In 2000, the United States, along with the majority of countries around the world, declared “human trafficking” a transnational crime. Prior to 2000, practices that are now understood as human trafficking included forced prostitution, forced migration, or were categorized as other crimes. Drawing from the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), states passed legislation to bolster prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership efforts (4Ps). Colorado’s anti-trafficking movement emerged in 2005, with non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and coalitions documenting hundreds of cases.

What would it take to end human trafficking in Colorado?

Since 2005, the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) has endeavored to answer that question more effectively while advancing anti-trafficking efforts across the state. With an array of partners - survivors, advocates, law enforcement, and practitioners – we developed methods to measure Colorado’s progress in addressing human trafficking. The Colorado Project to Comprehensively Combat Human Trafficking 2.0 (CP2.0) is a summary of anti-trafficking efforts across the state of Colorado as of 2018. CP2.0 builds from the original research conducted from 2010-2013 (our baseline assessment). For more information on CP2.0, please see LCHT’s Report and Action plan at combathumantrafficking.org/coloradoproject

Colorado communities differ in their characteristics, strengths, gaps, and opportunities; these regional differences led researchers to create demographic profiles as tools for communities seeking more specific recommendations based on data collected during CP2.0. The aim of these regional profiles is to provide specialized feedback on combating human trafficking in seven regions across the state. These regions, defined by LCHT, are geographic areas grouped by judicial district and county, with a review of industries, population demographics, and the physical landscape that influence the root causes and vulnerabilities to trafficking. Direct quotes from study participants are included below that pertain to this region.

Region 4: Population and Geography

El Paso County, home to Colorado Springs, is an economically diverse, thriving, and growing region of Colorado. The county is home to nearly 675,000 residents, a large military base, several universities and colleges, as well as a population that identifies as nearly 85% white. The Colorado Springs municipal airport is the second busiest in the state and major interstate highways cross the county. Colorado Springs is known for its natural beauty and, according to visit Colorado Springs, the Pikes Peak region attracts over 23 million visitors per year. Tourism is the third largest job provider in the region. Colorado Springs is also known for the presence of large, national religious congregations and nonprofit organizations.

Human Trafficking in Colorado

A central theme emerges from the CP2.0 research: trafficking is happening across the state and the problem is worthy of time and attention. Overall, participants note that there is little agreement on the root causes of trafficking. Communities do not share the same definitions or understanding of trafficking, and participants worry that average citizens may not have the tools to identify the signs of trafficking. Colorado’s legislation, updated in
2014 with House Bill 14-1273, highlighted force, fraud or coercion as the definition of trafficking. Overwhelmingly, Coloradans believe human trafficking to be sex trafficking; however, our current research shows that we are beginning to characterize nuances to include labor trafficking descriptions.

In Colorado, adults and children, foreign-nationals and US citizens, men and women, have all been identified as victims. Colorado sits at a geographic crossroads and is accessible via an international airport and by two major interstates. Denver and Colorado Springs have a disproportionately large number of youth experiencing homelessness compared to other urban centers. Much of the state is used for agriculture, ranching, and tourism, necessitating seasonal/migrant workers. Such circumstances may result in the exploitation of many particularly vulnerable populations including immigrants on temporary visas, refugees, people experiencing homelessness, and victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence.

Ending human trafficking requires collective action and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders. Focusing collaborative community efforts on root causes will support efforts to decrease trafficking. As the anti-trafficking movement reflects upon 19 years since the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), the crime has expanded and the response has become more sophisticated. The following sections highlight regional characteristics, the vulnerabilities to trafficking, and successes occurring across the 4Ps of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership.

**Trafficking Vulnerabilities/Root Causes**

Participants believe that human trafficking decreases in Colorado communities when agencies that provide resources understand the unique circumstances facing their local communities. Participants’ responses emphasize that point, “I think that to truly be more effective, you have to be very locally grounded and understand what’s happening in the different communities.” Additionally, another participant noted, “Every community is very different, and so, how each community handles an incident of human trafficking is going to be unique to that community.”

The realities of human trafficking are challenging for all communities to recognize and address throughout the nation. Rural communities in Colorado have particular challenges regarding human trafficking. These challenges come as a result of factors such as geographical isolation, interstate transportation routes, industries that hire seasonal workers (like tourism, agriculture, energy, and ranching), lack of economic/employment security, lack of victim resources and support, and a lack of training for front line professionals or law enforcement. Geographical isolation can contribute to a delay in intervention and lack of opportunities to identify human trafficking.

Root causes are preexisting social, cultural, and family conditions that create vulnerability for people to be trafficked such as trauma in the home setting, poverty, homelessness, addiction, violence in the home or local community, lack of education, lack of citizenship status, and marginalization from one’s LGBTQIA identity. We asked communities to describe root causes they believe contribute to human trafficking, and these were responses from Region 4 participants.

The vulnerabilities related to trafficking around Colorado Springs were identified as individuals who are transient or not locally connected in the community. Panhandlers, sales crews, individuals experiencing homelessness, and immigrants or migrants were perceived as being at risk to trafficking. For example, participants noticed trafficking vulnerabilities in sales crews that pop up in the summers and massage parlors that are bringing in women from out of the country. One participant suggests:

> We had a lot of allegations of labor trafficking especially with our sales crews and they tend to come up every summer. We had looked into them year after year and most of our sales crews, at least in Colorado Springs are operating legally. Sometimes in a little bit of a grey legal area. But everything seems to be legal. We did have one case that I thought was very interesting and kind of opened the door to concerns
about how often this is happening, but it was a massage parlor in Colorado Springs that was a Mexican massage parlor. They were bringing girls up through Tucson and Phoenix and they’re bringing them to Colorado Springs. Putting them in the massage parlor, where the money that was paid by the customers would go to the house and the money that the girls could make was only what was made after the doors close. So only what the tip that the customer will provide, what is their role in the actual wage that they were making. And they had to pay a rent to the massage parlor, every day that they work that they rent for their room. They also obviously had to house themselves. But it was kind of combined labor and sex trafficking. And it made me wonder how prevalent that might be. We haven’t seen a cent, but boy, it seemed like a model that could be replicated with some degree of success. So that was an interesting case we had. A combined labor and sex.

Another participant in interviews reinforced the notion that locals are concerned about the prevalence of massage parlors, “There’s still something around 39 massage parlors in Colorado Springs all are basically brothels.” Other participants in the focus groups noted that social media is a problem when it comes to vulnerabilities for human trafficking and prostitution, “I know social media is a huge aspect, teenagers using Tinder, Grindr, various dating apps and Snapchat in Colorado Springs, in El Paso County area is a huge reason why they’re being trafficked and prostituted.” This concern about social media vulnerabilities was most prominent in the Colorado Springs/Pueblo corridor compared to the rest of Colorado.

While social media vulnerabilities and vulnerabilities specific to the perceived density of massage parlors might be specific to this region, participants also described a common root cause we heard from every region in the state: homelessness. Two different participants highlight this concern, “the homelessness out here in Colorado Springs isolated in the vacant buildings, causes a lot of it,” and,

There’s a lot of homelessness, a lot of people living in their cars, there’s a real transient population and we all know that people aging out of foster care and they’re living in this transient lifestyle and they’re the vulnerable ones and so I just wish, I don’t know what that looks like but I wish that we could figure that out.

The constant concern around homelessness seeps through the state. In the Colorado Springs region specifically, median housing costs have risen 19.26% since 2017 (El Paso County Assessor’s Office). A major employer across El Paso county is the United State Air Force and other military installations. There are a large number of bases in this area relative to any other place in the state and participants suggest that the military presence may create vulnerabilities to trafficking. One participant claims, “I would say in El Paso County the large military presence also contributes to the supply and demand end of things.” And another argues,

I think there’s several factors as far as the community, I think we’re on a direct route up to Denver with I-25. I also think, and I know people cringe every time I bring this up, but I think the fact that we have a huge amount of military bases is a big thing.

A different participant connects the massage parlor industry to the military facilities in El Paso county. These concerns appeared to reflect adult trafficking vulnerabilities while other participants were concerned about youth, specifically youth who may have been recruited to join traveling sales crews.

I would say for our community, being kind of tucked up in the mountains there, a lot of the door to door, kids selling magazines, and candy, but you know, it’s kids in high school too who, so. You know it’s
right under their noses, and a lot of it might be denial, they don’t want to see it, but the door to door salespeople are probably the most obvious in our community.

Tourism, hospitality and service-based employment appears to present some level of concern for residents as well.

I believe because the tourism here, and when we have large events like come to the World Arena or even with the – even all the state fairs in Pueblo, the people that stayed here [in Colorado Springs], I think that also contributes to it [trafficking].

Another participant argued that, “We have it so often at this Royal Hotel that the corporate headquarters asked to take their name off of the hotel. It is such a reputation for sex trafficking.” Overall, the significance of tourism to sites like Garden of the Gods, World Arena, and athletic training centers, appeared to present a risk for trafficking.

The Colorado Springs population changes rapidly; many people in the area come and go, especially with the military population. Some participants were concerned about this turnover and noted, “I think the high transiency of our community, we have a lot of people that come and go whether it’s military, even the whole organizations, it’s just a lot who had come through Colorado Springs.” One participant perceives there is a larger amount of people coming to the area from Mexico, Central America and Asian countries, “there could be some but probably some domestic servitude out of homes. People product from Mexico or Central America maybe Asian countries. So I think that’s what we’re seeing in Colorado Springs.” Settling down roots and building networks in a community may increase resilience to trafficking; participants in this research suggest that one kind of vulnerability across the county might be that so many households come and go.

COLORADO SPRINGS CHALLENGES

Need for Awareness, Attention on Labor Trafficking and Housing

A consistent challenge for all communities in Colorado is a denial that human trafficking happens locally. This concern is noted by this participant,

It was happening right in front of us but nobody realized it because I think we’re just weren’t aware that it even existed here in Colorado Springs being that the place has such a strong town feel to it that you would think that well if it’s anywhere it’s got to be in Denver, can’t possibly be here. But there’s hundreds of thousands who still do not know anything about us or human trafficking in Colorado Springs.

Participants noted that there needs to be more talk around the subject of trafficking because the language is not used and instead statements like “commercial sexual exploitation,” are used. For instance,

We don’t really talk about labor trafficking very much, we talk about commercial sexual exploitation and so I think that is a gap that we’re already seeing and trying to get people on board, like [a local agency that works] with unaccompanied refugee minors and having them at the table would be really beneficial.

Similar to other communities across the state there was a concern for the lack of housing. Housing is important for the stability of survivors; a participant comments, “oh my gosh like housing for sure has been an issue and if survivors don’t have a place to live then you’re not really giving them an option to get out of the situation that
they’re in.” The ability to effectively provide services, especially to survivors of trafficking, appears to be an important next step for Colorado Springs.

Regional Resources for Trafficking Survivors

This region boasts two established and long running human trafficking task forces: the Human Trafficking Task Force of Southern Colorado (founded in 2008) and the El Paso County Department of Human Services Task Force. Additionally, the Colorado Springs Police Department has a human trafficking task force made up of members who often interact with the two local task forces and to whom many referrals are made when calls come into the CoNEHT Human Trafficking Hotline, when appropriate. This strong community connection, including a comprehensive group of stakeholders, is an invaluable resource for trafficking survivors as well as community members who want to become more involved in the movement in the Colorado Springs area.

Local resources that may be able to offer support to victims of exploitation or human trafficking (not an exhaustive list):

- TESSA of Colorado Springs
- Sarah’s Home
- Care and Share Food Bank
- Ecumenical Social Ministries
- Connections 4 Life Center
- Whole Balance Health
- Colorado Springs Rescue Mission
- Urban Peak
- Dream Centers
- The Task Force of Southern Colorado has partnered with more than 20 church communities in the area to provide resources for survivors of human trafficking through the Care Portal. This is an online platform designed originally to connect youth in need to the resources they require through donations from community members anonymously. The Colorado Springs community has utilized this platform to do the same for survivors of human trafficking. You can read more about how this platform is utilized in our CP2.0 report.

Last year in 2018, the CoNEHT 24/7 Human Trafficking Hotline received 35 calls from Region 4.

Human Trafficking Response in Region 4

Community responses are driven in part by the ways in which the cause of the crime is framed, availability of local resources, how resources interact with each other, and how communities talk about the innovative work that is successful in their local community. We asked professionals and community members across the state to explain what is working in their communities, as well as to share their ideas for the future.

PREVENTION

Some community members took time to complete statewide training programs aimed at creating comprehensive human trafficking awareness programs. For example,
Now, myself and another team member, we went through the T train-the-trainer, so now we’re providing that type of training in our community. So, that’s helped us because not only can we provide that training, but then we can also talk about it to community members what our, you know, our agency does specifically to help victims of crimes. So, that kind of gets us, you know, in the door as far as if people are identifying this, we tell them the hotlines to call, so we have that direct connection now with the community more than we had before when it came to human trafficking.

Many organizations host or provide information about trafficking; “within our own Zonta Pikes Peak we do a lot of awareness and education in itself and we will have speakers come in throughout the year that speak about trafficking.”

A strong attribute that Colorado Springs has is the human trafficking task force that helps to fill in the missing pieces in regards to resources for survivors. The task force also provides a significant number of trainings along with an annual symposium, “the Colorado Springs partnership hosts annual symposiums, “we’ve had ten symposiums here in Colorado Springs with attendance of about 300-450 people each year.”

PROTECTION

Residents noted that there are a large number of mental health resources for survivors in El Paso county. The service provider community actively adopts trauma-informed practices and has some resources that are specifically provided for survivors of trafficking. For example,

I think that we also have in El Paso county a large amount of a mental health resources that have recently gone through and become more trauma informed. A large majority of my job [protection work - job title redacted] is to connect my clients with resources that will help them and I believe that in this community, and specifically we have a lot of really good mental health people that will assist with survivors.

Another organization noted that,

Restorative care is the long-term relationships with survivors who are matched with trained, accountable mentors here in CO. That’s just for females at this point and once that survivor is matched with a mentor, that mentor has a year minimum commitment with that young woman, but the request is that they remain in relationship for as long as that young woman is willing to be in that space.

Efforts toward mentorship, support, and a commitment to trauma responsiveness are happening throughout the Colorado Springs region.

Service providers in the Colorado Springs area feel that there are many resources out there for human trafficking survivors.

I feel Colorado Springs kind of has a plethora on resources for human trafficking and they seem to come out of here [for a specific agency] or you know talk about restoring a sense but we also have [a housing facility for survivors] and we have a very huge faith-based community that has jumped in and recently we’ve also just started using the Care Portal, which is a portal that DHS used to help needs of foster fields like specific needs and they just expanded that to, for us as service providers we only use that for human trafficking victims.
This Care Portal, highlighted in CP2.0 as an innovative community solution, is a way for community members to provide much needed essentials to an individual coming out of risky or dangerous situation.

PROSECUTION

Colorado Springs spent time, money, and resources to train officers and other law enforcement team members about human trafficking. “So about 4 years ago I think Colorado Springs police department created their own human trafficking little division, much like they have in Denver.” They deemed this a valuable endeavor,

I think because in our state right now, there’s not a lot of law enforcement victim advocacy involvement in these cases. Our organization has, I think it might be the only one or one of the few investigative units that solely for the purpose, it was formed solely for the purpose of investigating human trafficking cases. And because our victim advocacy is very involved in that, I think it’s just kind of a rare situation right now, but hopefully it’s not going to be that way. Hopefully there’ll be more law enforcement advocates involved, which I think is really important because in this particular world, we see a lot of our victims don’t really have a strong voice in what’s happening.

This strong commitment to recognizing and prosecuting cases of trafficking appears to have had great success - the El Paso county region filed 29 trafficking cases under the 2014 Colorado Revised Statute update and tried 21 of those cases.

PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships in Colorado Springs are working to incorporate survivor voices and providing opportunities for survivor leadership. “We do have survivors as part of the partnership and then we also have some different, we have our task forces that also will include survivors in different roles.” Some partnerships created subcommittees that are dedicated to labor trafficking, as this sometimes gets looked over when compared to sex trafficking.

I’m glad that we have a labor trafficking subcommittee this year, but it’s one of those things, I guess, looking at that, that maybe we should have probably started with something like that. Because I still feel to this day and I know we’ve really tried to make conscious efforts of making sure we’re including labor trafficking victims in our discussions.

The transition to a focus on labor trafficking and supporting survivor leadership will likely strengthen efforts to end human trafficking in Colorado Springs.
Recommendations for Region 4 to Comprehensively End Human Trafficking

These regional profiles should spark conversation, discussion, and ultimately, action. We encourage each community to gather in partnership and create goals related to these location-specific questions:

1. How are you measuring the effectiveness of your efforts to end human trafficking? What data would you need to collect to understand your impact? How would you like to share and protect this data? How will you know your efforts are directly impacting the root causes of trafficking in your community?

2. How does a community address the perceived connection between trafficking and a large military presence? How does tourism and large numbers of people traveling through the community create risks for trafficking?

3. How are your efforts to end trafficking addressing the root causes of trafficking? Are local partnerships setting goals that are directly connected to the root causes of trafficking?
THE COLORADO PROJECT TIMELINE

2010-2013
Colorado Project 1.0
National Survey (2011)
Statewide Survey, Focus Groups (2012)
Report Publication (2013)

2018-2019
Colorado Project 2.0
Statewide Survey, Interviews, Focus Groups (2018)
Report Publication (2019)

2010
Colorado Action Plan 1.0
State Advisory Board
14 Recommendations
48 Activities
State Policy Recommendations

2013
Colorado Anti-Trafficking Movement
Updated Human Trafficking Laws
Governor’s Council Established (2014)
Colorado Anti-Trafficking Exchange (2017)

2019
Colorado Action Plan 2.0
Survivor-Informed Committee
State Advisory Committee
10 Recommendations

THE 4PS:
WHAT TO LOOK FOR

STRENGTHS:
WHAT EXISTS

GAPS:
WHAT’S MISSING

RECOMMENDATIONS:
ACTION PLAN

ADVANCE COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS
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REFINE PROMISING PRACTICES
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The 4P Framework

The Colorado Project Regional Community Profiles frame their recommendations through the “4P” (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) definitions, which were shaped by five global and federal protocols and legislation. The 4P framework recognizes that there are multiple sectors engaged in efforts to combat trafficking, as well as necessarily diverse strategies. Using the 4Ps helps us better understand both strengths and gaps in Colorado, and to develop a more comprehensive response.

**Prevention** measures increase awareness, advocacy, and education towards addressing a community’s systemic vulnerability to a continuum of exploitation, including human trafficking. Prevention plans recognize that exploitation and human trafficking are symptoms of root causes like poverty, gender inequality, and other forms of oppression which create vulnerable populations in the first place.

**Protection** measures ensure that survivors of human trafficking are provided access to (at a minimum) health care, legal aid, social services, and education in ways that are not prejudicial against victims’ rights, dignity, or psychological well-being. Protection also means creating an environment (social, political, and legal) that fosters the protection of victims of trafficking.

**Prosecution** measures ensure the creation and implementation of laws that address the continuum of labor exploitation and the pursuit of criminal punishments for such cases, treating human trafficking as exploitation of victims rather than recruitment/transportation of workers or people in prostitution. This includes not just criminal prosecution, but law enforcement officers and the creation of legislation.

**Partnership** measures acknowledge that combating human trafficking requires a comprehensive response through the cooperation of multiple sectors. Partnerships bring together diverse experiences, amplify messages, and leverage resources. An anti-human trafficking partnership refers to a cooperative relationship between two or more organizations established for the purpose of jointly combating human trafficking in some way (LCHT, 2013, p.8).
The Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Denver, Colorado and an established leader in the national anti-trafficking movement. Since 2005, LCHT has trained over 30,000 professionals and community members; conducted research to drive action and inform policy change; operated Colorado’s 24/7 human trafficking hotline; and developed over 150 future human rights leaders.