



Rate That Rescue

A community resource for sex work, where everyone can add and review organizations that provide services that sex workers use.

Like Yelp for sex work.

Problems with the growing Rescue Industry

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing assistance to sex workers are primarily focused on human trafficking in the sex industry, to the detriment of victims of trafficking in other labor markets. The rescue industry's prurient emphasis on sexual exploitation isn't only leaving out victims of labor abuse in other industries, it's actively ignoring the very real needs of individuals in the sex industry, whether or not they wish to leave it.

This emphasis, unfortunately, is big business — a recent report indicates that the 50 most prominent rescue organizations in the United States command over half a billion dollars per year. A sensationalist narrative of salvation and shocking figures keep many of these organizations funded, giving them no incentive to distinguish between those who choose to work in commercial sex and actual victims of coercion.

It is unsurprising to see survivor accounts fall apart under closer scrutiny when so many organizations purporting to offer aid require sex workers to sing and dance for their suppers.

These NGOs operate without significant oversight. Many of them are run by religious organizations and groups that place morality over labor and human rights. Few seek to develop harm reduction policies and practices. Only a handful are led by sex workers, or seek the advice of individuals with experience in the sex industry.

10 Questions to ask a Rescue Organization

So you are about to be “rescued” from prostitution? Or perhaps you need some help with a specific issue and want to find a Sex Work/Sex Worker positive Rescue Organization to give you advice or support of some kind. Regardless of how you got to this point, its important to make sure you have some questions answered before you get whisked away and into more trouble than bargained for. Here are 10 questions you should ask a Rescue Organization before you take the leap.

1. Is this rescue organization legitimate?

There is nothing wrong with asking for some sort of proof that the people who are in front of you are who they say they are and they should be able to prove it. Don't be afraid to ask for Identification, credentials and references - especially if you are meeting them as a result of being in a “crisis” situation where law enforcement is involved.

Be especially wary of Organizations who don't post contact information on their website. Any legitimate organization who is sex work/sex worker positive will have local phone numbers and an address posted on their website. Many post a phone number that is a “National Human Trafficking Hotline” and this number is used to report crime and is associated with local, state and federal law enforcement. If you call this number you are essentially calling the cops on yourself.

2. Do they have any “success stories” of other sex workers they have “rescued”?

Don't be surprised if they either don't have anyone you can talk to or if the person they do connect you with is only recently “rescued” as well. Many of these organizations used

recently acquired "victims" who have not been with them very long to talk others into "joining" - borrowing techniques from "traffickers and recruiters" like they describe in their anti-trafficking rhetoric.

Many organizations recruit former sex workers (labeled as "survivors" or "victims") to assist in their recruitment efforts. They may or may not be able to help you with specific issues but be aware that they have been recruited for the purpose of "saving" you from sex work. A good indicator of how much help they will be is if they LISTEN to what you have to say. If they talk more than they listen - they are probably not going to be of much help as they are not likely to discover what your needs are since they are too busy talking.

3. Are they promising to help you with legal issues?

A rescue organization that promises legal representation may NOT be offering you a lawyer - they may be offering you a caseworker. A caseworker cannot represent you in court and they cannot make deals with court officials. They also may not be offering the right kind of legal representation you need. Criminal, Civil, Immigration and Family Court Cases are all very different and require a lawyer with specialized skills and experience.

4. Do they offer residential support?

Many rescue organizations provide housing or "access to housing" but make sure you know exactly what kind of housing they are providing before you commit. "Access to housing" may be assistance with finding a single family home or an apartment but it also might be a residential group home where you will be living with other people you don't know. Adult residential facilities are not always supervised with the

residents safety in mind. They can also be tied to community based programs and faith based programs where the requirements are to "join". The most common complaint we hear is when there is a promise made to "help you get you own place" but the reality is a "program" requiring you to jump through hoop after hoop in order to receive what you may or may not have been able to get for yourself. Be especially wary of what is commonly referred to as a "safe house".

5. Do they offer NON-residential support?

Should you not need or desire residential assistance or support or if you have needs that do not require a housing component, there are many resources that you may be interested in. For example - if you need legal representation and they claim to offer it - you should not have to participate in other areas of support they offer if you do not want or need it. A Sex Work/Sex Worker Positive organization will have no problem with you picking and choosing the services you want or need without insisting that you subscribe to ALL of their services.

5. Will they respect your personal faith and/or ideology?

Your personal faith or ideology should be respected by any organization that offers assistance in the form of services. In fact - the subject of what you believe or don't believe shouldn't even come up if they sincerely want to help you achieve a goal. Very often - particularly with faith-based rescue organizations - faith and ideology is the first thing they will work towards controlling.

6. How do they provide services?

Organizations who are sex work or sex worker positive will work to help you achieve YOUR goals...not THEIR goals. They will move at your pace and they will encourage you to facilitate your own care plan.

Organizations who are not sex work or sex worker positive will insist that you participate in their path to a set of goals they set for you.

7. Is the organization sex work/sex worker positive?

An organization is sex work/sex worker positive when they are more concerned about WHO YOU ARE rather than WHAT YOU DO. They will provide you with health and safety information. This includes keeping you safe by helping you to NOT get arrested. If you need assistance of any sort and they will only help you if you cease to be a sex worker, they are NOT a sex work/sex worker positive organization.

8. What steps do they take to protect and respect your privacy?

A legitimate organization will not share your personal information with anyone without receiving written permission from you. They will not ask you to "tell your story". They will not create videos or documents that identify you as a sex industry worker (present or former) or ask you to "go public" about how they assisted or supported you. If you choose to endorse an organization and create any documents or videos or podcasts Rate That Rescue encourages you to create them YOURSELF, retain the copyrights to any documents, videos or podcasts and retain control of distribution.

9. Will they help me find alternative paid work within 3 months? (Job market permitting)

You may find you need a break from the industry and if that's the case, you may need assistance finding suitable employment. You may need help with job training or school and if someone is promising you "rescue", they should already have that in mind. If a legal issue or custody issue is the primary reason for taking a permanent or temporary break, you will want to work at a job that meets your needs financially.

10. Are they willing to provide you with written documentation about what they are promising?

Once you and the rescue organization agree on what they will provide - you need them to put it in writing and it should be dated and signed. Make sure that you are provided with a copy of the signed agreement or contract.

10 Questions before SUPPORTING a Human Trafficking organization

Human Trafficking is a "hot topic" in the social justice arena, and you'd have to have been living under a rock to not have heard some pretty incredible things about how you can join and "Fight Human Trafficking". If you thinking about endorsing or supporting an organization or cause, we hope you will take a minute to research it, and make sure you are giving your support that falls in line with your vision of a better world.

Or maybe you are an ordinary person who is horrified at the idea of monetized sexual services? Perhaps you were suddenly alerted to the subject of human trafficking at your church, on TV, or in a movie, and want to donate your time, talent, or treasure, to help someone who has fallen victim to this dreaded social disease.

In any of the above cases, you probably "just want to help" and you have the best of intentions. But before you write that check, hand out those flyers, or march in that rally, get to know the real people behind the organization you want to support and ask a few questions about what they really do with your money or your time.

1. Is this organization really fighting human trafficking?

Human trafficking is often confused with human smuggling. These are very complex crimes and its important to know the difference. Human smuggling is generally *with the consent* of the person(s) being smuggled, who often pay large sums of money. The vast majority of people who are assisted in illegally entering the United States are smuggled, rather than trafficked. While they can often become victims of other crimes because of their illegal status and the reasons they

chose to be smuggled, *it is not the same thing* as human trafficking.

Human trafficking is the *exploitation of people through force, coercion, threat, and deception* and includes human rights abuses such as debt bondage, deprivation of liberty, and lack of control over freedom and labor. Trafficking can be for purposes of sexual exploitation or labor exploitation.

This is where it gets tricky.

Unlike smuggling, *which is often a criminal commercial transaction between two willing parties who go their separate ways once their business is complete*, trafficking specifically targets the trafficked person as an object of criminal exploitation. The purpose *from the beginning of the trafficking enterprise is to profit from the exploitation of the victim*.

2. Is this organization legitimate?

Ask for identification and documentation that the person you are talking with is actually working on a human trafficking issue, and not just lining their pockets with your money. A legitimate organization will be transparent and know their own numbers. In the U.S., you can always ask to see the previous years' 990 IRS form. If they refuse allowing you access to this information voluntarily - simply don't support them. But you can also view their organizations information on Guidestar, Charity Navigator and Charity Check. Keep in mind that many charitable organizations "do business as" another organization, particularly faith-based projects and sub-organizations. Rate That Rescue finds it disturbing that faith based organizations have so little oversight and requirements for transparency.

3. What kind of work does this organization do regarding human trafficking?

All organizations have a mission statement that outlines what their intention is. But these mission statements are usually a broad interpretation of what the NGO would do if it had your money. It is a "wish list" of sorts. There are several types of NGO's (non-governmental organizations) on the broad subject of human trafficking.

Raising Awareness

There are a great many organizations that are furiously raising money to "raise awareness" about the plight of trafficking victims. They get in front of whatever microphone that is available and tell story after story about different victims and survivors. Then, they humbly ask for money so they can get to the next microphone and "raise more awareness." The money you donate to these organizations does not serve the needs of victims and Rate That Rescue does not recommend donating time talent or treasure to organizations that are only "raising awareness".

Advocacy

There are different kinds of advocacy, and diverse communities and groups understand advocacy in different ways, but advocacy in all forms shares some core beliefs. *An advocate should respect the views and wishes of the person they advocate for, without judgement, and believes in their right to access information, representation, services and opportunities.* Although some advocates may be legally or medically qualified, in general, advocates are volunteers or paid workers who have been trained by the project or group they are part of. You can expect an advocate to have been given

training in listening and negotiating skills. They should also have knowledge of the basic legal framework and provision of mental health and community care services.

Advocacy within the anti-trafficking community can have an even broader scope. Rate That Rescue recommends that you find out what the organization (or in some cases, and individual) advocates for and what specific steps they take to serve the client or group of clients.

Coalitions and Task-Forces

Coalitions and Task-Forces are networks of organizations that are claiming to serve the needs of trafficking victims, but who are not actually having any direct impact on victims and survivors at all. They are a collection of different kinds of organizations that do a variety of things. They usually include law enforcement, social services, and a variety of community based organizations.

They are supposed to be conduits (meaning they refer victims and survivors) to other organizations that are *in theory* supposed to provide specific services to a targeted population, but *in reality* these referrals end up "falling through the cracks" and receive nothing.

Sometimes local task-forces and coalitions will become funded in all or in part by larger coalitions and task-forces. The higher up the chain you go, the less effective these organizations become, and it is within these larger more diverse organizations where the large majority of gender based violence and abuse occurs. Rate That Rescue has determined that the large majority of coalitions and task-forces are not

an effective use of your time, money or talent and we discourage you from donating to them.

Faith-based ministries, coalitions, and task-forces

There are many organizations that are church-funded as ministries, coalitions and task-forces. They may be a part of an individual church or a coalition of many churches, and may sometimes include other law enforcement organizations and even some social services.

The level of involvement in church-related human trafficking efforts is alarming because they are so difficult to track, both in financial transparency as well as service related accountability. Additionally, the services they do provide are largely "spiritual" and require complete immersion in a belief system that may or may not fall in line with their targeted demographic of client base. They are very exclusive as to who they will provide services to and the strings attached to their provision of services to victims and survivors require submission to their belief system in order to receive what they need.

Faith-based ministries can also have a high rate of sexual and gender based violence and abuse, so if you are intent on giving to this type of charitable organization, Rate That Rescue would encourage you to keep a close eye on their activities and try to ensure that only the most transparent and all-inclusive faith-based organizations receive your donations.

Media-based organizations

One of the latest trends in the human trafficking genre of NGO's is media-based projects that produce films about human trafficking, specifically within the sex trade, as it has

the most salacious and marketable type of material. They often recruit a celebrity or two and then follow them - sometimes with the cooperation of a leader of an NGO - around for a couple of weeks to document the work being done at "ground level".

These "documentaries" are usually slanted to ensure that the viewer gets whatever point the production company wants to portray. Much of the production ideas and costs are borne by the larger organizations, coalitions and task forces we discussed earlier. Rate That Rescue does not recommend donating to these type of productions without investigating exactly what viewpoints they are trying to put forth.

Paramilitary raid and rescue organizations

A paramilitary organization is a group of people usually made up of former military, law enforcement private investigators who band together and its a pretty exciting story these organizations propagate. They claim to "investigate, rescue and restore" victims of human trafficking", but they have a very poor history at having any positive real impact on the communities they invade. In fact, they usually make things much worse.

They often cite different levels of local, state, federal and international law enforcement and justice systems that they have partnered with and they insist that they have necessary follow-up services "all set up" but they rarely do. Rate That Rescue does not recommend supporting organizations that do not distinguish between consensual sex work and sex trafficking.

Anti-sex work organizations

Some organizations are nothing more than anti-sex work organizations that are only concerned with eliminating prostitution in any form in their community or even world-wide. Some make vehement claims that they are really only concerned with child sex trafficking and some that argue that all forms of prostitution are sex trafficking. It's important to distinguish the difference between sex work, prostitution and sex trafficking.

Don't be alarmed if you didn't know there was a distinction. The tendency to treat trafficking and prostitution as if they were the same thing has a long and problematic history. Legislation and social discussion have often blurred the lines or even denied any difference, but that has always made things worse rather than better for those involved.

4. What is the difference between sex work, prostitution and sex trafficking?

The trafficking of women and children into sexual slavery is undeniably a gross abuse of human rights. It involves coercion or trickery or both. Sex trafficking is an odious form of trafficking, but it is far from the only one. Men, women and children are also — *and more commonly* — trafficked routinely for purposes of household and farm labor as well as sweatshop manufacturing. Those who are trafficked for the purposes of labor trafficking are not as popular to cover within the media as than those of sex trafficking victims, but they are no less brutal, dangerous and degraded.

A narrow focus on the single aspect of sex trafficking is often fueled by sensationalist and sometimes salacious accounts of sexual abuse. It leads us to ignore these other forms of

trafficking, and so denies help and protection to all the men, women and children forced into and trapped in abusive working situations in other industries.

Sex workers include men and women and transgender persons who offer sexual services in exchange for money. The services may include prostitution (sexual intercourse) and other services such as phone sex, stripping, escorting or pornography. Sex workers engage in this for many reasons, but the key distinction here is that they do it voluntarily. They are not coerced or tricked into staying in the business but have chosen this from among options available to them.

Law enforcement raids targeting sex workers in the U.S. and abroad have led to little success identifying trafficked persons but instead have driven sex work underground. This exposes sex workers to an increased risk of violence and denies them any protection of laws against assault or access to medical, legal and educational services. *It denies them their human rights.*

You can read more about the difference between sex trafficking and sex work from a variety of perspectives on our resources page and we encourage you to do so! We want your donation of time, talent or treasure to be effective and it is only effective if you have all the information.

5. Who is in charge of the organization?

The people in charge of non-governmental organizations are usually high-profile people with an agenda. Knowing who the executive director is usually an easy person to identify, but be sure you ask questions about the board of directors and how they pick their projects. You can also get a great deal of

information by talking to other people who volunteer for an organization.

6. What affiliations or alliances do they have with other organizations?

Organizations affiliate and align with other organizations when it suits their purpose. By definition, an affiliation or an alliance is a formal agreement for two or more group to work together towards a specific goal.

It is important to know who the organization you are interested in supporting aligns or affiliates themselves with and it should be a mutual affiliation or alliance. If there is not a "Memorandum of Understanding" (MOU), the stated affiliation is not real. It is nothing more than a link on a website.

Partners on the other hand is definitive in meaning they support (or are supported by) the other partner financially. When you volunteer or donate to an organization, you are, in effect, partnering with that organization and you are stating that you publicly support all their activities and methodologies. If they do something that you do not agree with intellectually or philosophically, you should not support them by donating or volunteering with them.

7. How do they receive financial funding for their projects? And more importantly - how do they spend it?

Organizations receive funding through a variety of means. They can hold events and fundraisers, solicit donations through email or on their website. They can access government, educational and private corporate grants if their mission qualifies.

There are broad guidelines to the spending of donations raised through any means other than grants and there is little tangible evidence that a large part of this revenue actually benefits victims and/or survivors. You can request documentation about how they spend the money but Rate That Rescue encourages you to request visible evidence of stated services of support.

8. Do they provide direct services to victims and survivors?

Services are the most difficult portion of NGO's operations and it is often based on availability but it is by far the most desperately lacking. The difficulty in providing the basic human needs of housing, clothing, food, transportation and advocacy are what drives some organizations to affiliate, align and partner with others.

There is often a breakdown in the process of a larger organization promising services and the smaller organization lacking the funding or resources to provide said services.

While there should be a fundamental practice in place to financially make provision for the larger organization to ensure the direct service is correctly managed, there is not currently a set of practices in place.

Direct services are basic human needs such as shelter, clothing, food, and can be expanded to include transportation and education and information about a variety of subjects including health and safety, life and employment skills, or even formal education for a degree or a trade. The provision of direct services should be granted for humanitarian reasons without requirements for "joining" or "believing" as the primary goal.

Indirect services mean the organization is "farming out" the direct services to a smaller NGO or individual that may or may not follow through with implementation of the task. Rate That Rescue recommends donating money and time to direct service organizations as they are more likely to be capable of determining how best to provide services to individuals and there is a greater likelihood the services will have an impact. You will want to be sure their direct service organization actually has the resources and the manpower to follow through with your financial contribution.

9. Are they ethical in their activities and are they following all required laws, including tax laws?

What is "legal" and what is "ethical" are often two separate things. The Code of Ethics and Conduct for NGOs is a set of fundamental principles, operational principles, and standards to guide the actions and management of non-governmental organizations.

Ethics in non-governmental organizations standards are applicable regardless of an NGO's focus, whether it be humanitarian relief, advocacy, conflict prevention, research, education, human rights monitoring, health care, environmental action, and so forth. It should mean they treat others in the organization and the clients they seek to serve with respect and dignity as this is the gold human rights standard. A few of these ideals taken from The Code of Ethics and Conducts for NGO's are:

- Responsibly maintaining itself, an NGO should conduct its activities for the sake of others, whether for the public at large or a particular segment of the public.

- **Public money must not be misused for selfish purposes** and all public assets are to be treated with utmost seriousness, as a public trust.
- An NGO should recognize that its conduct and activities impact on the public's perception of NGOs and that it shares responsibility for the public's trust of NGOs.
- An NGO should be **willing to work beyond borders of politics, religion, culture, race and ethnicity**, within the limits of the organizing documents and with organizations and individuals that share common values and objectives.
- An NGO **should not violate any person's fundamental human rights, with which each person is endowed.**
- An NGO should recognize that all people are born free and equal in dignity.
- An NGO should be sensitive to the moral values, religion, customs, traditions, and culture of the communities they serve.
- An NGO should respect the integrity of families and support family-based life.
- An NGO should be transparent in all of its dealings with the government, the public, donors, partners, beneficiaries, and other interested parties, except for personnel matters and proprietary information.
- An NGO's basic financial information, governance structure, activities, and listing of officers and partnerships shall be open and accessible to public scrutiny and the NGO is to make effort to inform the public about its work and the origin and use of its resources.
- An NGO should be accountable for its actions and decisions, not only to its funding agencies and the government, but also to the people it serves, its staff

and members, partner organizations, and the public at large.

- An NGO should take prompt corrective action whenever wrongdoing is discovered among its staff, governing body, volunteers, contractors, and partners.
- **Percentage of expenditures** - The organization shall spend at least 65% of its total expenditures (including fundraising costs) on program activities, and ideally more than 80%.
- The organization is not to be part of, or controlled by, government or an intergovernmental agency.
- The organization shall maintain independence and not be rigidly aligned or affiliated with any political party. By itself, being non-governmental does not mean that an NGO is prohibited from political activity, although certain types of NGOs may be proscribed by their nations from political and legislative activity, such as tax-exempt organizations in the United States, which are prohibited from participating or intervening to any substantial extent in attempts to influence legislation or participating in political campaigns to support or oppose any candidate(s) for political office. However, an NGO that is permitted to do political and legislative activity shall only engage within the limit of its mission and stated objectives.
- The organization shall not act as an instrument of government foreign policy, but act independently of governments. The NGO shall not seek to implement the policy of any government, unless it coincides with the mission of the organization and the organization's own independent policy.

10. Has anyone complained about any kind of harassment or sexual violence or abuse - particularly gender based harassment, violence or abuse?

Ask around about this subject and how it relates to the NGO you are considering supporting. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest this takes place a lot more often than you would think (or hope) because the very subject of sex is inflammatory - particularly in the US. If you hear of a complaint regarding abuse, it is worth further investigation. If you find it to be true, we encourage you to report it.

Rate That Rescue recommends that you only support organizations who you would accept services from if you were in need of such services. Do not donate time, talent or treasure to organizations who violate the human rights of other people through their provision of rescue by the very same methods of force, fraud and coercion that anti-trafficking organizations claim to fight.

To that end, Rate That Rescue encourages donations to human rights organizations and sex worker positive organizations who provide direct services for housing, food, clothing, legal advocacy of all types and education and information.