



Polaris

Freedom
happens
now.

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Polaris experienced a year of firsts in 2020. We're sure you can say the same, as the COVID-19 pandemic required all of us to take extraordinary steps to sustain life and livelihoods, and to look out for each other in new and urgent ways. And yet, in a year that tested every capacity we had, the Polaris team and our community of partners and supporters rose to the challenge.

In the span of 48 hours over one weekend in March, Polaris transformed the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline from a centralized 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week operation run from our office, to a fully remote service, providing round-the-clock supports to victims and survivors from the homes of Polaris's incredibly dedicated Trafficking Hotline team.

We took our data-driven approach further in 2020 — launching new “snapshots” of insight from the Trafficking Hotline to show how vulnerability, exploitation, and profit were manifesting and morphing in an unprecedented moment in time. In doing so, we equipped policymakers with new tools to better understand how best to reduce trafficking in the future.

We laid out our vision of what a just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization looks like. We appointed a nationally recognized survivor leader to our Board of Directors and passed an important milestone: More than 50% of Polaris's Board of Directors, executive team, and staff are people of color.

At the same time, we faced — and faced down — an onslaught of misinformation, disinformation, and online attacks stemming from the QAnon conspiracy and the spread of false rumors about a wave of child sex trafficking. Not only did Polaris push back, but we also developed a technology-enabled approach to predict how viral misinformation could jam the Trafficking Hotline, successfully adapting to ensure thousands of victims and survivors could continue to reach us.

In the midst of it all, we launched Polaris's Financial Intelligence Unit. Made possible by support from PayPal, this new unit leverages the power of the financial industry and anti-money laundering community to make sure trafficking does not continue to be a low-risk, high-profit opportunity.

Against this backdrop of Polaris's spirit of innovation and determination, we are profoundly honored to lead the organization. Despite these tumultuous times, 2020 brought new opportunities for Polaris to open doors that lead to freedom. We continue to be inspired by the resilience and courage we witness in victims and survivors. And we continue to be bolstered by the support of partners like you.

With gratitude,



Catherine Chen
CEO



Gregory Moore
Chairperson, Board of Directors



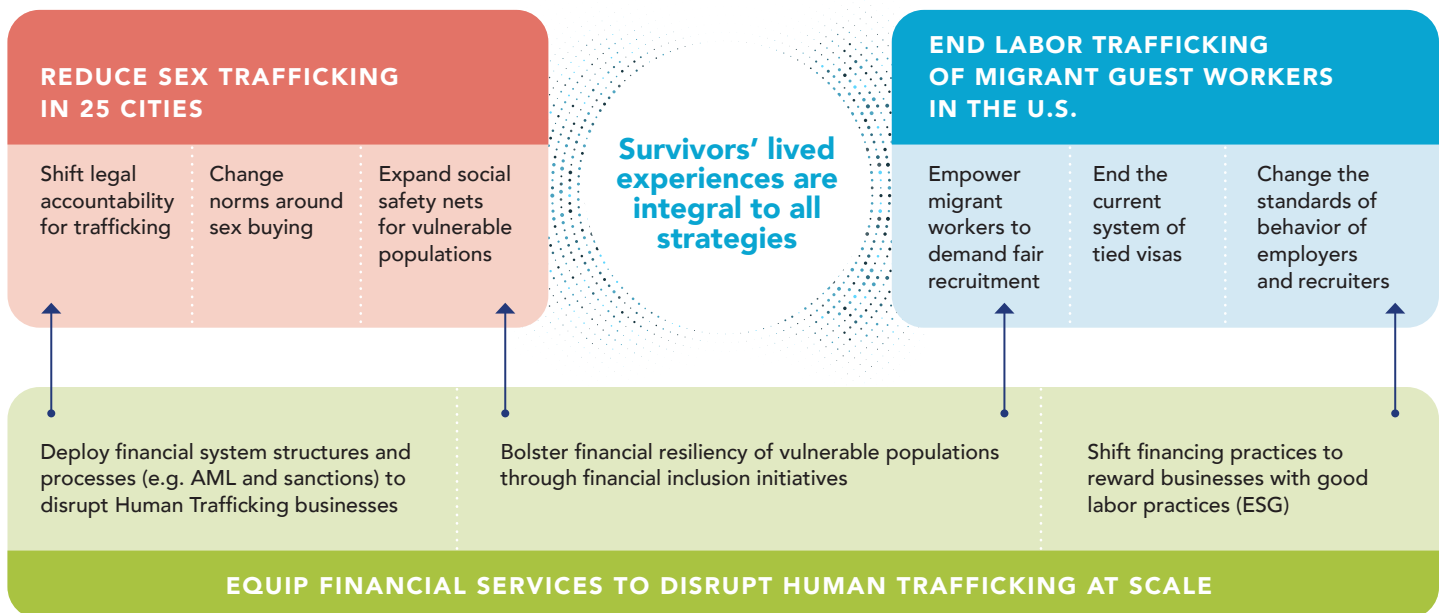
Mission

Polaris is leading a data-driven social justice movement to fight sex and labor trafficking at the massive scale of the problem — 25 million people worldwide deprived of the freedom to choose how they live and work.

During 2020, Polaris launched our systems change strategy focused on “Three Big Fights” addressing sex and labor trafficking and working with financial systems —

THREE BIG FIGHTS

Our Systems Change Approach





COVID-19 Impact

Running the Hotline From Home

As the dangers of COVID-19 became clear, Polaris recognized that trafficking victims and survivors were going to need more help than ever — just as it also became obvious that we needed to close our physical office. Over a 48-hour period in March, we undertook an unprecedented effort to turn our physical 24/7 call center into a fully remote operation. Polaris’s Hotline and Technology teams quickly pivoted, ensuring that even as we moved to rapidly set up staff to work from home, the Trafficking Hotline never went dark. In the months following, Polaris staff managed crises and provided support for victims and survivors from their kitchen tables, bedrooms, and basements, stepping up to ensure that people in need always have a place to turn for help.

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Trafficking During the Pandemic

In June, Polaris released our first “COVID-19 snapshot” of data that helped illuminate how the pandemic was affecting the trafficking landscape. We found that the number of crisis trafficking cases increased by more than 40% and the requests for immediate emergency shelter doubled during this time. The snapshot also showed a 40% increase in likely sex trafficking through pre-recorded pornography and remote interactive sex acts. This insight allowed us to engage with social media companies who were in a position to make their sites safer for everyone.



Advancing Our Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Since 2017 Polaris has been working intentionally to transform our organization to reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion — and everything we witnessed in 2020 strengthened our resolve. As the pandemic laid bare, and the murder of George Floyd so tragically drove home, deep structural inequities disproportionately affect communities of color across the country and make them vulnerable to trafficking.

Our efforts continued in 2020 with a new vision and framework for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) work and a promising milestone: More than half of our board, executive team, and staff identify as people of color — a significant step in our ongoing JEDI journey.

Polaris's JEDI Commitment

We are fighting for a world that is just and equitable — where the abuse and exploitation of the most vulnerable in our communities for the profit of those in power cannot survive. For this world to become a reality, Polaris must demonstrate these values of justice and equity out into the world. And for Polaris to reflect those values into the world, we must cultivate them and protect them within our organization and among our employees, and in our culture and our processes.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Polaris Is Taking on Big Fights for Systems Change

Polaris launched our 10-year program strategy to focus efforts on tackling the underlying patterns of exploitation so that we *prevent* trafficking before it happens and *fundamentally alter* the systems that enable abuse. **Survivors are at the center of this work** — their invaluable partnership remains foundational to our efforts and the field as a whole.

SEX TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE

Pilot Activities in Four Cities

The Sex Trafficking Initiative began in four pilot cities: Boston, Louisville, New Orleans, and San Diego. Working with survivor leaders and community stakeholders, the team is gathering and analyzing local data reflecting on-the-ground realities, expanding safety net resources for potential victims to decrease vulnerability, and supporting criminal justice transformation to protect survivors and enable them to thrive. This work will continue in 2021 and beyond to focus on upstream prevention of sex trafficking.



LABOR TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE

Worker Empowerment Through Information

Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline shows that migrant agricultural workers who come to the United States legally on temporary visas known as H-2As are disproportionately victimized by human traffickers. Polaris’s interactive, mobile-friendly toolkit, developed in 2020, gives these workers the information they need to understand their rights and protect their livelihoods. This Spanish-language resource will be strategically distributed to farmworkers in Mexico and the U.S. throughout 2021.



FINANCIAL SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

Innovative Partnerships to Disrupt Trafficking

In 2020, Polaris launched its Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) with support from PayPal, and began the work of maximizing the potential of the financial industry and anti-money laundering community to make trafficking less profitable and riskier for traffickers. In its first year, the FIU piloted a unique initiative, partnering with survivor leader Megan Lundstrom of the Avery Center to analyze bank records she had kept from the period when she was being trafficked. Together with experts from the anti-money laundering community, Megan and the team found patterns and potential red flags that can help others identify and interrupt trafficking situations — a clear example of how survivor insight and expertise can enable financial institutions to be the best possible partners in ending trafficking.



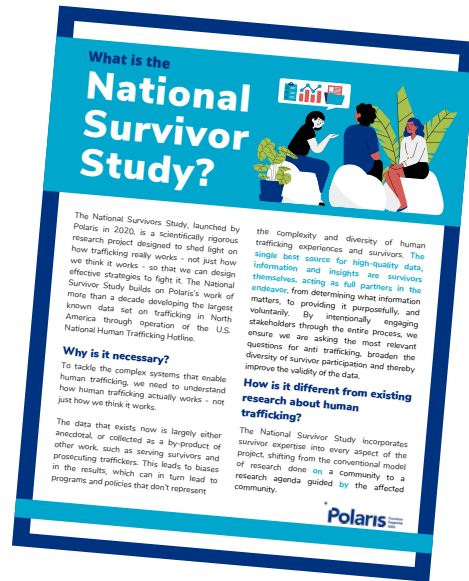
PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Polaris Is Leading a Data-Driven Movement

After building and sharing the largest known data set on trafficking in North America through the Trafficking Hotline, Polaris kicked off a first-of-its-kind research project in full partnership with survivors.

National Survivor Study

Launched in 2020, this project will illuminate how trafficking really works so we can sharpen the tools to end it. Unlike traditional research studies done on a community, this scientifically rigorous study aims to build survivors' power, created and carried out *with* survivors to determine what information matters. Flipping disparate power dynamics between survivors and the research process, Polaris has engaged diverse communities and will use a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative, to survey 500-1,000 survivors. The first findings are expected in early 2022.



20th Anniversary of The Trafficking Victims Protection Act – October 28, 2020

The first Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was signed into law in October 2000 and codified human trafficking as a crime in the United States. Since then, it has been updated and strengthened every few years to reflect a growing understanding of the trafficking landscape in the United States and globally, and to meet the shifting needs of victims, survivors, law enforcement, and those working to prevent trafficking before it happens. Polaris has been at the table for every reauthorization, leading efforts to coordinate partners, engage bipartisan champions, and further collective goals.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Polaris Is Furthering Frontline Response

From COVID-19 adaptations to future planning, Polaris continues to meet new milestones in its operation of the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Trafficking Hotline Award and Statistics

In September 2020, Polaris was awarded a five-year cooperative agreement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to continue operating the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Polaris conceived of the Trafficking Hotline and has run it since 2007, providing a victim-centered, trauma-informed response to the needs of victims and survivors, and taking reports of possible trafficking situations from third parties.

In 2020, Polaris assisted thousands of victims, survivors, and their supporters through the Trafficking Hotline:

66,484 substantive contacts to the Trafficking Hotline

3,825 trafficking victims and survivors contacted the Trafficking Hotline directly*



The Trafficking Hotline is available 24/7 by phone, text, email, webchat, and webform.

**May be multiple contacts from an individual*

10,583 trafficking situations identified

Sex Trafficking	7,648
Labor Trafficking	1,052
Sex Trafficking and Labor Trafficking	334
Other/Not-Specified Trafficking	1,549

Trafficking Hotline and Weathering the Storm of Disinformation

COVID-19 was not the only unprecedented challenge Polaris faced in 2020. In July, rumors and well-meaning tips about children being shipped into trafficking situations in Wayfair cabinets began flooding into the Trafficking Hotline, diverting valuable time from actionable contacts. The Polaris team kicked into action, first publishing as much information as possible about how human trafficking in general, and child sex trafficking in particular, actually happens. We worked with other anti-trafficking organizations to equip them to answer questions and defend their work as necessary. And we dove deeply into the rumor mill, partnering with leading cybersecurity experts to understand how these rumors started, how they spread, and how to protect the work of anti-trafficking organizations from bad actors who continue to use human trafficking as a tool to spark extremism.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Steps Toward Freedom

6 *Survivor Story* Labor Trafficking

Elias,* a worker on an H-2A visa, called the Trafficking Hotline to report threats, abuse, and rampant COVID-19 infections at an Indiana farm. He described threats of deportation and workers forced to put in anywhere from 12 to 22 hours a day, often without breaks. He and his colleagues had sleep deprivation and heat exhaustion, placing them at higher risk for accidents on the job. Elias reported that more than 100 workers shared a residence, leaving them unable to maintain safe distance during the pandemic. Many were infected but were still forced to work and were not allowed to seek medical help.

After several years of working at this farm, Elias was fed up with the treatment, especially in the midst of a pandemic. During the call, Polaris staff connected him with local legal services to help him safely exit his situation and pursue his choice to return to Mexico.

6 *Survivor Story* Sex Trafficking

Jennifer* met her trafficker through a mutual friend. Offering a new job, the trafficker convinced her to relocate to another state and bought her a plane ticket. Once she was there, he started advertising her on various websites and through texts, controlling everything and pretending to be Jennifer while making arrangements with sex buyers. If she didn't earn a specific amount of money, he would physically assault her.

One day while they were getting gas, Jennifer managed to run to a nearby convenience store and call 911 for help. She was taken to a hospital, where she and a case manager called the Trafficking Hotline together. The Polaris team helped Jennifer return to her home state, connected her to local counseling resources, and supported her to report to law enforcement.

**Names and certain details have been changed to protect anonymity.*

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthening the Safety Net

Polaris continues to deepen philanthropic and programmatic corporate partnerships with companies that share our vision for a world free from sex and labor trafficking. The struggles that came with surviving a global pandemic tested that vision more in 2020 than in any previous year. Vulnerable communities found themselves at even greater risk of experiencing exploitation, and trafficked people had fewer avenues for escape. At the same time, services and transportation for trafficking survivors — particularly emergency shelter — became even more difficult to find.

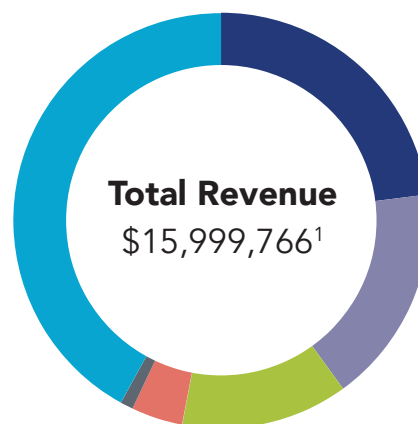
The already-stretched national safety net threatened to break, but Polaris’s corporate partners stepped up to ensure that wouldn’t happen despite grappling with economic disruptions themselves. Whether it was hotel points to book rooms for emergency shelter, rideshare vouchers to access treatment or basic services, or airline miles and ticketing to travel home after leaving a trafficker, in-kind donations from hospitality and transportation companies were critical to ensuring trafficking victims and survivors received the support they needed during an especially desperate time.



Financial Summary – 2020

REVENUE

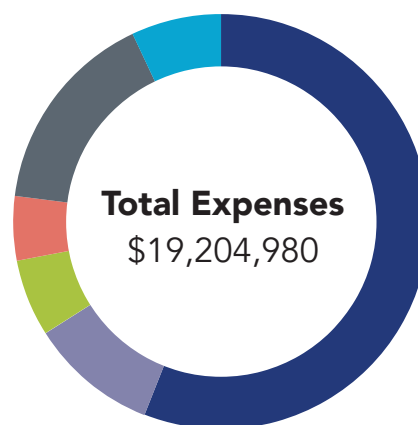
Government Grants (23%)	\$3,700,372
Individual Donations (17%)	\$2,774,614
Private Foundations (13%)	\$2,077,585
Corporate Donations (4%)	\$624,921
Donated Goods (1%)	\$192,923
Other Income (0%)	\$53,069
Pro-Bono Services (41%)	\$6,576,282



¹ Does not include \$4.03 million in funds released from restrictions

EXPENSES

National Hotline (57%)	\$10,912,123 ²
Other Programs (10%)	\$1,884,501
Strategic Initiative – Labor Trafficking (6%)	\$1,199,203
Learning, Innovation and Data Systems (5%)	\$946,641
Administration (16%)	\$2,989,942
Fundraising (7%)	\$1,272,570



² Includes \$6.34 million of in-kind support

ENDING NET ASSETS \$4,403,548

Note: These financials are pending audit completion and Board approval.

About Polaris

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Catherine Chen, *Chief Executive Officer*
Caren Benjamin, *Chief Communications Officer*
Jen Jinks, *Chief Strategy and Impact Officer*
Patrick McIntyre, *Chief Development Officer*
Michelle Nicholson, *Chief People Officer*
Anjana Rajan, *Chief Technology Officer*
Alfonso Wright, *Chief Financial Officer*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gregory L. Moore, *Chairperson*
Frederick Reynolds, *Secretary*
Jean Gilbert, *Treasurer*
Roy L. Austin, Jr.
Lisa Benenson
Susan Coppedge
Boris Gartner
Tanya Gould
Angel Nguyen Swift

U.S. NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE



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