



10-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Honoring a Decade of Service, Advocacy, and Survivor Empowerment



A Survivor Reflection



A Story of Hope, Healing, and a New Future

There was a time when I couldn't imagine the life I have today.

When I first began working with the SAFE Center, I didn't even realize that I was a victim of human trafficking. I knew something wasn't right, but I didn't have the understanding or the words to describe what I had experienced. Working with the SAFE Center changed that.

The SAFE Center helped me recognize what had happened to me, guided me through the immigration process, and treated me with compassion, dignity, and respect during one of the most difficult times in my life. Their support gave me hope and became the foundation for rebuilding my life.

Because of the SAFE Center's support, I was able to accomplish goals that once felt impossible. I graduated from college with honors, was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, received academic scholarships and awards, and eventually became a licensed real estate agent.

For a long time, I wondered how I could ever truly thank the SAFE Center. Eventually, I realized that the best way to express my gratitude was by paying their kindness forward. Every opportunity I have to help someone else is my way of saying "thank you." I hope that by sharing my story, others will know that healing is possible and that, with the right support, it is possible to build a future filled with hope and purpose."

Cover Photo: University of Maryland, College Park students write notes of hope for the SAFE Center's clients on Maryland Day.

Note: Names have been changed throughout this report to protect the identity of our clients.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

A Message From Our Founder and CEO

SINCE OUR FOUNDING TEN YEARS AGO, the extraordinary and compassionate SAFE Center team has made a profound difference in the lives of hundreds of human trafficking survivors in the Washington, DC - Baltimore region. The strength and resilience of the clients we serve inspire and motivate us every day. This life-saving work would not be possible without our generous donors, as well as our university, community, and business partners. Your support and partnership has never been more important.

Over the past decade, the SAFE Center has served more than 850 human trafficking survivors and their family members. We provide comprehensive, survivor-centered services, including legal advocacy, crisis intervention and social services, mental health care, basic medical and dental care, and economic empowerment. Our multidisciplinary team brings these services together under one roof, allowing us to respond to survivors' most urgent needs while building a coordinated path toward longer-term stability and independence.

We have helped drive systemic change across Maryland through statewide prevention initiatives and policy advocacy informed by our work with survivors. In partnership with the Maryland Hospital Association, we developed guidelines for medical professionals to more effectively treat trafficking victims, which have been adopted by all 46 member hospitals statewide as well as put into practice at the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center. Through our tailored youth services and local school programs, we help young people recognize risks and reduce vulnerability to trafficking.

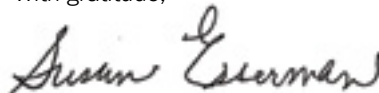
We have drawn on the clinical and intellectual expertise of thirteen schools at the University of Maryland, College Park and Baltimore campuses to enhance our services and programs. In partnership with the School of Nursing, for example, we created Healing Pathways, an innovative workforce development program that prepares survivors for

meaningful careers in healthcare while helping address our region's healthcare workforce shortage. In addition, over 200 students have interned at the SAFE Center, advancing our commitment to prepare the next generation of professionals to combat trafficking.

As we take pride in what we have built together, we also recognize the challenges facing the anti-trafficking field today. Current federal actions threaten to undermine the strides made since the passage of the visionary Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000. Federal grants for critical victim services are being terminated, restricted, and delayed, jeopardizing the stability of programs that survivors rely on. As a result, the SAFE Center faces unprecedented financial challenges at a time when survivors' needs are growing more complex. We are determined to meet this challenge, but the financial support of new as well as longstanding partners is vital.

As we look toward the next decade, we invite you to join us in expanding lifesaving services, strengthening prevention efforts, advancing research and policy, and ensuring survivor voices continue to guide everything we do. Together, we can build on the progress of the past ten years and create a future in which every survivor has the opportunity to heal and reclaim their life.

With gratitude,



Susan Esserman
Founder and CEO



“The strength and resilience of the clients we serve inspire and motivate us every day.”

10 YEARS OF Impact

2016

- Joined by university, federal, and state leaders and the anti-trafficking community, the SAFE Center announces its opening in 2016.



2017

- Receives first federal grant to enhance collaboration among Prince George's County Human Trafficking Task Force partners to support services for survivors, investigations, and prosecutions of traffickers.

2018

- Susan Esserman and Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett join Maryland Governor Larry Hogan at a press conference on human trafficking.

2019

- Successfully advocates for Maryland laws that criminalize labor trafficking, establish specialized services for youth and young adult survivors, and strengthen protections for survivors.
- Empowers SAFE Center survivor to testify on legislation in front of the Maryland General Assembly.

2020

- Convenes Maryland Labor Trafficking Symposium with government, law enforcement, and community partners to strengthen Maryland's response to labor trafficking.
- Maryland Hospital Association adopts the SAFE Center's guidelines for healthcare providers, leading all 46 member hospitals to establish a standardized response to human trafficking.



2021

- Introduces human trafficking prevention programming for students, parents, and educators in Prince George's County and Montgomery County schools, reaching over 300 students in its first year.
- Pilots a job training program developed by Marriott International and the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery to prepare human trafficking survivors for careers in the hospitality industry.
- Launches the First Step into Employment Internship Program.



2022

- Convenes national and international experts to advance dialogue on emerging issues in the fight against human trafficking.
- Receives federal grant to put into practice the SAFE Center's guidelines for healthcare providers at the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center.

2023

- Selected by the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation to lead the national rollout of a hospitality career training program, which has since trained 663 survivors.

2024

- Leads first annual Girls Leadership Retreat to help students build awareness and to reduce vulnerability to human trafficking.
- Establishes a Survivor Engagement Program to foster leadership, connection, and survivor community.
- Launches the Healing Pathways healthcare job training initiative in partnership with the University of Maryland School of Nursing.



2025

- Conducts Maryland's first statewide survey on the crime of labor trafficking.

2026

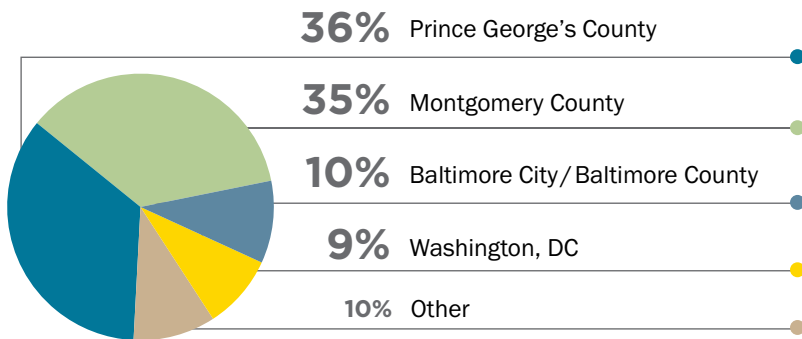
- Spearheads, with Secretary of State Susan Lee, a meeting headlined by Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller at which state leaders committed to step up efforts to combat human trafficking.
- With support from Senators Van Hollen and Alsobrooks and Congressman Steny Hoyer, receives Congressionally Directed Spending award to strengthen our data analysis capabilities to better serve survivors and track human trafficking trends.



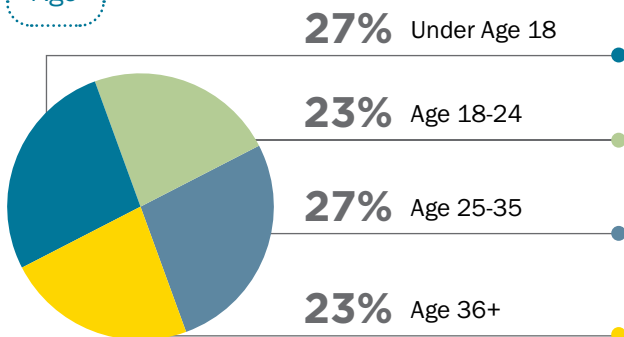
OUR IMPACT

By the Numbers

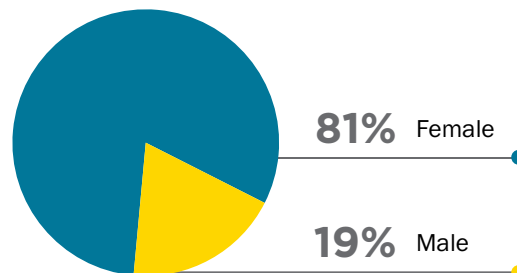
Clients by County of Residence



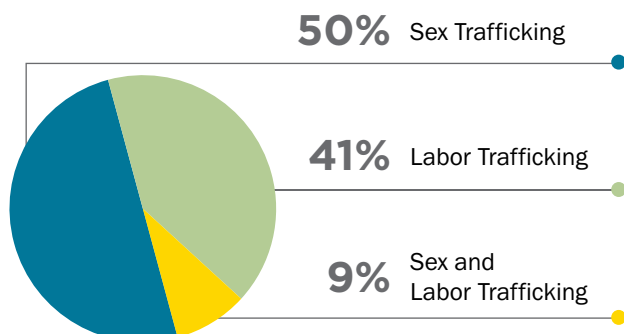
Age



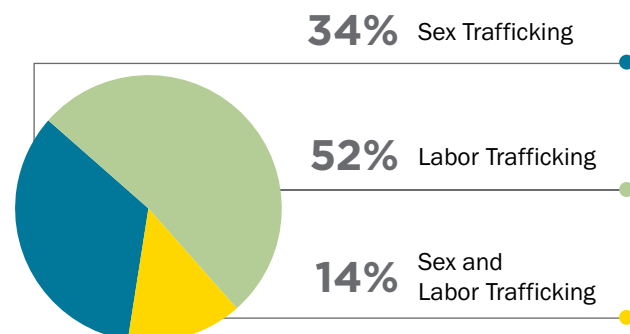
Gender



Type of Trafficking (2016-2026)



Type of Trafficking (2025)



**All statistics reflect cumulative services 2016-2026 unless otherwise noted.*

850+

Human trafficking survivors and their family members served by the SAFE Center in the last decade

SOCIAL SERVICES

1,154

Crisis interventions provided through Social Services

935

Shelter/housing services provided for survivors

LEGAL SERVICES

311

Humanitarian immigration applications filed

147

T Visas filed with the help of our Legal Services team

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

663

Survivors who completed hospitality career readiness and job training through our programs and partnerships

PREVENTION

22,489

Individuals trained on signs of exploitation and human trafficking risk factors

6,283

Of the individuals trained were youth participants in middle schools and high schools in Prince George's County and Montgomery County

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

202

Student interns contributed to the SAFE Center's mission

13

University of Maryland, College Park and University of Maryland, Baltimore schools collaborated with the SAFE Center

HEALTHCARE SUPPORT

46

Maryland hospitals adopted our guidelines for medical professionals to more effectively treat human trafficking survivors

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

2,589

Individual therapy sessions provided

From Crisis to Stability

Social Services

OUR SOCIAL SERVICES TEAM walks alongside survivors at every stage of their journey—from moments of crisis through long-term healing—helping them overcome barriers and access the resources they need to thrive. We work with each client to identify and prioritize the goals that matter most to them as they build safety, stability, and well-being.

When survivors exit human trafficking situations, compassionate and timely intervention is life changing. Our social services team develops safety plans, meets immediate needs, and ensures that survivors have a trauma-informed advocate by their side from the very beginning.

Meeting survivors' basic needs has always been an essential part of promoting long-term stability. In addition to crisis intervention, we help clients recover vital documents, gain access to public benefits, and enroll in school. We also accompany them to court hearings, law enforcement interviews, school meetings, and medical appointments.

Housing remains one of the greatest challenges facing many survivors. We assist clients with emergency housing through local shelters and Marriott International's HotelHelp room donations program. We also help clients identify safe and affordable long-term housing options, understand their rights as tenants, and navigate federal housing programs.

SECURING Independence

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Amy worked with our multidisciplinary team to receive crisis intervention, mental health, legal, and housing services and participated in our workforce training and survivor engagement programs.

With encouragement and assistance from our staff, Amy applied for and was selected as a consultant at a nonprofit organization—an achievement that represents far more than a new job.

Photo: The SAFE Center's social services team organizes a Thanksgiving community celebration for clients.



Supporting Healing and Hope

Clinical Mental Health Services

EVERY SURVIVOR'S healing journey is unique. The SAFE Center's clinical mental health team supports survivors as they navigate the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of trauma. We prioritize each survivor's autonomy, dignity, and safety by ensuring that clinical services are responsive to their individual goals.

Our clinicians provide evidence-based services tailored to each survivor's unique needs, using approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Motivational Interviewing. Care begins with a comprehensive mental health assessment and can include mental health crisis intervention, safety planning, and individual therapy. When additional support is needed, we connect survivors with specialized providers, including psychiatrists, family counselors, and substance use specialists.

“

The SAFE Center supported me during one of the hardest times in my life. Having a therapist who listens, understands, and genuinely cares has helped me process what happened and begin to heal. I'm thankful for the support and guidance I've received.”

— SAFE CENTER CLIENT

Photo: Youth clients participate in the SAFE Center's after-school program to create vision boards of their hopes for the future.



Advancing Justice Through Legal Advocacy

Legal Services

TEN YEARS AGO, the SAFE Center set out to ensure that survivors could access justice regardless of the complexity of their legal circumstances. Today, our legal advocacy continues to open doors to safety, stability, and new beginnings while helping shape efforts to combat human trafficking.

The SAFE Center provides comprehensive legal immigration services for survivors of human trafficking, including T and U nonimmigrant status petitions, asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, VAWA self-petitions, and Continued Presence applications. Our team has particular expertise representing children and survivors of labor trafficking, as well as individuals in complex removal proceedings. The majority of our legal cases involve labor trafficking, an area where we have deep, specialized experience.

Our reach goes well beyond the clients we work with directly. We have built a strong network of community partners and pro bono and low bono attorneys, so that together we can meet survivors' needs more fully than any one organization could alone.

At the core of this work is a rights-based approach. When people understand their rights, they are better equipped to avoid human trafficking, exit unsafe situations, and defend their rights fully. We bring this same approach to the trainings we lead locally and nationally, sharing what we have learned with advocates and attorneys across the field.

Justice does not look the same for every survivor. For some, it is immigration status. For others, it is safety, reunification with family, or simply reclaiming their life. Whatever justice looks like to them, we help survivors pursue it on their own terms.

Photo: Allison Norris, Director of Legal Immigration Services, briefs the Maryland Governor's Office Immigrant Rights Protection Task Force on barriers survivors face in reporting human trafficking and accessing services.

BUILDING Long-Term Security

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Forced to work up to eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, Laura was isolated from the outside world, denied control over her earnings, and threatened with deportation. Our legal team assisted her in reporting the crime of human trafficking and pursuing immigration relief.

Today, she is on the path to obtaining permanent residency—a testament to how skilled legal advocacy can help transform survival into long-term economic security.



Staff Spotlight

Jannina Santana, SAFE Center Paralegal

SINCE JOINING THE SAFE CENTER IN 2020, our paralegal Jannina Santana has been a lifeline for survivors of human trafficking navigating a legal system that can feel completely overwhelming. As the bridge between attorney and client, she breaks down confusing legal processes into something survivors can actually understand, making sure their voices are heard every step of the way. She is often the first call when a survivor is scared, stressed, or just needs someone to listen, and she meets every client with the patience and empathy that build real trust.

Her care extends well beyond the job description: she has shown up with formula and diapers for a client who was a new mother, driven to the hospital when a client's baby fell ill, and brought balloons and flowers to the airport to celebrate family reunifications, all on her own time and her own initiative.

"When I see the immigration approval notices, my heart is so happy," she says, and it's that same joy she brings to watching clients grow and rebuild their lives.

For our survivors, Jannina is so much more than a paralegal. She is a constant reminder that they are not alone. Without question, she is the heart of our legal team.



Photo Above: Jannina Santana, SAFE Center Paralegal

Photo Below: Students and families connect with the SAFE Center's legal team at a resource fair in Montgomery County, Maryland.



Empowering Survivors Through Education and Employment

Economic Empowerment

HUMAN TRAFFICKING can severely disrupt education, employment, and financial security. The SAFE Center's economic empowerment program provides career readiness and skills training, education support, and job assistance services to help survivors secure stable jobs and financial independence which are both essential for a true escape from human trafficking.

Partnerships That Open New Possibilities

Since our economic empowerment program launch, employer partnerships have moved our work beyond job preparation to creating opportunities for hands-on work experience and employment. Our First Step into Employment initiative gives clients an opportunity to build experience and resumes so they can more easily enter the workforce.

National Hospitality Career Initiative

The SAFE Center provides career readiness and job skills training to prepare survivors for careers in the hospitality industry. Following our successful implementation of a pilot job readiness training curriculum developed by Marriott International, survivor leaders, and field experts, the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation selected us for a grant to lead the program's national rollout.

DEVELOPING Workplace Skills

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Amelia's internship through our First Step into Employment program led to employment as a business analyst at a local tech company. She credited her supportive, flexible mentors with helping her develop time management and digital literacy skills to succeed in the workplace.

The experience boosted her confidence and ability to advocate for herself and her two children.

Photo: The SAFE Center participated in a panel discussion at Marriott International's headquarters on hospitality job training for survivors.

Photo Credit: Vinny Desiderioscioli, Marriott International



Building Community

Survivor Engagement

THE SAFE CENTER promotes healing by providing both individualized services for survivors and opportunities for survivors to build meaningful connections in a group setting.

We lead a wide range of programs where survivors can develop a sense of belonging, build positive relationships, and strengthen essential life skills. Events include healthy relationship workshops, mental health awareness programs, student wellness activities, and tax preparation assistance offered in partnership with TerpTax at the University of Maryland, College Park. Each year, this programming evolves in response to participant feedback and emerging needs.

Celebrating Survivor Achievements

Last year, the SAFE Center held its first Graduation Celebration, where survivors, their families, and our staff honored client achievements including high school graduation, new employment, volunteer service, and completion of job skills trainings. For many participants, this was the first time their accomplishments had been publicly recognized, making it an affirmation of both their resilience and progress.

BUILDING Connection and Belonging

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Sarah came to the SAFE Center during a moment of crisis and found compassion, encouragement, and community through our Survivor Engagement program. As she participated in life skills trainings, mental health workshops, and self-defense classes, she built confidence and meaningful relationships.

Sarah's journey reflects the power of community and connection in helping survivors heal, grow, and thrive.



Photo: Karina Velasco, Manager of Survivor Engagement Programs, celebrates survivors' graduation from hospitality job training and high school, as well as their new employment and volunteer opportunities.

A DECADE OF Changing Systems

Reducing Vulnerability to Exploitation

HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION is one of the SAFE Center's defining strengths. Our prevention initiatives reach healthcare providers, schools, and local communities across the Washington, DC-Baltimore region.

At both the state and county levels, we participate in task forces to identify and coordinate services for survivors, shape anti-trafficking policy, and hold traffickers accountable. Drawing on our extensive work with labor trafficking survivors, we established state and countywide labor trafficking committees to increase awareness and strengthen the broader community response.

In Prince George's and Montgomery counties, we provide prevention workshops for students, parents, and school staff focused on healthy relationships, online safety, and identifying signs of exploitation. We offer My Life My Choice, an evidence-based prevention curriculum that helps high school girls build healthy boundaries, strengthen decision-making skills, and recognize tactics used by traffickers. For the past three years,

the SAFE Center has led an annual Girls Leadership Retreat, reaching nearly 200 adolescent girls. The retreat provides a supportive environment where participants develop leadership skills, learn strategies to safeguard their well-being, and reduce the risk of trafficking.

Prevention also includes investing in the next generation of anti-trafficking leaders, making student education and professional training core to our mission. More than two hundred students have interned with the SAFE Center, and several now work in anti-trafficking and related fields.

Photo Left: University of Maryland, College Park communication students plan a campus-wide program to raise awareness and funds for the SAFE Center.

Photo Right: Tanejah Jones, Senior Manager of Prevention Programs at the SAFE Center, welcomes students to the first annual Girls Leadership Retreat in College Park in 2024.





Survivor leader Shamere McKenzie educates students about grooming tactics and strategies to prevent human trafficking at the SAFE Center's 2026 Girls Leadership Retreat.



A Path Out of Human Trafficking for Youth and Young Adults

Youth Services

SINCE OUR FOUNDING, we have seen a significant need for specialized services for children, adolescents, and young adults who are survivors of human trafficking or at risk of human trafficking. With **50% of the SAFE Center's clients under age 25**, we have designed programs to meet their unique developmental, emotional, and educational needs.

Coordinating Local Support for Youth

For a number of years, the Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy has selected the SAFE Center to serve as the Regional Navigator for Montgomery County and Prince George's County. Through this program, child welfare agencies, law enforcement, educators, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations refer youth at risk of human trafficking and human trafficking survivors under age 25 to the SAFE Center for support. As the Regional Navigator, the SAFE Center helps identify youth at risk and survivors, delivers crisis response and long-term services, and leads efforts to prevent trafficking.

Strengthening Families and Support Systems

Our experience as a youth service provider has reinforced that lasting change often depends on strengthening the support systems around each child. As a result, we intentionally engage parents, caregivers, and other trusted adults in the healing process, creating opportunities to strengthen relationships, improve communication, and build environments where young people can heal and flourish.

In partnership with a local county health department, we led the Strengthening Families evidence-based training for parents and early adolescent youth. Our clients and their families explored stress management, resisting peer pressure, goal setting, and tools for effective communication among family members.

Photo: Young clients participate in a volunteer community art project during the SAFE Center's Spring Break Wellness Week.

RESTORING Trust

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Thirteen-year-old Carolina connected with the SAFE Center through our crisis intervention services after leaving home. Carolina and her family began meeting regularly with a SAFE Center case manager and participating in communication workshops, which helped them create safer ways to process emotions, understand one another's perspectives, and restore trust.

Over time, with support from the SAFE Center, Carolina began engaging more positively with her family and peers.



A Decade of Legislative Impact

Policy Initiatives

OVER THE PAST DECADE, the SAFE Center has worked at the federal, state, and local levels to strengthen laws, policies, and systems that protect survivors of human trafficking. In Maryland, the SAFE Center has helped to advance reforms, including legislation that criminalized labor trafficking, recognized sex trafficking as a crime against a person, and established the Regional Navigator Program to connect young survivors with coordinated, trauma-informed services and prevent exploitation. These reforms shifted Maryland's approach from one centered on criminalization toward one that recognizes human trafficking survivors as victims entitled to protection and support. More recently, the SAFE Center advocated for expanding Maryland's Safe Harbor protections and Regional Navigator Program to include child victims of labor trafficking.

In Prince George's County, the SAFE Center proposed and helped develop groundbreaking legislation using procurement laws to deter sex and labor trafficking. Prince George's County is the first county in the country to adopt such legislation. Together, these efforts reflect the SAFE Center's commitment to lasting systemic change.

We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with thoughtful advocates and legislators at the federal, state, and county levels.

Photo 1: Congressman Jamie Raskin recognizes Susan Esserman as a local hero of Maryland's 8th district.

Photo 2: Heidi Alvarez testifies before the Montgomery County Council on the presence of trafficking in the county.

Photo 3: SAFE Center participates in the signing of Maryland's Anti-Exploitation Act.



Engaging Healthcare Partners

Advancing Prevention

RECOGNIZING THAT HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS are often the first to encounter human trafficking survivors, the SAFE Center developed the SIRV (Serve, Identify, Respond, and eValuate) Model in partnership with the Maryland Hospital Association, forensic nurse examiners, and child abuse experts to guide trauma-informed care for survivors. This model outlines best practices to help Maryland's medical professionals identify and support survivors of human trafficking in hospitals. The model has since been adopted by all **46 Maryland Hospital Association member hospitals**.

Building on this foundation, the SAFE Center partnered with the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center to implement the SIRV Model across all hospital departments, train staff to recognize human trafficking indicators, streamline referrals to specialized services, and, in 2025, hire a survivor leader as the hospital's Human Trafficking Training and Services Coordinator.

In addition to our human trafficking prevention efforts, our healthcare partners enable us to extend our direct services, expanding access to care and economic opportunity for survivors. Through partnerships with the University of Maryland School

All of the Maryland Hospital Association member hospitals adopted the SAFE Center's guidelines for medical professionals to more effectively treat human trafficking survivors.

of Nursing Governor's Wellmobile Clinic and the University of Maryland School of Dentistry, survivors have access to basic medical care and affordable dental services. Staffed by nurse practitioners and bilingual outreach workers, the Wellmobile Clinic delivers primary and preventative care onsite at the SAFE Center's office.

Designed with the University of Maryland School of Nursing, the SAFE Center's Healing Pathways initiative empowers survivors to work in meaningful healthcare jobs while addressing the shortage of healthcare workers in our region. The program helps participants apply for and participate in training and education programs, connect with mentors, and obtain certifications and jobs in the medical field.



Photo: Every week, the University of Maryland School of Nursing Governor's Wellmobile provides basic medical services onsite at the SAFE Center.

Staff Spotlight

Q&A with Sophie Aron



Sophie Aron, Policy and Healthcare Strategist, is driving change at the SAFE Center. She has been at the SAFE Center since 2018, leading initiatives with local and statewide impact.

What was your path to the organization and what inspired you to pursue anti-trafficking work?

I always felt a pull to help people but never knew exactly what form that would take. When I started social work school, I thought I wanted to be a therapist. During my first-year field placement, I quickly realized therapy was not for me and made my way to the SAFE Center for a “macro-level” or systems-focused placement. I was so compelled by the work that when my placement ended, I found a way to stay. That was eight years ago, and I have been here ever since.

Can you briefly describe your role at the SAFE Center and how it has evolved?

I wear three hats: I advocate for and testify on state legislation in Annapolis, support grant writing, and manage our partnerships with Maryland hospitals, including the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center, where we have created a hospital-wide response to human trafficking. My role has evolved significantly, and I love working across policy, healthcare, and organizational strategy.

“We are a small but mighty organization, and the work always feels important.”

One of your major areas of focus has been strengthening healthcare responses to human trafficking. Can you tell us about that work?

Healthcare providers are often among the only people who see survivors while they are being trafficked. When providers know what to look for and how to respond, healthcare can be a critical opportunity to identify human trafficking and connect survivors to services. In 2019, the SAFE Center partnered with the Maryland Hospital Association, forensic nurses, and survivors to create the SIRV Model, which offers a framework for recognizing and responding to human trafficking in hospital settings. The work put human trafficking squarely on the radar of Maryland’s healthcare professionals. We had not done that previously.

As we celebrate the SAFE Center’s tenth anniversary, what are you most proud of, and what gives you hope for the future?

Two of the SAFE Center’s greatest strengths are centering survivors in everything we do and working at multiple levels at once. In one day, we may help a survivor navigate a crisis while working with legislators, hospitals, and community partners on policy change. This combination of direct services and systemic change honors survivors as whole people while changing the systems that affect their lives.

We are a small but mighty organization, and the work always feels important. I hope the next ten years are about going further upstream—strengthening systems that identify human trafficking early and addressing the conditions that make people vulnerable to exploitation. I also hope survivors continue to have a meaningful voice in shaping the policies and programs we build.

THE CORE OF OUR MISSION

Our Staff and the University

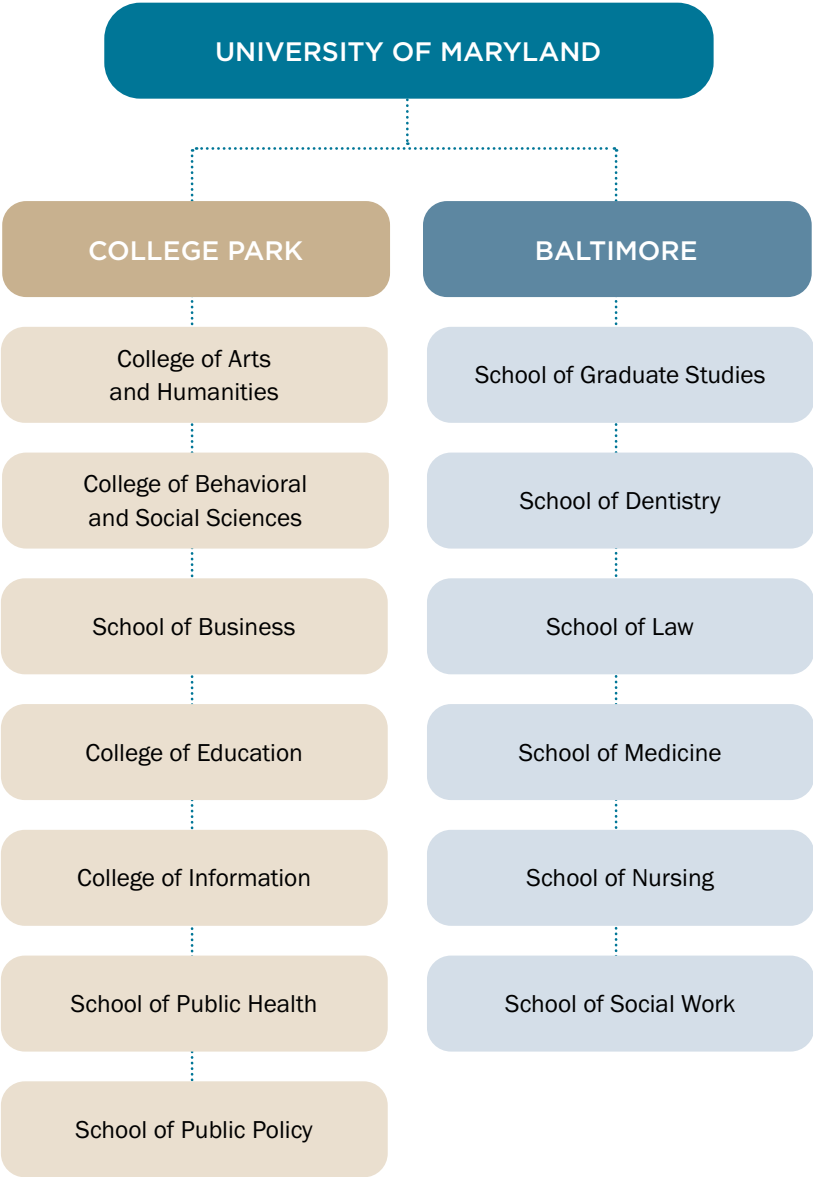
The SAFE Center’s first ten years would not have been possible without the leadership and commitment of our university partners and the dedication of our staff.

Strength Through Collaboration

As an initiative of MPower, the strategic partnership between the University of Maryland, College Park and the University of Maryland, Baltimore, we have drawn on the expertise of faculty, students, and staff from 13 schools across both campuses to strengthen our research and services.

We are deeply grateful to University of Maryland, Baltimore President Dr. Bruce Jarrell for his unwavering belief in our mission and model, and to former Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance and Chief Operating Officer of the University System of Maryland Joseph F. Vivona, who embraced the SAFE Center concept from the beginning and was instrumental in our founding.

We also thank the MPower Joint Steering Council and the late Adrienne Arthur for their commitment and the University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Graduate Studies for serving as our administrative home.



Collaboration with The Universities at Shady Grove

In 2026, The Universities at Shady Grove became a SAFE Center partner, providing space for our teams to serve Montgomery County residents closer to home and expanding access to our programs within the community.

The People Behind the Work

From direct services to policy advocacy and prevention, our staff have made a lasting difference in the lives of hundreds of survivors while helping advance systemic change. Our multidisciplinary team includes lawyers, social workers, mental health clinicians, workforce development experts, and housing and data specialists who work together toward our vision of empowering survivors.

We thank Majaella Ruden and Sophie Aron for their exceptional contributions in developing this report.



Photo Above: The Universities at Shady Grove Executive Director Dr. Anne Khademian, SAFE Center Founder and CEO Susan Esserman, and University of Maryland, Baltimore President Dr. Bruce Jarrell.

Photo Below: SAFE Center gathering to honor the dedication of our staff.



The Community Behind The Mission

Our Supporters and Partners

AS THE SAFE CENTER marks ten years of service, we express our sincere gratitude to the donors, partners, and collaborators who have supported our mission and made our vision a reality. Their generosity and commitment to our work have enabled the SAFE Center to grow, expand our services, and create new opportunities for human trafficking survivors.

Our longstanding corporate partners have provided training, internships, and job opportunities to help survivors pursue their goals and build greater economic independence. They also contribute their expertise, services, financial support, and in-kind donations to assist our clients.

Marriott International

Marriott International has been a key supporter of the SAFE Center's Economic Empowerment program. Marriott International selected the SAFE Center to pilot their Future in Training Curriculum, an innovative hospitality job training program that we have since rolled out nationwide. Marriott International's HotelHelp room donations program has also provided critical emergency housing support for survivors.

University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center

The SAFE Center partnered with the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center to strengthen the hospital's ability to identify and respond to human trafficking. Together we trained healthcare providers and staff across the hospital to recognize signs of human trafficking and provide compassionate, trauma-informed care. This work builds on the SAFE Center's collaboration with the Maryland Hospital Association to develop a statewide best-practice model for treating human trafficking survivors in healthcare settings.

Step toe LLP

Step toe LLP, the Washington, DC-based international law firm, has been a SAFE Center partner since our founding and at every stage of the Center's development. The Step toe team has provided financial support and pro bono legal assistance, securing humanitarian visas, assisting on policy issues, and working on civil litigation matters.

American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation

The American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation's No Room for Trafficking Survivor Fund has enabled the SAFE Center and our partners to train 663 survivors across the country on basic skills for hospitality jobs.

TISTA Science and Technology Corporation

To address the digital divide often experienced by survivors, TISTA Science and Technology Corporation provided education scholarships, internships, and jobs for survivors. TISTA has also donated laptops, food, and family essentials to our clients.

Together, our philanthropic, corporate, and community partners have made a lasting difference in the lives of survivors. We are eternally grateful for our generous donors who have sustained our work and enabled us to advance the fight against human trafficking. We invite you to join us going forward to build a future free from exploitation.

Help us shape the next decade.



umdsafecenter.org/donate/

University of Maryland

SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors

TEL 301-314-7233 (SAFE) EMAIL safecenter@umaryland.edu