell us about your work with the community?

I am Ugandan, but I have lived in the Netherlands for the past 16 years. I am an educator, trainer, mentor, speaker, and advocate for victims' rights. I am a survivor of human trafficking.

I am also the founder of Footprint to Freedom. It is a survivor-led foundation that promotes survivor empowerment. We do this through restorative training to help survivors reclaim their freedom and prevent revictimisation. We empower survivors to advocate for themselves and collaborate with law enforcement and service providers to design services and policies that fully support survivors and victims of human trafficking.



My engagement with this work began after I was rescued 15 years ago. I was finding a purpose. I wanted to see what I could do to make sure that no other girl went through what I had gone through. It was a journey, and it took me time to be able to empower survivors. I began by sharing my personal experiences with the hope that it could help in identifying victims. I now work as a coach in the red-light districts with people who want to leave prostitution - especially victims of human trafficking. I walk around the area and give people the hope that if they are willing to exit prostitution, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I am here, and these are the strategies that I used to get help from organisations. If you need help, you can contact this organisation. I have been in this role for the past four years.

I also work with different organisations that raise awareness about human trafficking and sensitise schools, law enforcement officials, and government agencies, such as the city council. We are now working on the 'survivor walk project.' We aim to encourage survivors to join the fight against human trafficking and raise awareness on the current statistics related to human trafficking. We are survivors from different backgrounds. We have different experiences. We want to make sure that the community understands that human trafficking is not only associated with migration; it can happen to anybody.

Three years ago, I also started a project that empowers survivors of human trafficking who are undocumented in the Netherlands. I work with the Salvation Army as the project lead for this program.

Could you tell us more about this program?

I was undocumented for ten years in the Netherlands.

My goal is to empower survivors to self-discover their values, heal, and give them the tools to find their purpose. As we know, once you are undocumented, you lose the right to study, earn an income, or even to exist. Some undocumented survivors live underground, but those who do not live underground do not have the resources to sustain themselves. You feel lost. You are not in the system, but you are still there because you are interacting with the justice system. It can take years. Some of the women in our community have been doing this for about 19 years, while some have experienced homelessness for up to ten years.



Through our group, we talk about different things, such as ‘how can you dare to dream when you do not have the right to dream?’ and ‘how do you start the process of self-discovery when you are in a state of confusion?’ I tell them about the strategies that I used as a survivor to reach the stage that I am at and give them the autonomy and the lead to choose what would work for them. Everyone has their own time and way of processing things.

They also attend courses in computer training and sewing, among others. I train survivors who are looking to develop leadership skills. One of the most important things is that we give ourselves spiritual encouragement. We put God at the centre of what we are doing. We also take into consideration the culture and taboos, as well as their fears.

Thank you for sharing this with us, Malai-ka. Could you elaborate on your work with the Salvation Army and as an independent consultant?

I have been working with the Salvation Army and the EFA (Brussels) as an Assistant Policy Officer. The Salvation Army works closely with people in local communities, including those who are experiencing homelessness, living in the red-light districts, migrants, and refugees.

My role involved lobbying the European Parliament to emphasise the needs of survivors and those who are vulnerable to being trafficked. I spoke about their experiences and the gaps that have led vulnerable groups into slavery so that policymakers could look into the same. I talked about the need to end the impunity of traffickers. It is quite a prominent issue here. Often, traffickers walk free or end up in prison for about two years.

I also work as an independent consultant and spokesperson on combating human trafficking. I advocate for victims' rights. I communicate about the danger of looking for the 'perfect victim.' It is a major problem that we experience as African survivors of human trafficking. There are underlying reasons why victims are not able to give their statements like they want to, such as cultural barriers, debt bondage, or not knowing that they are victims.

Please tell us about your work in establishing a network in East Africa.

I believe that I now have the knowledge and capability to help my sisters back home. The situation is alarming. There is a lack of reintegration support, and survivors are stigmatised.

The network is for victims and survivors of labour trafficking in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. We hope to develop collective strategies on combatting human trafficking.

We were to start this June, but I could not travel due to the COVID-19 situation. We will start with creating a documentary film to hear from the survivors themselves about their stories, challenges, and the reasons that they had to leave these countries. It will help us build intervention strategies.

The network will have an advisory council that will help to empower other survivors of human trafficking with alternative employment opportunities and network with companies to ensure jobs.

What is your advice for survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

As a survivor leader, you first need to focus on your healing. If you have to be a source of strength for other survivors, you need to be their rock. They need to believe that they are working with somebody strong enough to lead them through this journey. Also, you have to understand that healing can be a long journey. It does not happen overnight. Some survivors may require time to be able to retain or take in what you are telling them. You need to be patient.

In most intervention strategies, people come up with programs that rely on a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. It is not going to help. You need to look at the survivor's individual needs and challenges. In our meetings, I also keep the focus on the future, their aspirations and dreams, and what can help them in what they want to achieve.

We also need to learn as survivor leaders when it is the right time to step aside and have other survivors on a stage to own their voices and experiences. Provide them with the tools that they need to be more than their stories and training that fits their aspirations. For example, I was not good at sewing. When they took me to sewing school, it did not work for me. I am a speaker. So, focus on the aspiration of the survivor. I also encourage leaders to give survivors the autonomy and strength to be not only beneficiaries but also direct contributors to projects.

I want to give survivor leaders the hope that no matter how hard it is to mobilise funds or help a survivor sister to reclaim freedom, you need to be resilient. It took me almost 12 years to see that I have helped somebody. I want you to remember this story. One day, after a storm, a girl was trying to throw the fish back into the sea.

She picked up one fish at a time and sent it back into the sea. Her father asked, 'why are you doing this? There are so many. You are not going to be able to help all of them.' The girl's response has been one of the principles that navigate my life. She said that to that one fish that she was able to throw into the sea, it mattered.

For that one survivor, it matters. Let that be the comfort that you have in your heart. You are making a difference. I know this from experience. My coach, and now colleague, stood by me for the last 12 years to see that I am where I am today. I always say that she threw me back into the sea. Now, I am here to do the same.

Can you tell us about how you were introduced to the Survivor Alliance?

I was looking for a network - for sisterhood, actually. I wanted to find people who could mentor me and survivors who have aspired to be lawyers, doctors, etc. I found the Survivor Alliance online and was intrigued by their work. I contacted them and received a reply from Minh. Minh was very kind and welcoming and introduced me to Maria, who became my mentor in building my network.



The second time I heard about the Survivor Alliance was from someone working at the Salvation Army. They were working with Survivor Alliance and the University of Nottingham. She wrote to Minh about me.

Being a part of the Survivor Alliance has helped me expand my network and learn from survivors from across the world. For example, about what is happening in Greece, India, South Africa, and other places through the members of our Whatsapp group.

Malaika, are there any resources that you would like to recommend or share with us?

The Footprint to Freedom YouTube channel educates anyone interested in learning about and stopping modern-day slavery. It provides information and tools to help educate ourselves and learn how to recognise and report human trafficking. We highlight the resilience and journeys of survivors from victims to survivor leaders and talk about thriving as a survivor leader.

Follow us here to learn more and stay up to date on anti-trafficking policies, training opportunities, and events.

Michel

Michel Ndahashuba resides in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Michel, an inspiring leader in his community, says empowering people means catalysing their energy and power to bring an end to bad practices and to ensure their rights and dignity are respected.

Here's more from our conversation.

Michel, could you tell us about your work with your community?


I am working in advocacy among my Nyindu indigenous community and also other communities surrounding the Nyindu indigenous community. I meet people who have experienced oppression and invite them to join our meetings.

Here, we talk about our experiences, what we have gone through, what has hurt in the past, or if it is still happening. We speak about what has been harmful to our lives in the past when we were children and were growing up. Together, we agree to spread awareness within the community and talk about the wounds we have had and the wounds people are getting from circumstances made by other people.

We talk about how bad it is and how badly this is affecting people. So I am involved in advocating for the end of bad practices that are done on individuals - which I have faced as a victim and practices which have been harmful to the people who I have met.

In my own childhood, I had experienced oppression - from when I was in primary and secondary school. Then, I saw it happen in my family, to my siblings. I saw it continue to happen to other people - the beatings that I had gone through when I was at school, the work that was imposed, the mockery that I have gone through. I have seen my siblings, mostly my sisters, becoming victims of a practice where a price is paid for young girls when they reach the legal age for getting married. I have seen it in my family, and it has impacted my life.

It has made wounds in my inner being. I saw a part of this oppression in my mother's experiences. She was oppressed in her own community. If they did not succeed in things, they said it is because my mother has thrown a curse on them. There was a time when my mother was about to be killed. There was no proof, but because she is a woman, they were about to kill her.



All these things have triggered me to stand for and bring together other people who have gone through the same wounds or have different wounds, so that we can voice out how bad it is to victimise people just because they are vulnerable in comparison to those who want to oppress them, to wound them, to beat them, to diminish their values, to make them work forcibly regardless of what people would want to do or not want to do.

Could you tell us more about how you reach out to people within the community?

After talking to one another, we think about what we should do to make our voices louder and to reach as many as possible for advocating for the end of what we have gone through and what others are going through in terms of oppression and victimisation. When we go into the community, everyone tries to accomplish what we have agreed to in terms of addressing situations. The next time we meet, we give feedback on what has happened.

Sometimes, if there is a particular event, for example, we know there is a gathering of women, and it is about dowry-related issues or forced marriage, we go together and ask for space to talk about these issues

I make sure that if there is a public demonstration, such as on Women's Day, or if we have room to go to a media outlet, such as the radio, we speak to the wider public about dowry-related issues and the oppression of children.

Thank you for sharing, Michel.

What does the term 'empowerment' mean to you?

Empowerment, for me, means catalysing the power, energy, and desire within the group to bring an end to bad practices and to ensure the human rights of victims and the dignity of people who have experienced oppression are respected. I have come to understand that what I have gone through, and how it has wounded my inner being, pushes up energy to resist, to face, to act. I always discover that within the victims I have been speaking to.

For anyone who has gone through victimisation, not only does the person experience oppression but even the people surrounding them, such as their siblings. So the community also needs this catalysation through invitations and making connections, in different ways, to end oppression and to bring change for the good of human dignity.

What is your advice for other leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

My advice to other leaders in the Survivor Alliance is to keep advancing, keep moving forward in unity. I have discovered, and it is a general truth, that the more I have lived and experienced the truth, the more it speaks to our hearts. Loneliness affects us negatively. Uniting as victims is a positive tool to face the oppression occurring within our communities. Also, it is good to identify like-minded people within the community. There always exists someone like-minded. This is why I appreciate the Survivor Alliance so much. It opens the door to building these connections, and it's a valuable opportunity for unified efforts to achieve our goals as leaders. Lastly, a positive attitude as leaders is important, as we communicate this same positive attitude to the people we are leading in action.



This forced movement of local people becomes an opportunity for traffickers to exploit them. They lure innocent people in the name of providing employment opportunities and making high payments for their work. With the dream of getting high-paying jobs, individuals get trapped and become victims of human trafficking and modern day slavery. Traffickers traffic them across the border as well as within the country's boundary in the CSEC and entertainment sector.

If we see the past trends in Nepal, our country used to be known as the source country for human trafficking. Today, Nepal is being recognized as a destination and transit country for human trafficking as well.

What inspires you the most in your work?

Whenever I am able to rescue trafficked women and girls from hellish places like brothels, whether from foreign countries or within the country's boundaries, I feel like I have been rescued again. I have faced the same situation, and I know the feeling of happiness when women and girls are rescued from brothels. I can feel their emotions and feelings while being rescued.



Another factor that motivates me to work in this issue is that I have been honored with different national and international awards such as the C10 Award at Stockholm, Sweden, in 2014, Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award at Taiwan in 2015, World Women Leadership Achievement Award in 2015, and Trafficking In Person Hero Award (2018) by the US Government. Similarly, I have been honored by the Nepal Government in 2016 for my relentless work in this issue.

Recently, according to the Fortune Magazine (2019), I have also been listed as one of the world's greatest leaders.

These recognitions and awards symbolize my effort in the anti-human trafficking campaign which motivates me even further to work for survivors of human trafficking. A number of trafficking survivors who cannot raise their voice due to social stigma come to me for support which gives me more energy to work on these issues.

What does the term 'empowerment' mean to you?

For me, empowerment means making survivors of human trafficking and modern day slavery and the youth strong enough to fight against human trafficking. They should be able to raise their own voice and fight for their rights without any fear.

Can you tell us about a time when you found your work personally rewarding?

I feel happy when I work closely with survivors and contribute to reviving their lives.

What is your advice for other leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

We should not always work for survivors but we should directly WITH them. We should hear their voices and the problems faced by them in daily life. I would like to give my own example; I am a survivor of human trafficking and now I am recognized as a leading activist in the field of human trafficking issues. If I was not empowered by the leaders in those days, I wouldn't have been in the place that I am in now.

There are a number of SUNITA DANUWARs in our communities who need support from us. We have to recognize them, and we should empower them in order to develop them from survivors to the next leading activists. We can and we must develop survivors as leaders. Try to develop and polish their leadership skills. We need to create more survivor leaders in our countries.

Can you tell us more about how the Survivor Alliance fits into your goals?

Survivor Alliance is a global network which involves a number of organizations and individual leaders from different countries. Our organization is very new at this stage, but I have the experience of working in these issues for 23 years. This alliance will be a great platform for me to enhance my coordination with more people, and I will also get a floor to raise the voice of trafficking survivors. I will get an opportunity to learn from different leaders and bring the learnings to my own practice.

I am also looking forward to connect with potential donors through this alliance so that we can work together to prevent human trafficking.

The network will be a great support for me in my work to combat the issue of human trafficking. In the near future, I am looking to get support to fundraise in order to support the survivors we work with through more rescue and repatriation efforts.



S.R Ahmed

Syed Ahmed - an empowering survivor leader - who believes in building sustainable communities for survivors through resilient relationships and authentic networks. Here are snippets from our conversation.

Syed, could you tell us about your work with your community?

I am volunteering with the Survivor Alliance, the Salvation Army, Local Bangladeshi Community (NBC), and the Bengal Cricket Club. I play for the Bengal Cricket Club as well. As a survivor leader, I am trying to empower myself and, at the same time, working to empower the community in various ways. In this effort, I am working to build resilient relationships, ensuring authentic networks for survivors, encouraging them to learn, and helping recognise active groups in the community.

What inspires you the most in your work? My own story inspires me.

As a victim, I know what is going on in our community and how the survivors in the community feel. I put myself in their position and understand everything intimately - what they might be thinking or what they may need.



What does empowerment mean to you?

Empowerment is a set of measures designed to increase autonomy and self-determination in people and within the community. It enables them to present their interests in a responsible and self-determined way.

Could you tell us about a time when you found your work personally rewarding?

My reward is the satisfaction that I feel in what I am doing as a survivor leader.

When I came to this country, I had a good life. I worked for a big company for five years. Soon, my visa expired, and there is no room for illegal immigrants in the country. I was trafficked and somehow rescued.

Now, I feel motivated. I can talk to the highest level of the government. I can represent survivors in front of stakeholders, Members of Parliament, the public, organisations and others. I consider myself very lucky to be able to raise my voice for survivors.

What is your advice for other survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

My advice is simple. Try not to look back. Think positive, and prepare yourself for the best life in the future.

Can you tell us about how you were introduced to the Survivor Alliance?

I came to know about the Survivor Alliance from the Salvation Army. They work for survivors of modern slavery and trafficking with the Home Office. One day, my manager said that there is a research program at Nottingham University. He asked if I would like to participate in it. I said, 'yes, sounds good to me.' All my life I have been in education, so if I can tell my story and help them somehow, that would be good.

I engaged with them through their RAB program (Research Advisory Board). I spoke with the co-director in the United Kingdom, spoke about myself, and what I wanted to do for the community. They asked me if I would like to join the Survivor Alliance. I said, 'yes, it would be my pleasure.'

My objectives are similar or parallel to their objectives and goals. I want to establish a sustainable community for survivors. That is my ambition in life.



Stephanie

Stephanie Anderson—an inspiring survivor leader who believes empowerment is successful and victorious living on a daily basis. Here are excerpts from our conversation.

Stephanie, could you tell us more about your current work in your community?

My background is in neurodevelopment.

Currently, I am travelling to conduct a training program with law enforcement officers. However, this is only one part of my work. I mainly work with survivors. I go into prisons and other places where individuals are in treatment or incarcerated. A lot of times, the people we talk to and work with are not aware that they were trafficked or have faced exploitation. We start discussions on their experiences, and what they might need to start their healing journey.

I work in both North Dakota and Montana.

Montana has a large population of Native American people. Also, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement is happening right now.

So, we work closely with a community that has the largest number of trafficked and missing women in the country and some of the least recorded numbers. Currently, we don't have a safe house in Montana. We're hoping that we're going to be able to bring together the resources to provide aftercare services.

What drives you in the work that you do every day?

I would say my own life story. I had a child who faced significant neurological problems. I learned everything about how the brain functions. I did all his exercises with him—side-by-side, hand-in-hand, and arm-on-arm. Everything. What motivates me today is knowing how much work went into my healing. I understand that the brain had to go through the stages of healing.

In my work everyday, I start the discussion on and work on bringing in aftercare. Healing can happen, and trauma can be addressed.

What does the term “empowerment” mean to you?

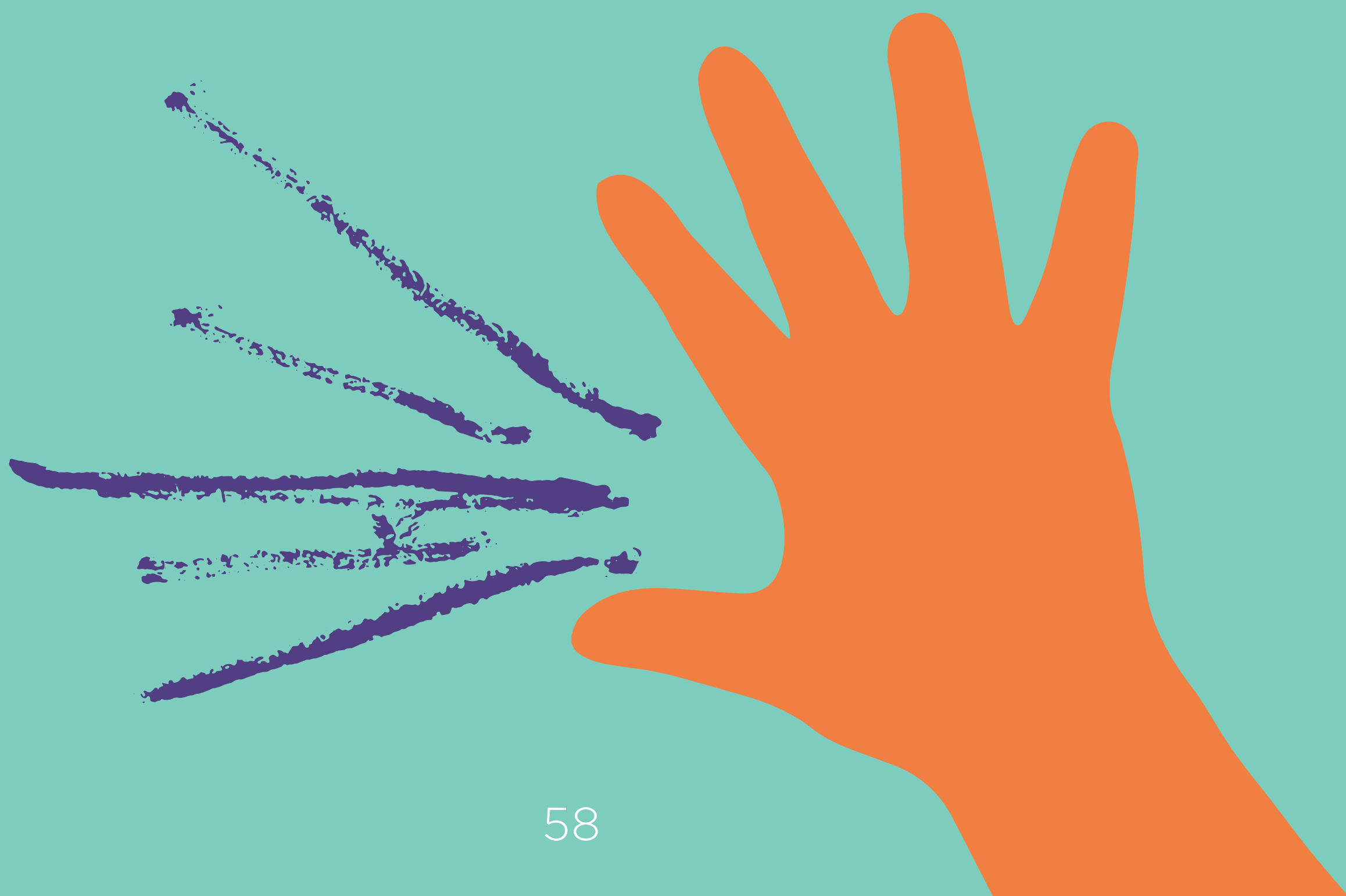
Successful and victorious living on a daily basis.

Can you tell us of a time when you found your work most rewarding?

I used to receive calls from some of our volunteers. They would talk about their frustrations—especially because they didn't have a point of reference to understand and interpret the behaviours and emotions that survivors felt.

I spoke to these individuals at length, even those who were going into prisons to volunteer. I explained to them that the brain is a lot more complicated. The amount of change that occurs, the pathways, and more—it's all very complicated. We have to continue to work and focus on healing.

Seeing them understand that it's more than what they look at as emotional behaviour—that there's actual damage and healing that takes place in the brain that will take time—was rewarding for me. Also, knowing that they are able now able to engage with their work in a more honest manner.



What is your advice for other survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

The first is that expectations are resentments waiting to happen. A few individuals in our communities will understand our issues and comprehend the concepts and what growth looks like; however, this is a minority.

The majority of people don't have a point of reference for a lot of the things that we're bringing to the table. So I would say be aware that when you work with your community, the expectation needs to be that "today, I'm going to walk in to the community and have a great conversation with so and so." Their response is not the reward itself but our ability to give them the information is what's important.

I recently watched a TED talk, and the speaker spoke about "compassion exhaustion." When you engage with your community, there are individuals who don't have the same point of reference for the material, the trauma, and for the experiences that we're going to share and the passion that we have. When it comes to this compassion exhaustion that a community or authorities may have, survivors need to know to not take it personally. The communication will build as they get to know us and develop relationships with us.

It's just really important for us to know sometimes it may feel like we are not getting anywhere, and we're not making an impact, but it's like learning a new language. No matter how much information you put out there, you're speaking to a community that doesn't speak the same language. I would just want to encourage leaders and say that if we are walking forward, that is the reward and not to forget that. Every step, every piece of work, and with everything we're going through, we are going forward.

How did you find Survivor Alliance? Can you tell us more about how the Survivor Alliance fits into your goals?

I found information on Survivor Alliance through the Rebecca Bender initiative. I've been taking the Elevate Academy. They post details on the different agencies and organisations that they partner with.

I initially worked with them for a curriculum review. I feel that Survivor Alliance provides practical tools and opportunities to grow in professional areas. I love what the organisation is doing. It really opened up my eyes to the work survivor leaders do, their impact—and how far-reaching it is.

Tell us a bit more about yourself.

My husband and I provide meals to people that don't have a family. We are actively engaged in communities where people are trying to get back on their feet. It's my joy! We've been doing this since 2008—making family wherever we are.





Delores

Delores Day who resides in the United States. Delores describes self-empowerment as giving yourself the power to do what you need to do - whether it's helping girls by ensuring justice or standing up for your own self.

Here are snippets from our conversation.

Hi, Delores! So our first question is, what work are you currently engaged in within your community? Can you tell us more about your work in empowerment?

Hi! I am currently in the process of opening a safe house - the Restore Innocence Ranch - for teenage girls who are survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The program at the safe house is inspired from one that a family member had been to before. Originally, it was going to be for teen girls coming out of the judicial system.

But, there are challenges. People, at times, don't realise what opening this kind of program would take.

It's complicated as it is a very thorough residential program with opportunities for job training and accessing counseling and medical services to get a start on their journey towards recovery and healing. After this program, we hope to ensure that the girls will be equipped with the tools and skills that they need to succeed in their lives.

At this point, I am working on getting the right people on board for the project.

Can you tell me more about the community where you want to set up this program?

At this point, I am not sure where the safe house will be constructed as we are still in the process of getting the funding and the right people to work with us. My community is situated near a major hub for human trafficking. In terms of referrals for beneficiaries that could benefit from this residential program, I have already been contacted by investigation agencies in the past asking whether the program is functional. The referrals will mostly come from the police and social services. In addition, I am well-connected on social media which is a great opportunity to connect with advocates for human trafficking and ask for referrals for girls who may require support or could benefit from our program.

One thing that I want to make sure of is that the girls have a house parent who is there with them 24x7. We want to make it different from the programs where house parents work in shifts and are replaced by another individual for the remnant of the day. In addition, I want to ensure that there are two residential interns - one being a survivor of trafficking - who can mentor the girls. These one-to-one interactions will create a space for the girls to open up.

Also, I think it's very important to teach the girls financial management through our program. In the past, they may not have had access to their own money. Now, I want them to be empowered with that knowledge.

What inspires you to continue your work in empowerment?

It's hard to say. God keeps me in this position for some reason. Every once in a while, he continues to inspire me.

Also, sometimes I come across some news or posts on social media that makes me think that there is a need for people to step in to change the situation.

What does the term empowerment mean to you?

Empowerment means giving yourself the power to do what you need to do - whether it is helping the girls get justice or to standing up for your own self.

How did you come across Survivor Alliance and how does it fit into your goals?

I am a part of the National Survivor Network. I got involved in it through the people that formulated the alliance. The kind of work that I am engaged in can be stressful and challenging. It helps to have the extra support from Survivor Alliance. It will keep me going and be like my cheerleader through challenges.

What is your advice for other leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

We can't do this alone.

We need more and more people involved so that we can make sure we cover as many beneficiaries as possible. No one person can do it alone.

What do you do in the time outside your work in empowerment?

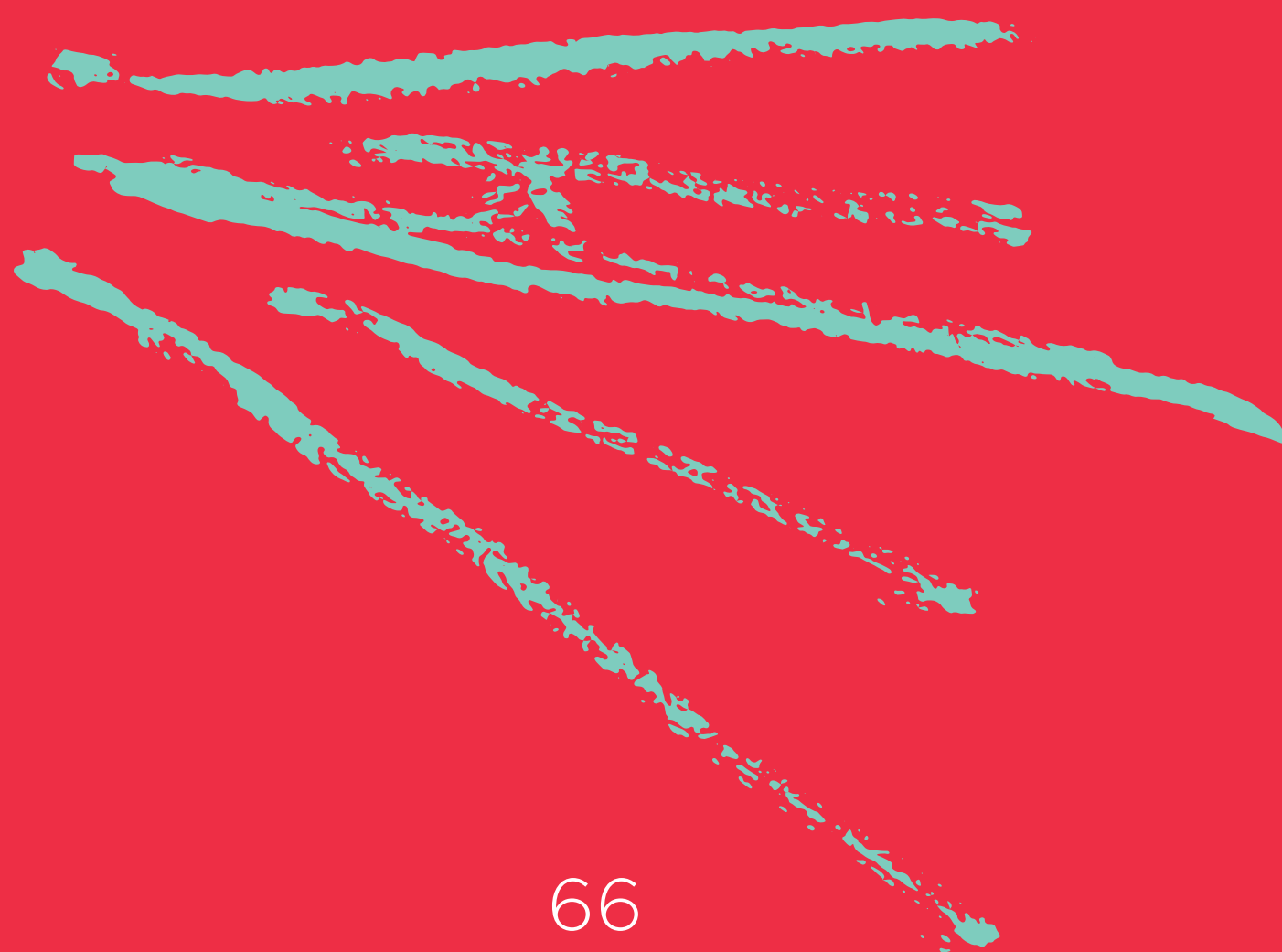
I have an African parrot called Rio - which is like having a toddler in my house.

I also do gardening, and I am into Bonsai. It can be quite interesting!

***bird whistling* I can hear your bird!**

Yes, I am surprised he didn't speak up before this (laughs). When they came out with a sequel to the first "Rio" movie, he heard his name on the television and actually had a look on his face like "how do they know me?"

He makes me laugh uncontrollably sometimes.



B

B is an emergent leader and speaker. B is currently a fellow at the Survivor Alliance.

Thank you for speaking with us. Could you tell us about your work with your community?

I am a member of the Survivor Alliance, and I am now starting the training at the Fellowship. I am currently working on a few topics.

What inspires you the most in your work?

I want to help myself by helping others. With what we have been through, we know how hard it has been for every survivor out there.

I want to be of help to my community - to the survivors in my community - by running a workshop in the future or something else. It depends on how the future comes really. I just want to be there and inspire people - be there for survivors.



What does empowerment mean to you?

Empowerment means to be able to wake up in the morning, talk with others and try and encourage them, and give them the hope that good things are coming- that it is not the end of the world, even though we have been through such things.

Could you tell us about a time when you found your work personally rewarding?

I was at a conference in Nottingham last year. Another member and I spoke at the panel about our lives as asylum seekers and as survivors, and what are the stereotypes that we face in our daily lives - having been through sexual abuse and exploitation. As Survivor Alliance members, we were there together and spoke. The audience was very large - about 500 people or so.

What is your advice for leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

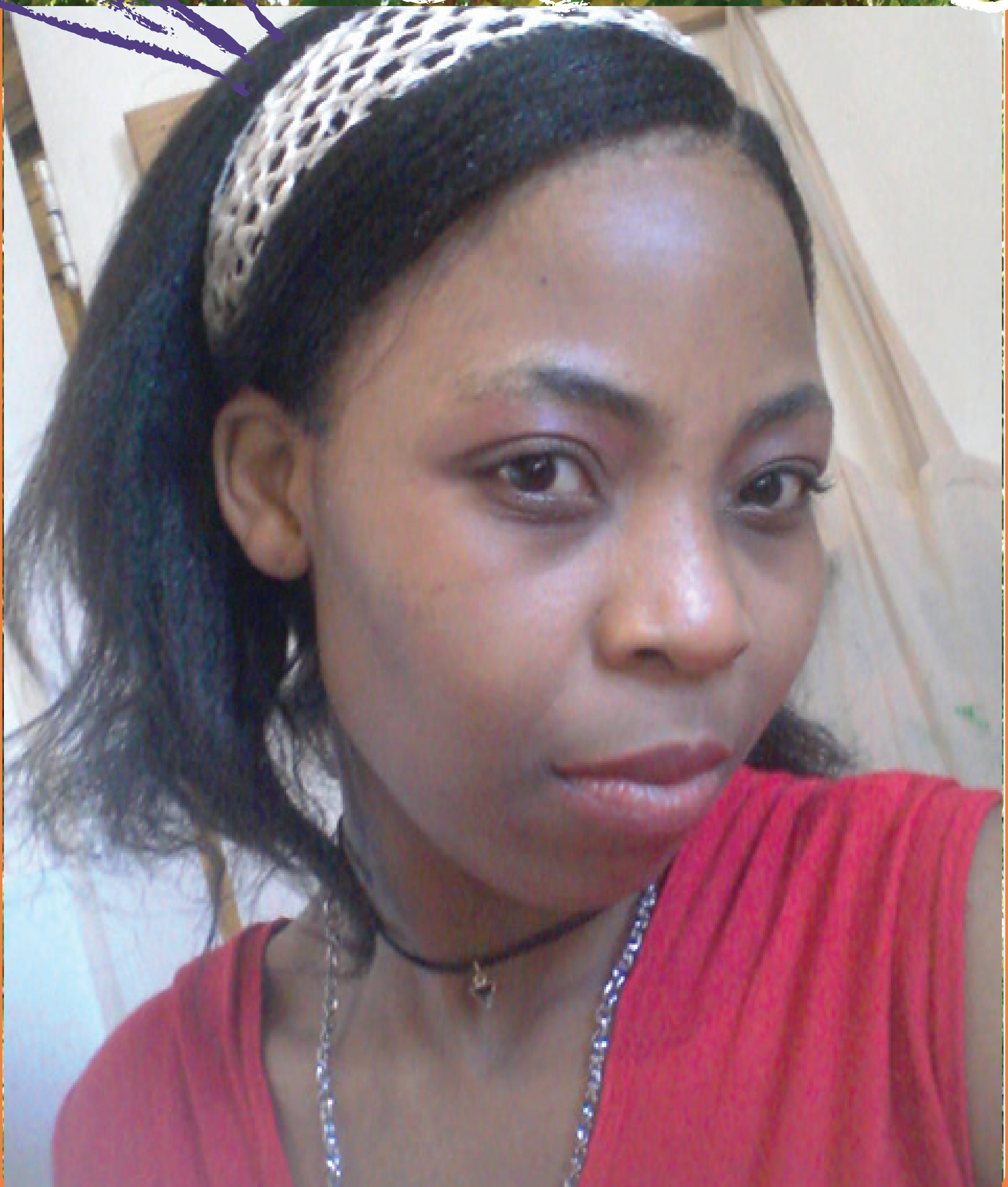
Keep survivors more close, and work more closely with them. Sometimes, we have lost our confidence, and we just think we cannot do something when we actually can. We just need more confidence in ourselves, and that is really hard to achieve by ourselves.

Can you tell us about how you were introduced to the Survivor Alliance?

I did not know about the Survivor Alliance earlier. I first heard about it through my tutors in college. We went to Nottingham and met with Minh, and she explained to us about what the Survivor Alliance is and does. Then, I started attending the meetings that they were running in Bradford and Nottingham, and it was really good. Bringing survivors together and having a place and people around where they can be heard and share their thoughts and experiences. It was really great and helpful. People fear to tell the truth, because they fear not being believed, and, so, this is needed.



Kristen



Survivor Alliance recently spoke with Kristen Johannes, a leader and advocate based in Leeds, United Kingdom. Kristen's work focuses on networking with law enforcement, service providers, and Members of Parliament (MPs) and advocating for the rights of survivors of modern slavery.

Kristen, could you tell us about your work with the community?

I have been contacting the police and MPs here to ask about what they are doing to ensure that modern slavery does not exist in the coming years.

This September, I was in touch with the MP in my area, and we discussed this. I asked him questions about the policies and laws. Although he did not seem to know much about modern slavery, he said this was because he did not work directly with survivors. At the same time, he agreed with the points that I had made. Also, he expressed his opinions about the government and how they see foreigners, both survivors of modern slavery as well as asylum seekers. He spoke about why he thought the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the asylum process took much longer than the given timeframe.

I went on to ask him about legalised prostitution in the area. The reason behind this was to find out how they are ensuring that none of the sex workers here is a victim of sex trafficking. He told me about a project that supposedly works with sex workers, that I am yet to contact. Towards the end of our conversation, I gave him an assignment that I am hoping he will complete.

Recently, I also got in touch with Safer Leeds as I heard that they provide support to survivors post a positive CG decision from the NRM. However, when I spoke with them, they said that they do not work directly with survivors and cannot provide me with the information that I need.

What inspires you the most in your work?

I am a victim myself. I do know the pain of someone having to go through something so painful, and when no one believes them. Many people in society do not know anything about modern slavery and trafficking. I believe that the more people know, the less it would be in society. It would be easier to eliminate it.

What is your advice for survivor leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

My advice to them is to keep going. They should not lose hope in this. It is not an easy thing. Already, I would say that they are strong because it takes courage for someone to say that, 'you know what, I want to leave this.' So wherever they are, they just need to keep going until it gets better.

As survivors, we have to be there for each other because we are a family; we are brothers and sisters. If opportunities come, we have to let others know. If we know other survivors, we can also invite them to the Survivor Alliance if they are interested.

Can you tell us about how you were introduced to the Survivor Alliance?

I was introduced to the Survivor Alliance by my previous support worker.

So far, I think they have really helped develop my confidence. Before, I could say that I wanted to apply for a job, but I didn't know where to start. The more I got involved in the work, the more my confidence grew, and the more my brain started to open up. All this time it has been cooped. It is starting to show that now I am alive and living.

Ashante



We spoke with Ashante Taylorcox from New Jersey. Ashante is a mental health clinician and the founder of You Are More Than (YAMT) - a survivor-led nonprofit organization.

Hi! Could you tell us about yourself and your work with the community?

My name is Ashante. To get people to remember how to say it is 'Ashante' like 'Beyoncé.' I am a clinician in New Jersey. I work with a lot of trauma survivors and, outside of the work that I do at the private practice, I run a survivor-led nonprofit organisation called You Are More Than or YAMT. Our mission is to plant seeds of emotional wellness, educational growth and pathways to financial freedom for adult survivors of exploitation and trafficking. As a Queer, African-American survivor, one of the biggest focuses of YAMT is creating a model of support that uplifts folx within the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ survivor communities.

We recently started this July and one of our main goals this year is to shift the narrative in the field of mental health for survivors. We do this by connecting survivors to trauma informed providers in the community that are trained and have experience serving our community and who can provide free therapy. There is not a lot of focus on supporting survivors as they hit the 18 mark and I'd like to change that.

I have always been passionate about giving back to my community and challenging the way that people see things.

What inspires you the most in your work?

I became a therapist because of one of my therapists. Like I wouldn't have been able to function in the world without her. I have known her since I was 20. She came back into my life, and I came back into hers. I see the progression from when I was 20 years old and understanding my trauma to today. I am 28 now, and my therapist just looks at me, and she is like, 'Ashante, you've come so far.' I am like, 'Yes!'

They [my therapists] are like my chosen family. To be able to see the way that my work, specifically in the mental health field, has helped people transform their lives has been transformative for me. It keeps me inspired and keeps me going. There are some days when I think, 'This is too hard.' Other days, it's like, 'Wow! I have watched this person grow from struggling every day to being able to take care of their kids, thrive and be wonderful.'

I don't believe that because I went through bad stuff or the people that I work with went through it, that life is not worth it or things have to be hard all the time. I have this mindset where I am like, 'Hey, how can I take this and change it into something that fits my needs or would uplift me and make me a better person.'

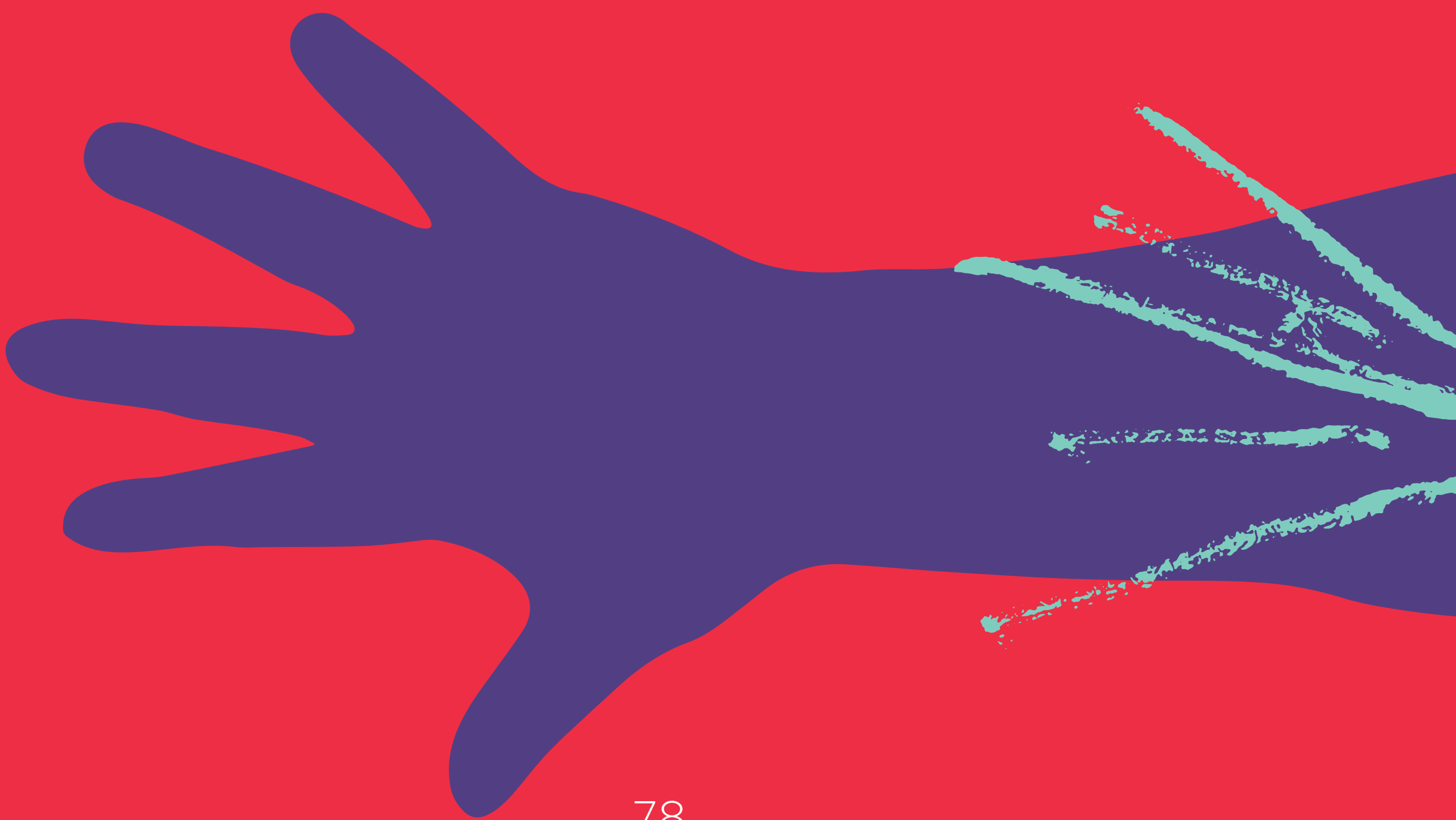
Trauma sucks, and we don't deserve it. At the same time, my life changed through my experiences and because of the people that supported me along the way. I want to do the same thing for other people. The best way that I know how to do that is by having this nonprofit and supporting people in this way.

Also, people think therapists make a lot of money, and maybe some do. But for me, you can come to me for free every day, and I would not care because I just want to help people.

What is your advice for other leaders on their journey to empower their communities?

Do not give up. A lot of people have told me that I am too ambitious or too passionate about creating a change. They say: 'It's going to be the same. It's going to be like this forever. There is nothing that you can do to change it. You're just wasting time.' But I say, 'No, I am not.' I can be passionate every single day, and I want to stay in that space. Just because you have a fear about me accomplishing my goals or helping people in a way that you didn't think about doesn't mean that I have to have that fear too. **So, do not give in to what other people think we can't do.**

I had an employer who didn't see my potential and would think, because I am young and haven't been here for five million years, my experience in working with my community and working with people who look like me is very minimal. That I can't accomplish things because I don't know anything about the world. That is not true. People will see that we've been through bad things, and they'll think that we will be in this bad space forever. But no, you can do whatever you put your mind to and whatever you believe in, as long as you believe in yourself. Not a lot of people will believe in you. Not a lot of people will have the faith that things will work out. But, as long as you have that faith and are able to say, 'Hey, I am thinking of this, or I am dreaming of this,' then that dream can come true. In short, do not give up and do not let other people try to limit you from doing what you want because they feel like you deserve to be in this box. You deserve to create your box. Make your own! We'll all have unique boxes, and that's okay.



Also, while some people say that they want to uplift survivors' voices and bring them to the table, YAMT is like, 'I want to teach other survivors how to build their own tables.' We are more than just speakers of our trauma narratives. We are more than just this story that you're like, 'Hey, let me make money off of you.' I may not be a carpenter, but we will learn together, and I will teach you how to make your own table. We need opportunities to lead rather than follow. We are not followers, and we are leading and doing great things.

Ashante, can you tell us about how you were introduced to the Survivor Alliance?

Minh is my chosen family, so that is how I was introduced to Survivor Alliance.

When I started my job a year ago, I felt like I didn't belong. I felt like there was something more or different that I should be doing. My nonprofit has always been a part of my long-term goals. However, as a clinician, I did not know what that would look like.

I noticed that Survivor Alliance focuses on helping survivors become more educated as a survivor leader, connect with other survivors around the world who are in leadership positions and are doing good work in communities and feel uplifted as leaders rather than isolated. They give us opportunities to build our tables and to see what is out there and how we can move ourselves forward. Where I live in New Jersey, there are supposedly only two people that are doing survivor leadership work. I know that is not true. There are a lot of us. It's just that we have not come out to say, 'We are here.'

Our overall goal at YAMT is to uplift survivors but also teach them how to uplift themselves.

We all have our own experiences, our narratives and paths that we want to take in life and sometimes we need a helping hand in the beginning. Then as we get the hang of it, we want to go out and thrive on our own.

You are More Than Inc. programs have not launched yet (***our goal is January 2021***) but if you'd like to learn more about our services, please check us out at www.yamt.org or email me at ashante@yamt.orgz