

## ASSESSING THE THREAT

Survey Results

### CLIENT SAFETY

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The highest priority of shelter programs for victims of human trafficking should be to ensure the safety of their clients. There's a dramatized assumption, however, that traffickers are somehow "crouched in the bushes waiting to infiltrate the shelter and take the girls." Mass media contributes to the presumption that a trafficked person is in imminent and constant danger. One start-up shelter program had become so convinced that this must be true, it was persuaded to install an expensive video surveillance system in all rooms of its shelter facility.



No one wants to underestimate the importance of security, and we would never put clients at risk. What we do want to offer is an informed perspective on this type of threat, based on actual sheltering experience.

**At The Institute for Shelter Care, we aspire to provide existing and emerging shelter programs with accurate information and evidence-based guidance so they implement physical measures and policies that are the most effective.**



### INDUSTRY RESPONSE

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The Institute for Shelter Care conducted a short poll of open and actively serving shelter programs across the U.S. Three questions were posed:

1. How long has your agency been providing residential shelter care for survivors of trafficking/sexual exploitation?
2. In that span of time, how many times have you had a trafficker (or other threatening character) come onto your property in pursuit of a client?
3. If you have had such incident(s), was there some other measure in security that you think would have prevented the intrusion?



We received 42 responses from coast-to-coast from agencies serving adults and/or minors. The average length of time these respondents have been serving victims of human trafficking was 8 years and 1 month. The longest operating program was 21 years and the shortest was 3 months. Of the 42 responses:

8 agencies reported having had only a single incident.

4 agencies reported having had only two incidences.

0 agencies reported having more than two incidences.

30 agencies reported never having experienced an on-property intrusion by a trafficker or other threatening character.

It bears repeating: this datapoint should not lead us to conclude that such incidences never happen or that security should ever be lax. What we might interpret from this data is that either **this specific threat is not as prevalent as imagined, and/or shelters are doing a credible job of ensuring the protection of their clients from this type of threat.**

## SECURITY MEASURES

As we inquired about the security measures that have/have not contributed to client security, one-third of the agencies specifically mentioned that their client obtained access to a phone and contacted the individual who was the trespasser. Per our 2017 “PRACTICES” national survey of shelter agencies, 45% of shelter programs restrict access to personal cell phones and roughly half of the respondent agencies have a “black-out” period that restricts outside contact. One shelter detailed: “Our guests do not have smart phones (just flip phones which we provide) and restricted computer access (just for job searches and educational purposes).” A third also reported that having an undisclosed location, they felt, contributed to overall security of their clients. These practices may favorably contribute to the low incident of threatening persons on the shelter property. Other comments offered included:



- “We have a home monitoring system that will alarm and call police if a window or door is opened when the alarm is set. We have a camera system outside and in the common areas inside the house. We also have the driveway/parking lot area lit 24/7/365 and we’ve never had an incident.”
- “Most of our referrals come from outside of our state and we prefer that. When she’s been removed from her centers of exploitation, her security—and perception of safety—automatically increases. When she realizes that the threats she believed weren’t true, she gets so angry with herself!”
- “...the main thing to be mindful of is internet security and safety and creating firewalls etc. so that the participants don’t necessarily have open access to potential harmful or unsafe people.”



- “There is a rule in our handbook that states a resident will be denied service and moved to another program if “Staff determine you have been located, targeted, stalked or harassed at our location and your physical safety is compromised and/or remaining a resident compromises the safety of others.” This rarely happens, but it is another reason that we give to women to ensure they keep our location confidential.”
- “We have never had anyone crouching in the bushes trying to snatch up our kids. The reality is...girls will call their traffickers some way/somehow (running to a neighbor’s house, hacking our firewalls and reaching out on social media etc.). The traffickers will wait at the end of the driveway while the girl runs out of the house, and jumps into the car with him.”



- “We buzz everyone into our building and have a camera and intercom system at our front door gate that allows us to see and hear who we are buzzing in.”
- “We take security measures seriously in the sense that we never give out the location of the home, we don’t put it in writing, we have mail sent to a PO box about 30 min away from the home and we have everyone sign a confidentiality agreement... We don’t have extra security equipment (cameras, lights, fences etc.). And we’ve never had a problem!”
- “...the greatest threat is from the ladies themselves, in a weak moment sabotaging their own recovery.”

While more in-depth survey of the security measures and practices of these shelters warrants attention, we should be tempered in our assumptions about what truly impacts a survivor’s actual and perceived security.

This report is based on findings from a survey prepared by the Institute for Shelter Care. For questions or for more information about the findings, please contact Jeanne Allert at: [jallert@thesamaritanwomen.org](mailto:jallert@thesamaritanwomen.org)

