



2020

# ANNUAL REPORT

ORGANIZATION FOR  
PROSTITUTION SURVIVORS



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# Executive Letter

2020 was a year of massive changes globally, and our adaptations have done the dual work of highlighting inequalities as well as giving space to creatively redefine paths forward. Many of us - and particularly the women we serve at OPS - have long known the devastating impact of economic injustices, health disparities, and state violence, and the ways they were exacerbated by the multiple pandemics of COVID-19, racism, and violence against women underscored the importance of community support and structural change.

OPS has continued to serve participants, remaining open for virtual and in-person advocacy services as well as groups. OPS operates as a reflection of the strength of those who consider it a home, and the resilience of OPS participants has guided our organization even more brightly through these challenges. Our education and policy work has continued as well, with the opportunity for remote conferences and hearings expanding those who can hear OPS' messaging and collaborate on our mission.

As we enter the second half of 2021, OPS has used the lessons of survival to heal the parts we need and rebuild those we've grown past. We have relied on the strength of our participants, the ingenuity of our brilliant staff, the shared labor of our coalitions, and the confidence of our supporters to continue our work to eradicate commercial sexual exploitation and repair from the harms of prostitution. We are doing so with an active understanding of the intersections of different oppressions and points of resilience, and an excitement to deepen our relationships with local, national, and world-wide partners in order to address this issue and provide for our participants holistically.

Words cannot fully express the honor I feel to have joined OPS as Executive Director during this transformative moment. As a survivor and committed activist, I am devoted to leading OPS with active collaboration from those both inside and buttressing the movement to end commercial sexual exploitation, and to following the lead of elders and burgeoning pathfinders as we construct a world that centers a just wellness. As OPS moves forward, the goal is to prioritize connections: strengthening our existing partnerships and those with parallel organizations with which we have yet to join in alliance. These relationships also require internal work to ensure operations and approach best meet the needs of our staff and our communities.

Below is a celebration of OPS' successes, an enthusiastic sketch of our plans, and a call for continued support from our volunteers, donors, and those eager to learn more about our organization.

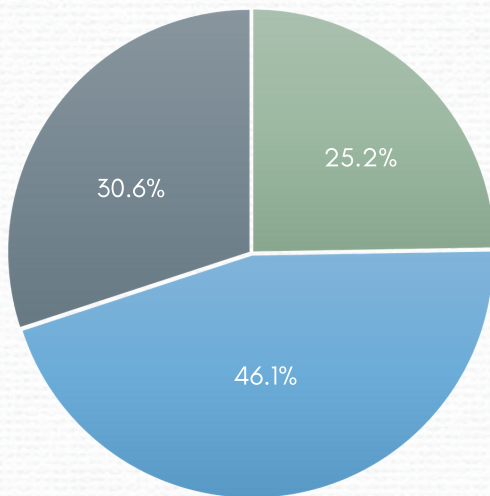
- Tori Adams, MPH, Ph.D  
Executive Director of OPS

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# WHO OPS SERVES

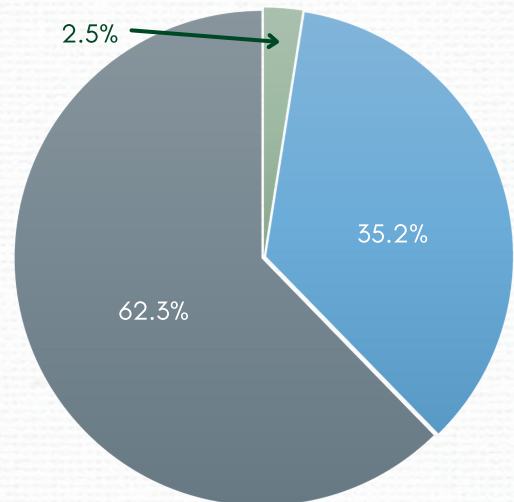
OPS has served 287 participants since 2014

Racial Demographics of Participants



■ Prefer not to say ■ Identify as BIPOC ■ Identify as white

Age at Time of Intake



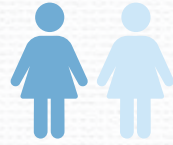
■ Unknown ■ Under 24 ■ 25 +

**46%**

Nearly half our intakes identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

# WHO OPS SERVES

Barriers to exit the sex trade are both complex and varied. Individuals face **psychological, physical, and environmental** factors that can be discouraging when trying to exit prostitution



At the time of intake, **1 in 2** participants experience some form of **mental illness**

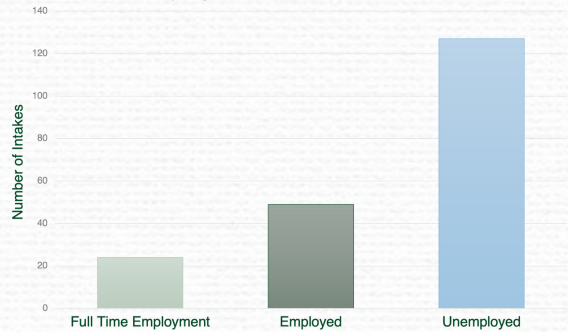
**54%**

54% of participants report having either a **developmental, mental, or physical** condition or disability



**One in two** participants experienced homelessness **at least once** in the three years before intake and **one third** of participants were unhoused at the **time of intake**

Employment at Time of Intake



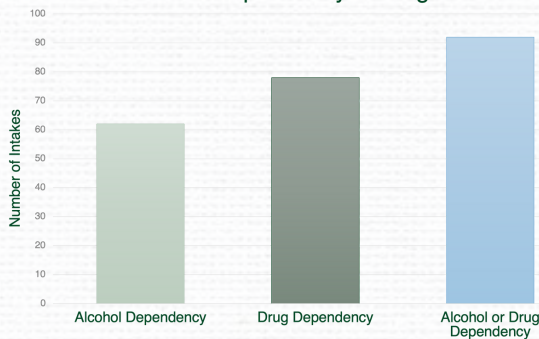
**Childhood abuse and/or sexual abuse** is common for individuals in the sex trafficking industry. This sexual victimization is often prevalent **before** entering the sex trade, but can happen during as well.



**Two out of three** participants have experienced intimate partner or domestic violence before connecting with OPS

Many believed that people **start** selling sex because they have a drug habit, but often the **substance addiction follows** commercial sexual exploitation.

Chemical Dependency Among Intakes



**Half** of OPS participants have had **at least one** interaction with the criminal justice system prior to intake



## THE OPS APPROACH

OPS participants come from various stages of exiting the sex trade, and therefore face a diverse range of barriers that prevent them from leaving the industry behind. Some need a community of people who have been through similar experiences, and others have more tangible needs. This includes help finding work or a place to live.

### Healing takes time and community

OPS supports survivors in their exit from prostitution if and when they are ready to do so. We offer services to individuals both in and out of the life - there is no judgment, only support. We honor survivors as the experts of their own experiences and support their unique strengths as individuals. We work alongside them via peer mentoring and empowerment-focused advocacy to identify needs and help them build a vision for their lives.

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### A test kitchen for life after "the life"

OPS provides a space for survivors to make mistakes. Recovering from trauma can be difficult and survivors face an extra set of barriers that make the journey towards healing daunting.

OPS acts as a test kitchen. It gives survivors the space to push comfort zones and figure out what works best for them through trial and error. OPS ensures a sanctuary without judgement, stigma, or shame.

OPS advocates for survivors to be the leaders of the movement to end prostitution. They know best what it means to be the targets of prostitution. That knowledge is essential in determining what strategies will be most effective in ending prostitution in the lives of individuals and on a societal level. We are proud of the fact that the majority of OPS staff are survivors focused on using our experiences and passions to propel this work.

"I feel empowered by the women at OPS. I feel like I can do anything. I feel safe and heard."  
-OPS Participant



Survivor Services Staff at the OPS Office

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OPS has three main services dedicated to supporting survivors. These services are focused on healing, community, and acceptance.

Case Management

Survivor Groups

Art Workshops

# SarahAnn Spotlight

SarahAnn is an artist, poet, and advocate who originally connected with OPS as a participant. When another participant asked SarahAnn to visit OPS, she was invited to engage in an art therapy workshop. Despite her insistence that she didn't paint, she picked up a brush.

Developing from that moment, SarahAnn has found meaning and healing in her art that speaks to her as well as her community. SarahAnn refers to her work as 'Trap Art,' a term that came from her son and feels apt for how "you find this beauty in the struggle." She focuses on themes that are empowering to women and also reference the realities of the sex trade in a way that helps survivors feel seen.

As an advocate, SarahAnn grounds her support in the belief that "the only difference between us is someone gave me a chance." She reflects on how it felt to first connect with OPS through staff members who are also survivors: "To have someone sitting across from you who has been there, been in the game, there is something really powerful about it."

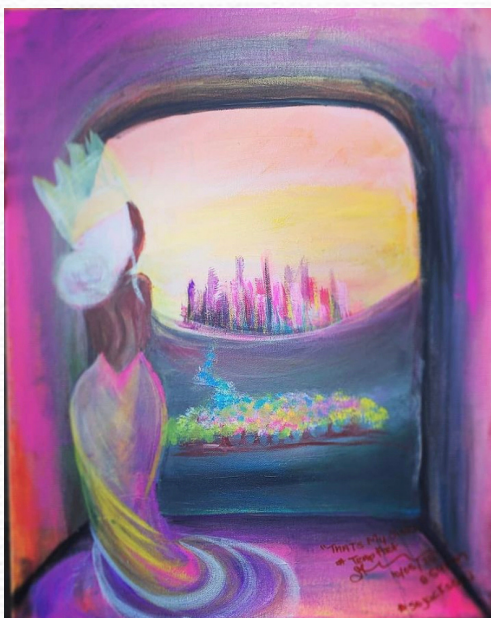
When asked about her goals for the future, SarahAnn stated, "I feel like we were conditioned in the game to be quiet [and] I don't want to be quiet anymore." She wants to teach girls and young women that "we can be loud and we can make a difference."

Check out  
SarahAnn's art!

IG:  
[@trap\\_art\\_206](https://www.instagram.com/trap_art_206)



"Through it all, she stood Tall"



"She can rule the nation"

Art as a form of healing

.....  
"When I think about when it all started for me, it was at that moment. I don't know what it was about the paint and being able to make everything stand still for a second, I don't know. But it changed everything for me."



# SELF DISCOVERY THROUGH SUPPORT

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"OPS has a magic that no other place that serves survivors does. It is because it's survivors that lead it. It just feels safe and like home."  
- OPS Participant

## Support Groups Offered

**Recovery** - for those struggling with chemical dependency

**Survivor Circle** - survivor-only space led by other survivors

**Feminist Support Group** - a space to encourage female empowerment

**All of the support group facilitators are survivors and former OPS participants. These women expertly guide conversations and cultivate self-knowledge in ways that encourage empowerment and connection. Although each individual's experience is different, being able to join together with others who understand and relate to survivors' stories is crucial for building a community devoted to healing and growth.**

## Community

Community is the most important service that OPS provides. Time and time again survivors will say that the people they have met through OPS are the reason they have managed to continue their journey to heal.

A year ago a survivor got on the bus to go buy drugs from her dealer. On the way, she ran into an OPS participant who brought her to survivor circle instead. The bonds that these survivors share allows them to find ways to heal together.

"I was always wanting to belong, used to look for friendship at the trap house even, now I know what comradery and real friendship is. I learned that here."  
- OPS Participant

# THE LIFE UNMASKED

*The Life Unmasked* is a project that amplifies the voices of survivors using quotes, narrative storytelling, and art to tell the larger story of their experiences during 2020. Survivors created masks to express how they've felt throughout the pandemic.



## Empathy's Experience Finding OPS

A while ago, Empathy met another survivor at Recovery Café, and she asked for her to join her at OPS. When she first walked into OPS, she was struck by the beautiful scent of lavender that reminded her of her grandmother. She had just finished drug court and counseling. She got therapy for an eating disorder and sexual assault survivor counselings. "I told the doctors at Harborview that I was done with counseling," she says.

The services she received at OPS were life changing. "I realized I was in the life. Dealing with that reality and the emotions that I didn't deal with in counseling -- that I didn't feel comfortable talking to others about. Even the specialist in domestic violence weren't seeing it. OPS helped me complete my healing. I was healing in other ways but that still was there. It was something that was unspoken and OPS helped me realize that I was in the life.

# LIFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

## The Pandemic's Effect on the Human Trafficking Industry

**"It's a traffickers dream situation, it's like their prime time essentially for recruiting and grooming women and girls because are desperate now, and their more vulnerable than normal"** -Chelsea Olsen, CSE/C Advocate

In addition, there are survivors who are falling back into "the life" due to all of the difficulties of the pandemic. Once they're brought back into the sex trade, it consumes them until they are able to get out again.

### The Impact on OPS participants

OPS participants are facing a whole new set of challenges due to the pandemic. Some have lost their jobs, COVID-related medical care can feel invasive to those who have experienced trauma from the human trafficking industry, restrictions limit women's ability to enter shelters, and mental health is at a low for a lot of survivors.

Some survivors, who have struggled with drug and alcohol abuse in the past, are falling into old patterns during a time with a lack of distractions. Trauma is resurfacing and it can be challenging to cope when the world seems to be spinning out of control.

Many OPS participants are doing their best to stay strong during these times. These women are trying to find hope in whatever they can. Support groups are still happening in-person and remotely, and survivors are turning to each other for support as they have always done at OPS. Participants also find security in the fact that OPS continues to have in-person access for those who need it.



## OPS' Pandemic Response

Like many direct service organizations, service delivery at OPS changed in the early days of the pandemic. Our nimble and hardworking team adjusted by making groups, case management, peer support and therapy services available via video.

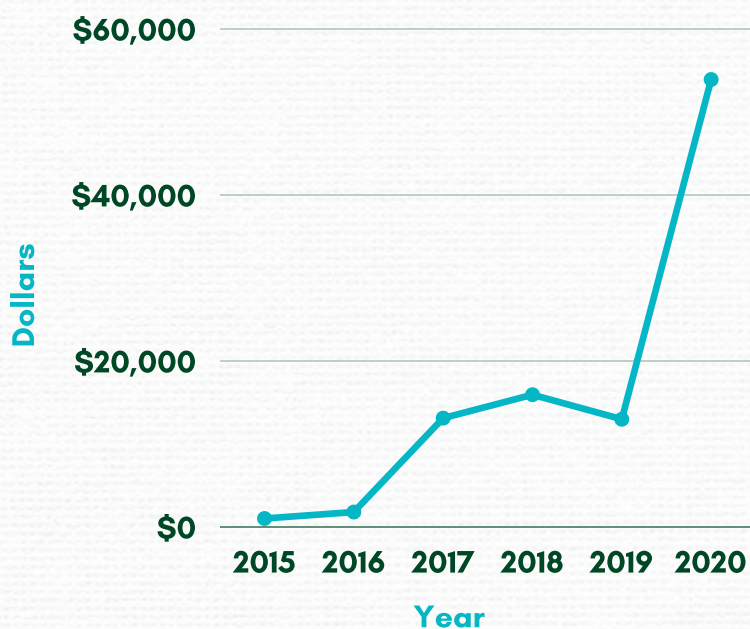
Our team has adapted and restructured, pivoted and modified to meet the needs of OPS participants. With determination and real grit, we have showed up for those we serve everyday.

Even so, it's been a difficult journey. Serving a population with complex and compounding trauma is a challenge under the best of circumstances. OPS has cared for our team more intentionally and differently than we have ever before. And our community stepped in with opportunities for self-care, the kindness of tangible gifts as well as training and human resource expertise.

“Biggest barrier getting into shelter is they have to go through the whole covid screening. They have to get tested, get test results back, and then can come in... this is like a week long process where they have no where to go” - Chelsea Olsen, CSE/C Advocate

## Direct Client Assistance

Direct Client Assistance provides financial support for participants who are struggling to fulfill basic needs such as housing, relocation, bills etc.



Due to the pandemic, OPS has put more money into direct client assistance than ever before. \$53,947 was distributed in 2020 to 47 individuals.

# How You Can Help OPS

“OPS is my home. I have never felt more safe anywhere than I do when I am here. OPS is my family.” - OPS Participant

“I’m so grateful for this place!! I wish I had known about this place when I first got out of the life, but I’m glad I found it now even at this point in my journey.” -OPS participant

OPS relies on the support of our community to continue serving participants and providing women with a place that feels like home to aid their healing. 2020 had a substantial impact on our budget, both due to the availability of funding as well as an increased need to provide financial support to participants. OPS is also striving to increase the ways we engage with community members and grassroots groups, and rely on mutual support throughout the region. Please be on the lookout for more opportunities for engagement, including remote and in-person events and trainings.

You can support us as we steer towards these new engagements by making a personal donation. We know that this past year has impacted individual funds in many ways, and welcome any support people can provide: through an individual financial donation, encouraging philanthropic engagement with our organization, volunteering or joining our Board of Directors, or spreading the word about OPS and its services.

[Donate to Support Our Mission](#)