



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 13, 2020

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\$1.3 million in grants to serve survivors of human trafficking

Catholic Charities of Louisville's Bakhita Empowerment Initiative (BEI) has received \$1.3 million in two grants from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to sustain services and increase access to housing for survivors of human trafficking in Central Kentucky over the next three years.

The first grant for \$919,246 will be used to provide direct services to survivors, including emergency housing, language access, food, mental health care, medical care, legal services, case management, and other individual needs. The second grant for \$443,074 will provide six to 24 months of transitional housing to support survivors of trafficking as they work toward self-sufficiency. Funding also supports addressing human trafficking through training and technical assistance, outreach to high-risk populations, and increasing awareness of trafficking in Kentucky communities.

BEI is the only OVC-funded comprehensive service provider supporting survivors of labor or sex trafficking cases in Kentucky. BEI was established in 2008 to identify and support survivors of trafficking throughout the Commonwealth. Since then, BEI has provided direct services to more than 400 survivors of sex or labor trafficking, foreign born and domestic, adults and children.

BEI Director Marissa Castellanos said she has seen increased identification of trafficking cases in Kentucky over the past 13 years, resulting in the need for more services and support. "We must come alongside survivors as they face challenges in finding safe spaces to heal from their trauma while pursuing their goals and becoming self-sufficient," Castellanos said. "It's about empowering survivors as they make their own choices about their lives and providing resources that improve their health and well-being for the long term."

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The OVC is part of the U.S. Department of Justice and provides more funding than any other department for human trafficking, investing millions each year in programs like BEI, which first received funding from OVC in 2013, and again in 2017. Funding from OVC primarily provides direct support to survivors of human trafficking throughout Kentucky.

Both new OVC grants focus on BEI's work in Central Kentucky counties, including Anderson, Bath, Bourbon, Bullitt, Casey, Clark, Estill, Fayette, Franklin, Garrard, Harrison, Henry, Jackson, Jefferson, Jessamine, Lincoln, Madison, Marion, Menifee, Mercer, Montgomery, Nelson, Nicholas, Oldham, Owen, Powell, Rockcastle, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Washington, and Woodford. Catholic Charities has BEI offices in Louisville and Lexington.

BEI will offer in-house services and collaborate with community partners to address the individualized needs of trafficking survivors. Castellanos said she expects the focus on Central Kentucky to foster even greater interagency collaboration, improved coordinated community response, and increased access to services.

In addition to offering direct services to survivors of human trafficking, BEI also works to prevent trafficking by educating and empowering youth, using two evidence-informed curricula: I Am Building a Healthy Identity and My Life My Choice. In 2018, BEI hosted the first national Labor Trafficking Conference in Louisville and is planning the second for October 2021. BEI staff co-authored the "Guiding Principles for Agencies Serving Survivors of Human Trafficking" and works closely with the Bakhita advisory board, whose members are former program participants, to advise programming.

Catholic Charities also has an OVC Language Access grant to enhance access to services for crime victims who are non-English proficient, blind, deaf, or hard of hearing.

Catholic Charities of Louisville is the social services arm of the Archdiocese of Louisville and a member of Catholic Charities USA. Founded in 1939, Catholic Charities provides services to people in need, advocates for justice in social structures, and calls the entire church and others of good will to do the same.

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