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 1: Population and Geography

Region 1, the southeastern corner of the state, is the most geographically and economically rural of all the regions in the state. Pueblo, the major hub for this region, is considered a metropolitan area by the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and according to the 2017 Census Bureau update, is home to over 160,000 residents. However, the surrounding towns in this region are closer to 2,000 to 8,000 residents - significantly smaller community sizes. This region includes the 3rd, 10th, 15th, and 16th Judicial Districts, with one larger urban area (Pueblo) and many small, rural communities in the south and east (Trinidad, La Junta, Rocky Ford, Walsenburg, Lamar, and Las Animas).

The State of Colorado Department of Local Affairs calculated the largest sectors of employment across this region as agriculture, manufacturing, service/hospitality, retail, construction, general administration, and health and welfare sectors. According to the USDA, three counties in Region 1 crack the top ten for agricultural production in the state - Crowley, Otero and Prowers counties all provide significant amounts of beef, hay, corn, wheat, and vegetables for export within Colorado and across the country.
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 in Region 1

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. 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 1 participants.

Because of a significant presence of farm workers, temporary laborers, and other low-paying work force opportunities, participants noted concern about labor trafficking. For example,

So in the last week I’ve interviewed or screened individuals that were trafficked, in the sheep herding industry, in construction, sex trafficking, um both, both, like on the streets and also connected to
individuals like a family member they knew type of situation, and I want to mention forced drug trafficking, so it’s a lot of interesting, construction, agriculture, restaurants.

Another respondent suggests,

We are just starting this program but we also think in our clinics we’re going to see labor trafficking because of the rural areas where we have seasonal farm workers and immigrants and it’s a big possibility we’ll see labor trafficking, not just sex.

There is no single industry to blame. Instead residents seem concerned that a lack of awareness about how trafficking happens locally might be impacting vulnerabilities to trafficking.

Two significant issues raised prominently across this region were poverty and drug / substance abuse along with the emerging marijuana industry. Participants identified drug trafficking as a significant contributor to human trafficking and noted that the significant poverty rates of communities across this region contribute to trafficking as well. In Pueblo, nearly 20% of the population lives below the federally defined poverty line and the average across the rural cities comprising Region 1 was nearly 24% of the population living in poverty. In Las Animas and La Junta, the percent in poverty was 36% and 27% respectively. Lack of economic opportunity combined with labor opportunities that tended to couple cash payment with no access to benefits, amounted to participants feeling like trafficking could be happening anywhere. These quotes below highlight these broad concerns:

Right now we have a huge drug issue, like probably most of Colorado does. We have a lot of drug trafficking going through the area. I think there are rumors of human trafficking coming in and out of the Lamar area, and that like, the western side of Kansas. I’m not sure if there’s truth to it or not, but there are people that say there is. But I think the biggest contributing factor would be the drug issues.

Also, locally in some of the restaurants and things like that, there are a lot of folks that are paying under the table. They are paid in cash. We know that they’re not paid fairly. They may have been illegal immigrants, but now they are clearly being taken advantage of. And we are hearing a lot of that through the marijuana industry. So keep in mind, a lot of my sort of not – they’re not rumors. A lot of my information comes from being around law enforcement all the time, being friends with them. And hearing that a lot of the folks that are doing the illegal grows or I suspect even some of the legal marijuana grows here in the area, but especially the illegal grows often those are migrant workers.

We have a big heroin issue in our community and so they’re getting them addicted and could be a boyfriend that groomed them in this situation and before they know it, 'I’m going to tell your mom what you’re doing' or 'I’m going to hurt your family' or 'now you’re addicted and now you’re nothing and I have control over you'. But even going into the workforce. We’ve been seeing these massage parlors popping up in our communities.

In a lot of instances, it’s vulnerabilities no matter what form they take and so in some cases with our clients it’s immigration status or it’s poverty or it’s housing it’s anything that’s created vulnerabilities.

Poverty and substance abuse appear to plague these communities. While this is not a new phenomenon for these rural areas, the Colorado Health Institute finds that eight of twelve counties in Colorado that have drug
overdose death rates of more than 20 per 100,000 residents, among the highest in the nation, are in this region of the state. Participants make a direct connection to a dearth of resources, drugs, and the potential for trafficking.

We’re not from the Denver Metro area and so poverty is probably the number one contributor in our area.

And a lot of those folks are here because of the recreational marijuana. A lot of them have signs being held up that they will work for weed. So we know that that has definitely increased the population. We don’t have shelters. We don’t have places for them. So, that’s another thing, as you also see a pretty big increase in females, I would say between the ages of anywhere from maybe 12 to 30. A huge population here and no shelters. We have no food banks. So, we know that they’re in a very vulnerable situation.

That’s a very complex... You know, I would talk about individuals being trapped in the workforce, such as out in our farm communities, maybe illegal immigrants, people coming for the promise of a better life not really know, or maybe they just don’t even have a high school diploma and they’re looking for employment. And so they’re stuck in that situation of getting little pay, being indebted to their employer, maybe even being stuck out there, all the way into the sex trafficking, which can be within families.

These communities might not be as sizable as other counties across the state, but residents seem concerned about both the local, ongoing trafficking that might be connected to poverty, drugs or agriculture, and the transient nature of visitors coming from Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.

**SOUTH EASTERN COLORADO CHALLENGES**

**A Lack of Public Awareness**

Although Region 1 has a large urban community, Pueblo still maintains the small town, rural feel you would experience if you lived in other counties through this region. You’d likely recognize neighbors at the grocery store, have attended high school or college with them, or know them through employment, church, or family connections. This sense of place was effectively articulated by this respondent:

So we’re pretty invested in our communities and at the table...to inform people of the services and down here, we’re a rural area. Everybody knows everybody and I honestly, I’ve gotten messages on Facebook, I’ve gotten texts, I’ve gotten you know, from people wanting to know. Like Sunday I got a text message from somebody I know that works for social services and she wanted to know if we could provide mental health services... And you know, so I gave her the information and explained to her what the program was, what basically was the process for that. But that’s very common in rural communities. People know who you are and reach out if they need something.

This overwhelming sense of connectedness may both serve as a protective factor against human trafficking or may keep suspicions of trafficking swept under the rug. One respondent suggested that,

I suspect that we see folks that sometimes we may not know that you know, maybe their situation was, you know, tied to human trafficking. I think it, I think, I think we’re a little bit naive here about human trafficking. I think that people have a different, I think they think it’s like you know, somebody else’s doing this and somebody else is involved.
Another respondent discussed how to approach training the community on human trafficking:

I would say in this area, there is in the community true ignorance when it comes to human trafficking. And a challenge that we will continue to overcome is there are a lot of folks who don’t want to leave it. And we also have times – we have families here who have been here forever and generations upon generations. But then a huge part of our population is also just passing through or they’re here for marijuana for a day. So it’s a good opportunity for awareness. But for these folks, long term training is in the great option. And for these folks, the struggle is getting in with them. You have to find a family member, if they’re family to have credibility that, hey, we are legitimate. That’s why kind of partnering with the police force was helpful, just even having them there because it gives the community members this feeling like, okay, this isn’t just a sham, non-profit or something that’s coming in and trying to get money. Like they actually want to tell what’s going on and train.

Relationships are clearly a key foundation to preventing human trafficking across this region. While vulnerabilities exist, the connections built in these places have the power to deeply address many root causes.

**Resources Primarily Clustered in Pueblo**

While Pueblo may have a network of service providers who are trained and partnering in anti-trafficking efforts, Pueblo can still be a significant distance away from residents across this region. This lack of disbursed resources may contribute to some of the challenges faced in communities across the south eastern plains of Colorado. A lack of housing services and accessibility to mental health treatment facilities may also contribute to the transience of community members. One participant suggests that one particular population may be especially at risk for trafficking:

We look at, like, you know, the, the resources. There’s so much limited resources that we have. So in that, we try to get with the other organization and see how we can provide resources for the victims. What I’ve, I have seen, mostly is that, working at the immigration, undocumented victims do not have resources because they’re undocumented. Um, the main piece that they lack is also that social security number. Some, some of our clients, specially the one that we’re working on, she’s not able to go to counseling because they need the social security. So, advocacy, education in the community. Just so the community can be aware of the issue of human trafficking.

Participants consistently suggested that the region could use additional support to prevent and reduce trafficking. One community member sums up the need for recognition.

But the point being ... that we have a real human trafficking issue. Not just one person here on that scale. We have real human trafficking on a large scale coming through completely out in the open. Completely out in the open through Trinidad, up and down I-25, through Walsenburg, through Raton, through these areas and nobody is recognizing it.

They may be a little more open in some places because there is such intense issues down here in families with violence with drugs. It’s a very low-income area and a lot of the kids that are here really don’t want to be here. And so it’s a very, very vulnerable population in my opinion. And I think most people around here would agree.
As noted in the next section, there is public and political will to address trafficking across Region 1 and some strong partners willing and able to help communities throughout the region.

Regional Resources for Trafficking Survivors

This region boasts the Alliance to Combat Human Trafficking - Pueblo (ACHT Pueblo). ACHT Pueblo was founded 2013 with the mission of raising public awareness of human trafficking issues and encouraging networking and partnerships with social service and medical providers, educators, prosecution, and law-enforcement. For anyone interested in anti-trafficking partnerships or collaborations, or interested in having staff trained in human trafficking, ACHT Pueblo can facilitate connections to raise awareness.

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

- WIC Pueblo
- Pueblo Cooperative Care Center
- Los Pobres
- Pueblo Rape Crisis Services
- Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment
- A Caring Pregnancy Center
- Posada Youth Center
- YWCA
- Pueblo Community Health Center
- Valley Wide Health Systems: La Junta, Las Animas, and Rocky Ford
- Advocates Against Domestic Assault, Las Animas
- Arkansas Valley Resource Center, Otero
- Domestic Safety Resource Center, Cheyenne

Last year in 2018, the CoNEHT 24/7 Human Trafficking Hotline received 17 calls from Region 1.

Human Trafficking Response in Region 1

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 efforts in Region 1 are increasing through trainings and community conversations. For example:

The presentation they did in Otero. I think more people need to hear and know what the real facts are and what the percentages are and how things play out. And I do think there’s a lot more in the news and about trafficking. You know, so I do think that where this is increasing but really anybody that works with kids or families or you know, even the judicial and the law enforcement umm...you know, domestic violence organizations, but like health you know, everybody should be more aware and be asking the right
questions of people. Umm…and then even you know, things like in the community, letting people know where they can go, that you know, for help if something’s going on.

Another respondent sums up the change:

I believe that you know, people are becoming more aware. And I think umm…I think you’re beginning to see kind of a culture change or maybe an awareness change. People are not as naïve, so I think that’s a good thing. And I think that leads us maybe to a better, better place for protecting folks.

Prevention efforts are starting to occur regularly and reach the rural corners of southeastern Colorado.

PROTECTION

Participants appeared concerned that their communities were not able to provide services that would be population specific. For example,

I think as far as serving the survivors, providing services to the survivors... again, back to sort of the infrastructure, there isn’t really anything, it’s the same services basically for everybody. It’s, we don’t have a carved out you know, victims of human trafficking...different services. But perhaps the general adult protective, child protective population. It’s not something that we really have. And it’s the same with a lot of our subsets of our populations. Our LGBT folks, we have the same services, for the trafficking folks, we have the same...we don’t have a good delineation of specific services that’s specific for them.

Promising practices found in the Colorado Project 2.0 do not appear to require specific types of programs or services; instead, developing systems, procedures, and protocols across all agencies that are trauma-responsive appear to have the most significant impact for protection.

PROSECUTION

Currently, no cases have been filed or tried in these judicial districts under the 2014 Colorado Revised Statute update. While there are no cases filed, community participants suggest that law enforcement trainings are occurring and they expect these trainings to result in more arrests or prosecutions. “I would say success for us is just getting law enforcement up to speed with it and what to look for when you come into contact with so many different people in our communities that recognizing the signs and then how to respond, and where to go from there.

However, in 2018 a federal jury awarded $330,000 in Colorado’s first civil human trafficking trial. After hours of testimony by plaintiffs and community members describing acts of psychological coercion and the hundreds of hours plaintiffs spent performing hard, unpaid manual labor for defendants, the jury found the defendants had violated the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and Colorado wage laws. The defendants, owners of a family-owned farm and several rental properties in Otero county, were extended family members of the plaintiffs who had recently emigrated to the U.S. from the Philippines.
Pueblo has a successful partnership up and running to combat human trafficking. Participants are proud of the efforts and believe this network of training and coordination of services will improve the community’s ability to reduce exploitation. Specifically,

These coalitions, when we all come together and I get to hear what you all do, I know that you’re out there, I know that you exist, and I think it helps to not duplicate efforts. Why recreate the wheel if somebody’s done it’s and something you approve of. So I think that’s been really helpful.

Another respondent described the partnership as providing a context for applying promising practices gathered from other places.

We’re constantly trying to network with different groups and task forces simply to stay up with what’s going on, what’s, what are other states doing, what are other providers doing, so we could understand what is the most promising practices. It changes all the time, there’s always something new, there’s no evidence-based umbrella for trafficking victims, so we’re continually looking to others to see what they’re doing.

Pueblo’s established partnership works to communicate with partners serving counties in this region. The more rural communities also utilize partnerships but have tended to support partnerships with a broader mission.
Recommendations for Region 1 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 are your efforts to end trafficking addressing the root causes of trafficking? How are different types of providers working together to address poverty, substance abuse, trafficking, homelessness, and unemployment?

3. How can trainers and service providers recognize both sex and labor trafficking? Are there some community partners where there is safety to report labor trafficking?

4. How can law enforcement agencies be supported to investigate and prosecute labor trafficking? Are community members and local service providers comfortable reporting to law enforcement and the criminal justice system? How can we enhance trust across the community for reporting?
THE COLORADO PROJECT TIMELINE

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

2010-2013
**Colorado Project 1.0**
- State Advisory Board
  - 14 Recommendations
  - 48 Activities
- State Policy Recommendations

2013
**Colorado Action Plan 1.0**
- Governor’s Council Established (2014)
- Colorado Anti-Trafficking Exchange (2017)

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

2018-2019
**Colorado Project 2.0**
- Survivor-Informed Committee
  - State Advisory Committee
  - 10 Recommendations

2019
**Colorado Action Plan 2.0**
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.