

## **(Not) Just Money: Exploring Economic Empowerment for Survivors of Trafficking**

**Intro** [00:00:01] RTI International's Justice Practice Area presents Just Science.

**Intro** [00:00:09] Welcome to Just Science, a podcast for justice professionals and anyone interested in learning more about public health, innovative technology, current research and actionable strategies to improve the criminal justice system. In episode one of our Economic Empowerment Season, Just Science sat down with Carolyne Ouya, program manager at Futures Without Violence, to discuss core concepts and economic empowerment for human trafficking. For those who have experienced human trafficking, economic or financial consequences are often inextricably linked to their trafficking experience and may leave those people without the skills, resources or social capital to meet their needs in the community. Listen along as Caroline talks about the role that victim advocates or social service providers can play in supporting someone's economic empowerment journey, the season is funded by the Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analyses Project. Some content in this podcast may be considered sensitive and may evoke emotional responses or may not be appropriate for younger audiences. Here's your host, Christina Melander.

**Christina Melander** [00:01:04] Hello and welcome to Just Science. I'm your host, Christina Melander. I am so excited to host today's episode as part of the Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analyses Project. RTI is hosting a three-part series focused on strategies to support economic empowerment for people who have experienced human trafficking. For more information on this project, please visit the link provided in the episode description. On today's episode, we'll be discussing core concepts of economic empowerment as they relate to recovery and healing after human trafficking exploitation. We'll learn about what people who have experienced human trafficking need in terms of their economic well-being and recovery in both the long and the short term and learn about the different programs and models to address these needs. Our guest today is Carolyne Ouya from Futures Without Violence. She is an expert in economic empowerment and human trafficking and provides training and technical assistance to organizations that provide these services. Welcome, Caroline. Can you tell listeners a little bit more about yourself and the work you do?

**Carolyne Ouya** [00:02:06] Thank you so much, Christina. I'm so excited to be here with you and to all of you listeners. My name is Carolyne Ouya, and I am a program manager on the workplace and economic justice team at Futures Without Violence or Futures for short. Futures is a national public health agency that seeks to create a world without violence. Through collaboration with survivors and leaders across government, health care, workplaces, education, social services, diverse communities. I mean, pretty much everywhere. For the past three years, I've helped lead a project that supports victims service agencies across the nation, create or strengthen programs that connect survivors of human trafficking to safe and sustainable education, employment and financial opportunities. Before futures, I've had over eight years of experience working with Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act programs. I've been a legal advocate for immigrants, survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking under the Violence Against Women Act. A Happy 30 Years, by the way. And innovative entrepreneurship and leadership programs for diverse communities. I consider myself a mental health and public health advocate that helps to facilitate local and national initiatives focused on behavioral health, economic prosperity, and overall wellness for all.

But I also have fun, y'all. So, I'm a marathon runner. I'm creative writer and I'm a lover, of all things dancing. So, I'm excited to be here with you.

**Christina Melander** [00:03:42] Caroline, you have a wealth of knowledge on this topic, and it is so exciting to be here with you to celebrate. Happy 30th anniversary of VAWA. I'm just glad you took a moment to call that out. So, we're talking about money and finances today. Core concepts related to economic empowerment. But why do money and finances matter in the context of somebody's recovery from human trafficking?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:04:06] A great question. I think before we can dive into talking about why money and finances are so important for human trafficking survivors, I really want to share some information from the Aspen Financial Security Program on why money and finances matter for all of us right now, especially during a time of significant financial insecurity. First, we know that every day almost 40 million Americans are living in poverty, according to the last census. We also know that there are widening wealth gaps based on age, education, race, ethnicity and gender. For example, the median wealth of black households is one tenth that of white households, and women's wealth is one third of that of men's. So, we have a lot of work to do in general. Additionally, we know that college debt has reached record highs, and many Americans have no retirement savings or pensions. And to put this all in perspective, a 2022 survey from the Federal Reserve found that nearly 4 in 10 American adults cannot pay for an unexpected \$400 expense. So that means that if there's a medical bill or something happens to the car or let's say a bigger emergency, we can't afford that right now. Which is wild to think about.

**Christina Melander** [00:05:25] It is. And that's so, so relatable to so many people. We're all kind of see and experience those things that you're talking about.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:05:32] Exactly. And so, with that context in mind and the current financial insecurity being experienced by many Americans, it's even worse for survivors of sex and labor trafficking. This is because traffickers often seek out financially vulnerable individuals such as those living in poverty who are unemployed, those who are unhoused and those impacted by forced migration or displacement, to name a few. In fact, a United Nations analysis of 200 plus human trafficking cases found that the majority of victims were reportedly in a condition of economic need, characterized by an inability to meet their basic needs, such as food, shelter or health care when they were originally recruited into human trafficking. So, with this vulnerability, I want to talk a bit about what that can look like when it comes to recruitment and being groomed into labor and sex trafficking. It makes it so much easier for traffickers to use financial abuse to control and exploit individuals. There was data released by the National Human Trafficking Hotline that indicated that over 60% of trafficking survivors who contacted the hotline reported experiencing some sort of financial abuse. So, it's so important because if we're able to address financial abuse, then hopefully we can address a lot of the vulnerabilities that survivors of trafficking experience. And I want to give a bit more information about what this financial abuse can look like. First, it can look like economic exploitation, which is when a person is forced into unsafe working conditions, when their wages are being stolen from them, or a person's legal right to work or their documentation is being used against them for forced labor. A second example of financial abuse is economic restriction or interference. So, this is when a survivor, they're kept from earning and keeping the money that they earn. And so, it makes it really difficult for that person to access their personal bank accounts or the financial resources that they need. Next is education or job interference or sabotage. We're just going to call it that. And this is when someone is deliberately prevented from applying for jobs, for pursuing education and training or

leadership opportunities. And then when they do pursue these avenues, they have to drop out because of stalking or some sort of situation that makes it difficult for them to continue. And then the final form of financial abuse, which we hear a lot about for survivors of trafficking, is coerced debt. So, this is when a trafficker uses a person's name or identity for their own expenses or credit related transactions. And we know that that lives on a person's record for a very, very long time. So, when we're adding what we've learned about what's going on with all Americans, and then we're adding these examples of exploitation that's related to being vulnerable financially, that's why it's so important for us to focus on this.

**Christina Melander** [00:08:39] I hear you talking about all of these ways that financial abuse is happening within the context of human trafficking. Can you tell me a little bit more about how that impacts people long term?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:08:51] Yeah, some of them we know from research, you know, a lot of people have shared kind of what their experiences are and then some of the experiences people keep very closely to themselves. So, we always want to ask a survivor, how is this experience impacted you instead of making assumptions. But what we know is that some survivors of trafficking, they struggle to leave their traffickers because of the financial vulnerability and exploitation that they're experiencing. So, they feel that if I leave, I don't know how I'm going to take care of myself. I don't know how I'm going to make money afterwards. I don't know how I'm going to be safe. So, it makes it really easy for them to stay in that predicament. They also struggle to meet their basic needs after exiting trafficking. So, imagine you've done all of the work individually. You've sought your resources to now be out of that trafficking situation. But then now you don't have any resources to pay for your housing, to pay for food, basic health care needs. So, a lot of people are struggling with that after exiting the trafficking situation. And unfortunately for some, during their trafficking experience, they've obtained a criminal record. They've acquired debt. Or they have poor credit because of some of the examples that we just gave of exploitation and sabotage and coerced debt. So, when they are trying to access a job or trying to get a new apartment, they're realizing that they're getting denied left and right because of all of these things that are on their record that are attached to them as a result of their victimization. And then lastly, we know that many struggle with the impact of the physical, mental health and trauma related to the challenges they've experienced. So, there are a lot of resources needed to navigate the health care side of things, but also to be able to move forward into financial opportunities with confidence. So, all of these struggles and barriers have long term impacts on their survivor's relationship with themselves, with money, with work. And so, we have to address financial insecurity for people who've experienced trafficking in a very collaborative, very creative, holistic and intentional way.

**Christina Melander** [00:11:00] Thank you so much for laying the foundation and just explaining these different types of financial challenges, you know, abuses and exploitations that people who have experienced human trafficking face when they're trying to exit and try to gain control of their lives and their financial circumstances. So, in a recent project co-led by RTI and Futures Without Violence and Economic Empowerment for people who have experienced human trafficking, we conducted listening sessions both with service providers and with people who have experienced human trafficking about that process of economic empowerment. And through that project and those listening sessions, we collaboratively developed a definition of economic empowerment that I think is a helpful guidepost as we continue our conversation. So, I'll read that out loud. It's the transformative process of moving away from exploitation and towards increased choice

and opportunities to gain independence, stability, skills and advancement in all areas related to one's economic well-being. And economic empowerment is the result of financial stability, financial literacy and professional development. So, thinking about that definition and this context of financial abuse and insecurity that you were just describing for us, tell us a little bit about what that process of economic empowerment actually looks like for survivors.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:12:20] At Futures, we have identified five critical elements of economic empowerment that are needed to facilitate access to workforce opportunities for survivors of human trafficking. These elements build on one another. So, I want to highlight, you know, from your definition or the definition that we came up with together through our research that it's a transformative process. It's the sum of all of these parts that leads towards economic empowerment. And so, the different five tiers, it starts off with crisis management. During this tier, you're focusing on addressing the immediate physical safety needs of a survivor and the basic and legal needs for a survivor such as safe housing or shelter. You're also addressing anything that may come up in a crisis situation that would get in the way of a survivor being able to take advantage of a training program or follow through with the financial assistance opportunity. Next is career exploration, which is the process of learning about work related interests, values desired by that survivor personal skills and characteristics that allow job seekers to understand what careers are out there and how it would be a good fit for them. So, it's just that process of really getting to learn like, what do I want to be? What do I want to do? What are my skills? And then seeing what's out there that matches that. From there we go into building skills and readiness for work. So, this includes training on hard and soft skills needed for employment. It means addressing maybe career development needs that a survivor may have so that they are able to connect to the work opportunities that are available. From there, it's experience building. So, experience building include opportunities for survivors to apply the skills that they have and that they're learning into internships or a job placement opportunity or volunteer opportunity. It's just your chance to build your experience in a given area. And then finally, we have employment, which can include self-employment or entrepreneurship. It can include more of a traditional job placement in someone's area. And within that tier, you're offering ongoing support for someone to be able to navigate how trauma may show up in that professional setting. Or sometimes there's rules to the workplace that we have to all figure out. And so, during that employment phase, we're exploring those different aspects of employment. So, a strong economic empowerment program that has all of these elements are able to support a survivor in moving from that space of crisis to receiving a lot of the different supports and financial tools that are out there, benefits that are out there that can help address the challenges that we've talked about.

**Christina Melander** [00:15:16] That's great. Thanks for laying out kind of what that whole spectrum and process of recovery looks like through this lens of economic empowerment and thinking about like really practically so a victim advocate or in a different type of victim service program, what are the concrete ways that they might help support their client's financial needs?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:15:37] One of the most important things that a victim service agency or advocate can do to support a client's financial needs is to really create a safe space for the survivor, to build their confidence, to find their voice and to become connected to community and all of the various choices that may be available to maintaining or obtaining financial security. So, advocates may hold biases and assumptions themselves about finances or employment that limit the kinds of resources and relationships that they're

connecting a survivor to. So, it's important for advocates to understand that each person in Survivor is different, that their goal within these five tiers may be very different from each other. And so, creating that safe space to ask those questions that will really help understand what are the most immediate needs for a survivor is very important.

**Christina Melander** [00:16:33] That sounds like folks really have to also kind of do their own work to understand their own relationship to money in that process of providing support as well.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:16:43] Absolutely. Because if we go back to what we shared in the beginning about the financial conditions of all of us, there are some things that we have to work on individually to feel comfortable talking about money and that will in return, help us have these meaningful conversations with a survivor. So, yeah, very important and a practical way to facilitate that understanding is to check in often and ask each survivor, what are you interested in? What do you feel are your strengths? What dreams do you have for yourself or your loved ones right now? What is your most immediate financial need and goal and what do you feel is getting in the way of reaching that goal? These kinds of questions, coupled with tools that are available like financial self-assessments or the American Job Center assessments that focus on identifying a person's interest and their work values and their strengths. These can all be tailored together in a culturally and accessible way for different communities that will help survivors learn more about themselves, build their confidence, and develop a roadmap towards their financial, educational and career goals.

**Christina Melander** [00:17:55] So I'm hearing you talk about through conversation, creating confidence and then using tools and assessments to help get a picture of somebody's financial status, where it is and where they want to go for the future.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:18:08] Yeah, I mean, those conversations help an advocate and a survivor to co-create an action plan, right? And this action plan is a living document that changes over time based on a survivor's needs. And it helps, you know, the advocate, as well as the survivor, work slowly through that transformative process of being connected to economic empowerment and economic resources. You know, a question that we get is, okay, now we have an action plan. What do we do with it? Like, how do we actually find those resources that will help bring that action plan to life? And so, another practical way, it's to support survivors with connecting to opportunities, education and learning opportunities, employment opportunities in their community. So, we encourage advocates to do targeted outreach and strategic collaborations with local workforce development programs, with credit unions, with workforce boards and adult schools, with community college career pathways, Chamber of Commerce, small business associations, Rotary Clubs and more. So just by listing that, you can see that there's many avenues to be connected to opportunity, but it takes time to build those relationships.

**Christina Melander** [00:19:27] That's great. And what are those opportunities, those connections as partnerships? Like where are they all going? What practical support would a Chamber of Commerce or a Rotary Club or a community college offer to a survivor? Like, what's the next step of building those partnerships?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:19:43] Right. So, for a Rotary Club or Chamber of Commerce or some of these organizations that are more focused on supporting employers, this is a great place to connect with to find safe employment partners. It's not great to just connect a survivor to any job, right? We have to go the extra distance and connect a survivor to a

safe job. Especially because many human trafficking survivors have been living in unsafe working conditions as a result of their trafficking experience. So, this is one way to find those employer relationships that will not exploit survivors and will maybe give good pay, you know, living wage pay based on what they're able to provide. So those are the questions that you're looking for with those entities and then with community colleges and adult schools and the workforce development system. These areas are there to connect survivors to learning opportunities, to connect them to maybe degrees or certificate programs that will help with obtaining a job. So those are great places to go to get support with that because it can be so overwhelming as an advocate, you think, now I have to be a job developer, now I have to be an educator. I didn't sign up for that. But there are a lot of relationships in your community that you can tap into that can assist with that goal.

**Christina Melander** [00:21:08] Are there any barriers that people encounter when they're kind of going through this process?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:21:14] Absolutely. So, for example, some may have limited English proficiency. So, we're looking for programs that could help with ESL, right, as learning English as a second language or can help with translation services, you know, that are available in the community. For some, they may have an immigration status that makes it difficult for them to find a job, to obtain a legal job. So, we have to then partner with legal systems to support that. Some may have a criminal record like we've talked about, and so that gets in the way of being able to obtain certain opportunities. And so, there's conversations and connections that need to be had about how to navigate that particular barrier. We're also hearing that many struggle with finding childcare. That some of the costs for training programs can be very high and transportation may be difficult to navigate getting to and from all of these opportunities. So those are common barriers that we should think about as advocates when supporting and connecting a survivor to these opportunities. And these barriers, you can't fix them overnight, right? All of a sudden? I mean, I'm originally from Kenya. English isn't my first language. I didn't learn English overnight. Right. So, with that context in mind, we have to remember that the process of moving through these different barriers and critical elements from crisis management to stable employment or income coming in, it takes time. The average amount of time it takes to work with a survivor through this is about three years. And so, it's important that advocates explore alternative ways to provide temporary financial assistance while survivors of trafficking are moving through these tiers. That can look like safety funds that survivors can access when they're in need, and that can look like stipends to participate in these different tiers and programs, that can look like cash assistance or match saving programs. And there's also access to victims' assistance compensation programs, paid internships and apprenticeships. And these are all models that survivors can get paid while they are working their way to economic empowerment and stability.

**Christina Melander** [00:23:29] That's awesome.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:23:30] And I just want to make it clear that I mean, I know we're talking about enlisting all of these different things but supporting a survivor with financial and economic empowerment is very difficult. So, if you're listening and you're like, well, that's a lot. I'm with you. It is a lot. We understand how taxing that this process can be for advocates who are already juggling so much. And so here at Futures, we provide training and technical assistance to advocates and victim service agencies to help them build strategic partnerships around these different tiers and connect to education, workforce and small business partners that will support survivors in navigating the barriers that we've

talked about and accessing a pathway towards financial and economic security. So yeah, you got to go where you could get some help because it's very hard.

**Christina Melander** [00:24:22] So I want to hear a little bit more about some of those, you know, solutions and ideas that you're talking about in navigating those barriers. You know, three years in somebody's recovery is longer than some case management services really intend their work. How are advocates learning to address some of those challenges when they're doing this economic empowerment programming?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:24:43] Yeah, I mean, I want to reiterate again that sometimes victim advocates may feel a lot of pressure to operate outside of their expertise and operate outside of what they're being hired to do in the first place. So, all of a sudden, some advocates are signed up to assist with crisis, but now are being asked to be a job developer or a financial advisor or a HR manager to support with work readiness. It can be very challenging to navigate these different labor and education systems that are often expensive or can be inaccessible. And I think that that's a very unfair burden to put on advocates alone. And that can cause burnout. That can cause frustration. And so, you know we're over here looking at solutions to that. Some examples that I've seen in the field that address this challenge of just burnout and sort of advocates feeling like they're required to do so much more than they have the scope for is we've seen some agencies, higher specialized staff that focus exclusively on employment, finances or education. That way, if something comes up and an advocate sees that this is a need, the advocate can then refer to that specialized role that then will go out and find the relationships and do the connections that are needed in this space. And this solution requires planning, and it requires funding because you're hiring more people. And some of them are either internal experts or some of them may be a contractor or consultant that comes in. And so, it's important to either plan for it ahead of time by putting money and naming it into a budget for your program or creating strategic partnerships with other organizations that already have this expertise and leveraging those to be able to provide this support for survivors. Another challenge is that many programs struggle to engage employers who can provide a living wage and competitive benefits. So, programs have gotten stronger at providing, you know, supporting with building skills and experience. But we're still having a difficult time with connecting to safe and sustainable employment opportunities. Advocates often navigate this challenge by trying to engage sort of the charitable heart of employers like, hey, you know, you want to do a good cause in your community. You want to help this family over here who's struggling, you know, a lot of that kind of altruistic language. However, this is not really effective when we are trying to connect with employers. Employers want to know what is the added benefit to their bottom line. So, it's helpful for advocates to learn about the needs of businesses that they are seeking to have a relationship with and then make a case for how the skills and strengths of the survivors and their community would help fulfill that need for the employer.

**Christina Melander** [00:27:43] I've heard you mention financial literacy as one component of the economic empowerment process. Can you tell me a little bit more about what survivors need related to financial literacy?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:27:54] Yes, financial literacy is the ability to understand financial concepts and build skills and resources that help you make informed financial decisions. This includes budgeting, savings, understanding credit, investing in stocks and retirement, and managing money wisely. You know, the truth is that survivors are some of the most financially resourceful people I know, they can turn a dollar into a multitude in a way that highlights their dynamic resilience and skills. However, it's difficult to build financial literacy

without finances. So due to the vulnerability and financial abuse that I mentioned earlier that many survivors face, the financial impact of a housing crisis and the abundance of jobs that don't pay a living wage. Many survivors don't have enough money to truly budget, save and build around. So sometimes it can be hurtful for advocates to continuously censor financial literacy and teaching survivors how to manage money without clearly providing ways for survivors to make enough money to be managed in the first place. So, while that education may be important, the first thing survivors need is cash. They need more unrestricted cash to apply to their immediate needs and goals, as they are the ones who know best what those are.

**Christina Melander** [00:29:15] Yeah, that's such a great point and I just appreciate you kind of bringing us back like we have that knowledge and that education, but if you don't have the money to apply that knowledge with, you know, you really can't go from there.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:29:28] Very true. And advocates can collaborate with local coalitions and financial institutions that can give cash assistance and matched savings funds or advocate two grant makers on the importance of unrestricted dollars in supporting the financial security of survivors. For sex and labor trafficking survivors, victimization and exploitation happened in the context of work and pursuit of financial security. So, these adverse and traumatic experiences become embedded within personal relationships with money and work. So, it may be helpful for advocates to partner with mental health practitioners and coaches that specialize on the relationship between mental health, trauma and finances to help survivors gain social emotional skills that will help on their journey towards financial and economic freedom. Advocates are also encouraged to expand traditional how to financial literacy curriculums, to incorporate conversations and activities that explore the emotional and cultural ties that are related to money and wealth building.

**Christina Melander** [00:30:34] Yeah, that's so powerful. It's just like getting at some of the root causes or.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:30:37] Exactly.

**Christina Melander** [00:30:38] You know, around the financial literacy and around people's relationship with money.

[00:30:43] Root causes as well as sustainability. Right. You know, we don't want a Band-Aid. We want to allow all of these things that we're talking about to be sustainable for a long time. So, thank you for bringing that up. Yeah.

**Christina Melander** [00:30:56] So speaking of root causes, we have been talking about some of these individual level issues, individual level ways to support people, individual level barriers. But let's talk a little bit about systemic contributors. Like there are bigger, broader forces at play related to the things that we're talking about. Can you just share a little bit more about how you see systemic contributors to the economic challenges?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:31:22] I love this question so much because sometimes a survivor can feel like it is their fault that they're not financially secure. Right. That they can't learn the new budgeting tool. And so that's why it's not working out for them. But we know that there's more behind that, the more systemic implications. So first, we know that those who are forced, prodded or coerced into trafficking often come from black, indigenous, immigrant, LGBTQ plus and other communities of color who are already systemically



excluded from resources and opportunities. And they were excluded before their trafficking experience, during their trafficking experience, and often after. So, it makes the process of reaching those resources very difficult. This systemic exclusion due to poverty, racism and discriminatory practices continues to impact the financial security of trafficking survivors through housing instability, legal barriers, health care access, hiring discrimination, wage gaps, language learning and disability access, and discrimination within financial institutions. So, these are all the different things that survivors are fighting against in order to reach their own level of empowerment. So that's why the work is difficult, you know, because it's not just an individual challenge. It's a systemic challenge as well.

**Christina Melander** [00:32:54] Yeah. And I'm hearing you talk about the interconnectedness of what's happening on people's daily lives with what's happening in the economy, what's happening in our society with bigger systems related to, you know, race, ethnicity, gender. So how do we address some of those things?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:33:11] Great question. I asked myself this question every day. Y'all, like I really do.

**Christina Melander** [00:33:17] Yeah. Yeah.

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:33:18] And I'll say that we're still trying to find the golden answer to that question. But it is important for advocates and survivors to continue pushing for authentic involvement in decision making spaces. So, whether it's through their local government like city councils or the Economic Development roundtables, workforce board conference rooms or small business conversations, by bringing up what we know to be a challenge for survivors and accessing these resources, we hope that we can change those systems and impact those systems so that we are improving access for survivors. And we're addressing how economic abuse can show up in those spaces. So, a seat at the table ensures that we can educate the right people and advocate for higher financial and resource investments that will directly go towards the economic and supportive services of survivors. So that is one way to get in the room where it happens and knock it down a little bit if you have to and ask questions, let them know that these are the barriers, that are being experienced.

**Christina Melander** [00:34:25] Caroline We have covered so much ground in talking about economic empowerment, the programs, the solutions, what's happening, but where do we have room to grow?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:34:34] There's always room for growth. And, you know, unfortunately, one area I can think of right now is that unfortunately, there's not enough reliable data and evidence-based research to demonstrate which financial literacy or economic empowerment strategies are the most effective for helping survivors of trafficking reach security. So that's a gap to get more data. To get more research on what's working so that we can continue to advocate for those with best practices. There are also some valuable lessons that we can learn from other models, like the supported employment models, universal basic income pilots, self-sufficiency programs that are associated with other funding sources, such as the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse. But there's still a huge need for anti-trafficking organizations to build time and funding towards evaluation of the models that they are implementing in their community. This information can help the anti-trafficking field as a whole become more unified in our approach, become more unified in the language we're using, in the advocacy that we're doing, so that there strengthen our collective advocacy and then strategic efforts. So that's one area that I see a gap on that

we could focus on. Also, many advocates and programs are operating in silos, and they're not taking full advantage of the opportunity to collaborate across funding streams, organizations, financial institutions and other workforce and economic development initiatives in their community. So, I would encourage advocates to participate in economic development task force, skilled employment, working groups, local councils, community colleges and education leadership groups. By participating in these spaces, advocates can meet champions from those industries who can support in building pathways for survivors and helping to address some of the barriers that we've talked about. Also, advocates can play a role in educating these different groups on the connections between trafficking and economic and financial insecurity. At Futures, we understand that collaboration takes time. It takes effort. It takes a lot of resources and tools on how to maintain relationships that support our collective goals and values around supporting survivors with economic empowerment. So, there's some resources that we've developed, like building collaborative responses to trafficking project, building pathways and collaborations with workforce and education systems, and other resources that you can find on our website that will help the field understand the economic barriers, best practices and how to connect to opportunities in their community.

**Christina Melander** [00:37:23] It's so great to hear about the resources and programs that are available in this space and the way that we're all kind of collectively moving to be thinking and addressing economic empowerment more intentionally. What are you seeing as innovative approaches in this economic empowerment space? Like what is exciting you the most right now as you look to the future?

**Carolyn Ouya** [00:37:44] Yeah, there's a lot of great innovation happening in the field. I'm excited about all the work that's being done across private and public sectors to create better opportunities for survivor leadership and engagement in the anti-trafficking field for lifting up organizations like the National Survivor Network, Survivor Alliance, the Office for Victim of Crime, Survivor Engagement Training and Technical Assistance Group. So, these are all, you know, wonderful organizations that are ensuring that survivor leaders are at the heart of establishing economic empowerment programs across the nation. So, I'm very excited about that. I am also happy to see industry specific programs that are coming up. For example, AnnieCannons has an IT and coding career pathway specifically for trafficking survivors, where they support the training of, as well as the job placement for survivors who are interested in coding and IT. So that, that is so exciting, and I hope to see more industry specific initiatives like that. There's also some amazing alternative economy structures that are being created. For example, there are community cooperatives and social enterprises and guaranteed income or universal basic income pilots that are happening all across the nation that are giving an alternative way for survivors to come together and leverage their resources, leverage their skills and ensure that they're getting the financial opportunities and economic opportunities that they're looking for. So, I'm really excited to learn more about that and expand that, you know, across different communities. And then if I speak a little bit personally about what I'm excited and what I'm working on over here at Futures with our amazing team, we have launched a peer mentorship pilot program with an amazing organization called You Are More Than. You Are More Than is a Black, Indigenous and People of Color and survivor led nonprofit that provides barrier free access to survivor centered support such as mental health, education and economic stability resources. So, this pilot is going to help us understand what core components should be in a peer-to-peer program focused on helping survivors connect to financial resources and stability. And the focus for this pilot is on black indigenous people of color, LGBTQIA+ communities that are often systemically excluded from reaching financial and economic goals. We also have a self-sufficiency pilot program up in the Bay

Area where there are 24 survivors enrolled and they are moving through the five tiers themselves and it's a two-year program with the goal of increasing survivors' confidence and understanding of their goals and their resources related to education, financial and economic opportunity. And then lastly, RTI and Futures is continuing our wonderful relationship to develop a self-assessment toolkit or programs that are focused on economic empowerment for survivors. So hopefully this toolkit will help all of us understand how to better design and align our programs to the needs of survivors and to lift up best practices that will help us reach the goals that we've talked about today. So those are some things happening that are very innovative that are going to help us inform this work moving forward. And so, we're excited to see what comes from it.

**Christina Melander** [00:41:19] Those are some great takeaways, and it is so thrilling to hear about those pilot projects and the work that's just being done in this space to help improve economic empowerment programming. If you want to learn more about the work that Futures Without Violence does, visit their website that's linked in the episode description. Caroline, thank you again so much for joining us and sharing all of your perspective, your wisdom and your expertise. I'm Christina Melander and this has been another episode of Just Science.

**Outro** [00:41:51] Next week, Just Science will sit down with Tiffany McGee, Lenore Schaffer and Laura Hackney to discuss key lessons learned related to skill building, job training and career development. The views expressed in this podcast belong to the participants and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, The Administration for Children and Families or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.