

Standing United Against Human Trafficking

January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, a time when advocates, organizations, and individuals around the globe raise awareness about this important issue. About 25 million people worldwide are estimated to be victims of Human Trafficking—a trade worth \$150 billion a year (according to the U.N. International Labour Organization). United Against Human Trafficking (UAHT) is a proud partner of Southwest Airlines and through this partnership, Southwest supports UAHT with monetary and travel donations. Our work at UAHT, allows us to help survivors like 'Jasmin.'

Jasmin encountered UAHT during an outreach event at one of our partnering agency sites. She approached our table to learn more about our organization and shared her own experience: she had been trafficked. Jasmin's exploitation occurred on and off for years. Using force, fraud, and coercion, her trafficker compelled Jasmin to work without pay as a housecleaner and endure sexual assault by strangers for his own profit. No cages or chains like in the movies—the threat of violence and withholding food or shelter were more than enough to keep Jasmin trapped in her situation. Still, Jasmin tried to leave. But each time she managed to escape, the man reappeared in her life to derail it. The trauma she experienced, coupled with the lack of resources available to support her, led Jasmin to become dependent on substances.

UAHT's Outreach Team acted quickly. They helped Jasmin navigate the process of intake at a local clinic and arranged for transportation—all during the same event where Jasmin first approached us. Jasmin has begun her journey to recovery from both exploitation and addiction. And it all started with her feeling safe enough to share her story. Since 2005, UAHT has assisted and empowered human trafficking victims, survivors, and at-risk persons like Jasmin.



UAHT began as a small volunteer coalition in Houston that formed in response to the area's trafficking problem. Major highways, thriving trade, proximity to a major border, and a booming sex industry all contribute to the Greater Houston Area being a hotbed for human trafficking. Today,

UAHT is a leader in the Greater Houston Area's anti-trafficking movement, unifying organizations across the region to develop a strategic approach to ending exploitation for the purposes of sex and labor. We collaborate extensively with local and national law enforcement to ensure trafficked persons are treated with the respect and autonomy they deserve.



Our goal at UAHT is to find and fill service gaps in our region. Trafficking victims are all too often hidden in plain sight due to stigma, ignorance, and fear. They frequently belong to marginalized groups such as the homeless, immigrants/refugees, LGBTQ+, the substance-dependent, the mentally ill, and survivors of domestic/sexual violence. We go out into the community to identify these forgotten victims, help in any way we can, and equip them with the tools they need to break free when they're ready.

UAHT's programs and services span six different fields of anti-trafficking work:

- **Education:** We teach adults and children how to spot human trafficking and dispel myths. Youth learn how to avoid trafficker grooming tactics. We train frontline professionals such as healthcare workers and law enforcement on how to notice the signs of exploitation when they encounter them in their day-to-day work – and how to help victims safely.
- **Prevention:** We equip youth in schools, juvenile justice, homeless shelters, and child welfare settings with the life skills necessary to navigate exploitative situations and avoid being (re)trafficked. If a child discloses trafficking, we work with them to get the support they deserve.
- **Outreach:** We engage at-risk and overlooked populations to direct them to community resources. Potential human trafficking victims are connected to care.

- **Direct Services:** We facilitate support groups for identified survivors of human trafficking and those involved in the criminal justice system. Participants learn how to process their trauma and develop coping skills to avoid (re)exploitation.
- **Demand Reduction:** Our newest initiative seeks to challenge the preconceived notions of sex buyers who fuel human trafficking. Using a non-judgmental support group approach, convicted male sex buyers discuss their experiences with masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and relationships. The goal is to disrupt the demand for trafficked sex work, therefore dismantling the industry from the ground up.
- **Coalition-Building:** UAHT is the lead agency of the Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition (HRRC). The Coalition is comprised of over 50 different entities—nonprofit and for-profit, governmental and private, faith-based and secular, service providers and awareness groups—all with the same goal in mind: ending human trafficking in the Greater Houston Area. HRRC provides mentorship for agencies and fights exploitation together.



Until all of us are free, none of us are free. No single person or organization can end exploitation. This lucrative criminal industry will only fall if we stand together, united against it. If you would like to learn more about our work, please [visit our website](#).