

“Collaboration Leads to Success”
Human Trafficking Case Study, Immokalee, FL
Justice for Victims
Written Transcript

Matthew J. Gallagher (Victim Witness Coordinator, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice):

Really just since the eighties there’s been a shift in the criminal justice system to do more victim-centered prosecutions and to really look at the needs of the victim and not just putting the bad guy behind bars.

Susan French (Trial Attorney, Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice):

Ultimately the successful prosecution is going to depend on whether or not you have a victim who feels safe and feels that he or she can trust you and that you have in some way heard his or her needs and met them.

Matthew J. Gallagher:

(voiceover) The Navarrete case is a good example of a case where a collaborative approach between law enforcement and victim services served victims well and improved prosecution outcomes.

Anthony Mullen (Special Agent, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):

In late November of 2007, allegations came forward that members of the Navarrete family were mistreating the workers that they employed in the fields in the Immokalee, Florida area.

“Luis” (Trafficking Victim):

(translated in English voiceover from Spanish) He would say, “I’m gonna pay you, I’m gonna pay you,” but he never did. Later he began threatening us, saying if we went with other people he would kill us.

Laura Germino (Anti-Slavery Campaign Coordinator, Coalition of Immokalee Workers):

We’ve dealt with a lot of violent human trafficking operations but this case reached a new level for us of physical restraint where workers were actually chained to posts, beaten, locked in at night...

(Phone ringing)

Marisol Schloendorn (Victim Advocate, Collier County Sheriff’s Department):

(Picks up phone) Human Trafficking Unit. How can I help you?

Antoinette Aqai (Former Victim Witness Specialist, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice):

(voiceover) The Collier County Sheriff's Office, through its task force membership, knew what to look for. The task force was instrumental in ensuring that the victims were discovered.

Charles Frost (Inspector, Human Trafficking Unit, Collier County Sheriff's Office):

I believe we were called out at about 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night and here we are at 3, 4 in the morning, and now we have four potential victims. We tap into local area providers who are able to assist us in clothing, feeding, and care for the victims. We knew who was responsible for what, and each person did what they were needed to do. That was important.

Antoinette Aqui:

The substance abuse issues were very problematic because the victims were unable to really, clearly, focus.

Douglas Molloy (Chief AUSA, Ft. Meyers Division, Middle District of Florida, U.S. Attorney's Office):

The victims were kept pretty well medicated in terms of the use of alcohol. They'd give 'em alcohol in the fields, they'd give 'em a big jug of malt liquor in the morning. It was an incredibly cynical operation. They were – you know – pretty much treated as throw-away people.

Cristobal Perez (Former Case Manager, Florida Freedom Partnership):

Some of them were shaking pretty badly, sweating, having stomach problems, so they needed to go to the E.R. room immediately. We had an in-house mental health counselor and he was also able to help them calm down and understand what we were there for and how we were going to help them out.

Antoinette Aqui:

The mental health and medical issues needed to be addressed prior to looking at the investigation. We really had to stabilize the victims.

Marie L. Martinez (Section Chief, Victim Assistance Program, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):

These cases are really dependent on the victim who is also, of course, a witness. And without the power of their statements about their victimization, it's very difficult to successfully prosecute these cases.

Marisol Schloendorn:

It took a lot of trust; it took a lot of talking to them and them getting to know us in order for them to tell us everything. It all didn't come out in one interview. There were several interviews to get all the information out of them.

Marie L. Martinez:

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act affords immigration relief for crime victims, and trafficking victims in particular have rights in this country, access to services and both temporary and long-term immigration relief in the form of Continued Presence and T-visas.

“Luis”:

(translated in English voiceover from Spanish) I didn't know that there was help, but now I do know that there is a lot that can help us no matter whether you are legal or illegal.

Ana Isabel Vallejo (Supervising Attorney, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center):

Most of the victims in this case were undocumented and had no permission to stay here, so they were at risk of being deported had they not had the ability to get the Continued Presence and the permission to remain in the country. One of the most empowering parts of this process for the victim is to see justice and to hear that their cases are being investigated and that somebody believes them, that this has happened to them.

Antoinette Aqui:

One of my main roles was to serve as that bridge between law enforcement and the N.G.O.s. That created a seamless operation, allowed us to really work together very collaboratively.

Susan French:

We could not have put the case together sitting in Washington, D.C. without the work of the N.G.O.s and the local sheriff's department that were there for the victims day after day.

Marisol Schloendorn:

I think a lot of them couldn't believe that the government's actually helping them and law enforcement's here to help 'em and I'm sure to them it was like a miracle that someone got 'em out of their situation and believed what they had to say about the beatings and the abuse that they were going through.

Matthew J. Gallagher:

We're a critical part of that because we are facilitating the victims' trust of the U.S. Government and the criminal justice system. It's really important to put the bad guy behind bars, but we also need to prioritize the needs of the victim.

Hillary Axam (Acting Director, Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice):

The law gives the victims rights and a role, but those rights don't mean much unless the victim really understands them and has access to them, and the victim-witness staff are

key to actually communicating those rights and making them real and allowing the victims to be in a position to exercise them.

Douglas Molloy:

When you have a victims' advocate person involved, you don't lose. They're not just an important part—they're a necessary part of the work that you're doing.