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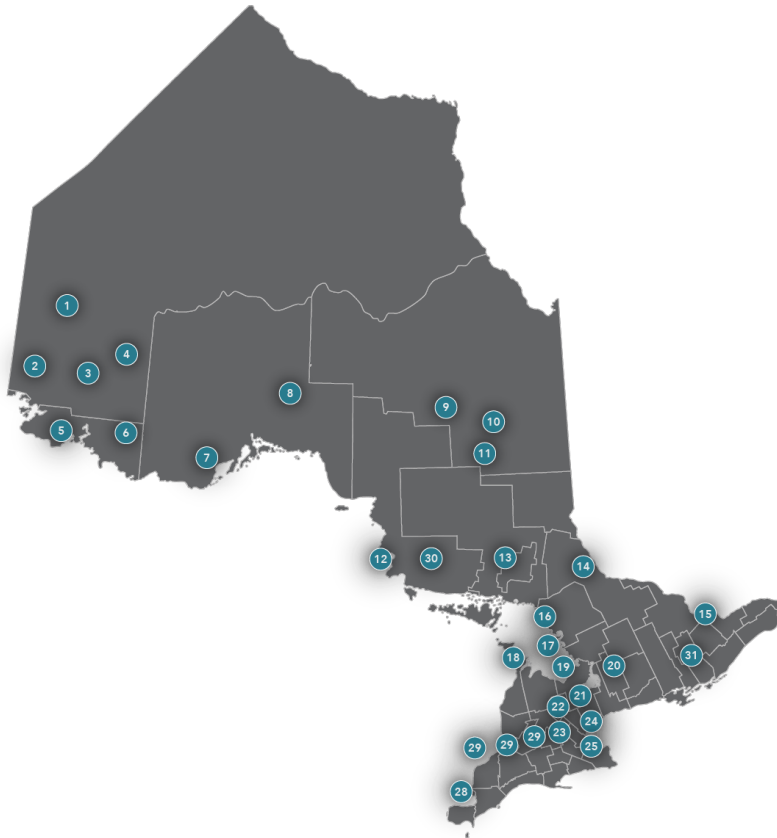
Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Building An Urban Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Response:

***Understanding Community Realities,
Survivor Experience, and Cross-Sector
Collaboration***

Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee | April 1st, 2026

The Friendship Centre Movement



Locations

1. Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre
2. Ne-Chee Friendship Centre (Kenora)
3. Dryden Native Friendship Centre
4. Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre (Sioux Lookout)
5. United Native Friendship Centre (Fort Frances)
6. Atikokan Native Friendship Centre
7. Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
8. Thunderbird Friendship Centre (Geraldton)
9. Kapuskasing Indian Friendship Centre
10. Ininew Friendship Centre (Cochrane)
11. Timmins Native Friendship Centre
12. Indigenous Friendship Centre (Sault Ste. Marie)
13. N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre (Sudbury)
14. North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
15. Odawa Native Friendship Centre (Ottawa)
16. Parry Sound Friendship Centre
17. Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre (Midland)
18. M'Wikwedong Native Cultural Resource Centre (Owen Sound)
19. Barrie Native Friendship Centre
20. Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre (Peterborough)
21. Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
22. The Indigenous Network (Peel)
23. Hamilton Regional Indian Centre
24. Niagara Regional Native Centre (Niagara-on-the-Lake)
25. Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre
26. N'Amerind Friendship Centre (London)
27. Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre
28. Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre of Windsor
29. Brantford Regional Indigenous Support Centre
30. Enji-maawindijyaang (Elliot Lake)
31. Kingston Native Centre and Language Nest



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Friendship Centre-Led Anti-Human Trafficking Project

Goals:

- Develop Friendship Centre- Informed:
 - 1) Anti-Human Trafficking Toolkit
 - 2) Anti-Human Trafficking Program Model
 - 3) Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy

TERMINOLOGY

Human Trafficking: The recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation.

Labour Trafficking: A form of human trafficking that involves recruiting, moving or holding victims to coerce them into doing any kind of work.

Sex Trafficking: A form of human trafficking that involves recruiting, moving, or holding victims for sexual exploitation purposes. Sex traffickers can coerce victims into providing sexual services by force or through threats, including mental and emotional abuse and manipulation.

Sex Work: The consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for money or goods. While selling one's own sexual services is legal, the surrounding activities, such as buying, advertising, and third-party involvement, are illegal.

How Trafficking Appears in Urban Indigenous Communities

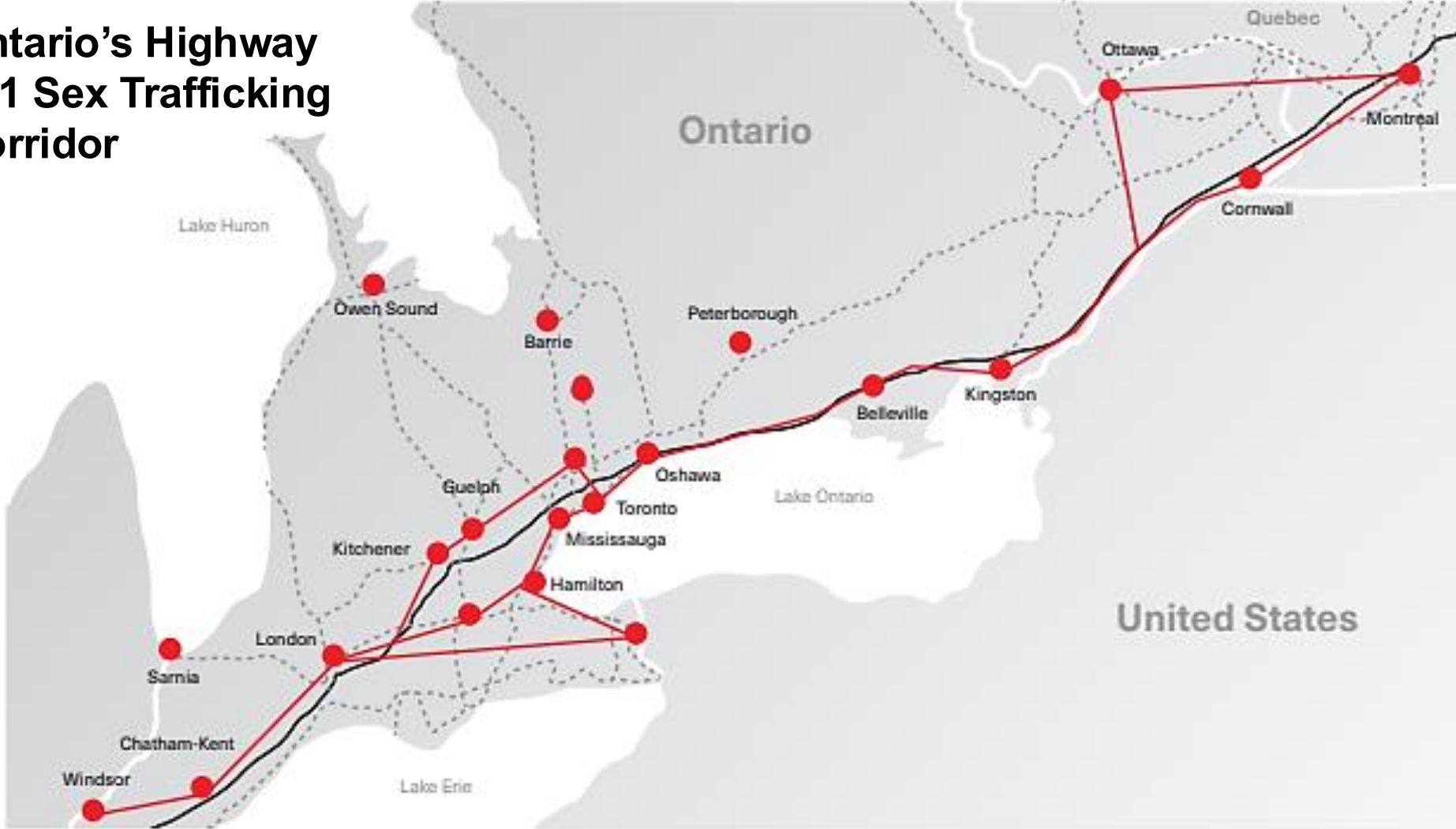
Sex Trafficking is the predominant form.

Friendship Centre staff emphasized that trafficking often intersects with:

- Intimate Partner Violence
- Gang Recruitment & Gang Initiation
- Housing Instability
- Poverty & Economic Vulnerability
- Mental Health & Addictions
- Online & Social Media Exploitation
- Challenges navigating systems that criminalize survivors
- Child Welfare (Youth transitioning out of Care)
- Special Economic Zones (Mines, Ring of Fire, Resource Extraction)



Ontario's Highway 401 Sex Trafficking Corridor



— 401 Highway corridor - - - - Major roads ● Commercial sex markets

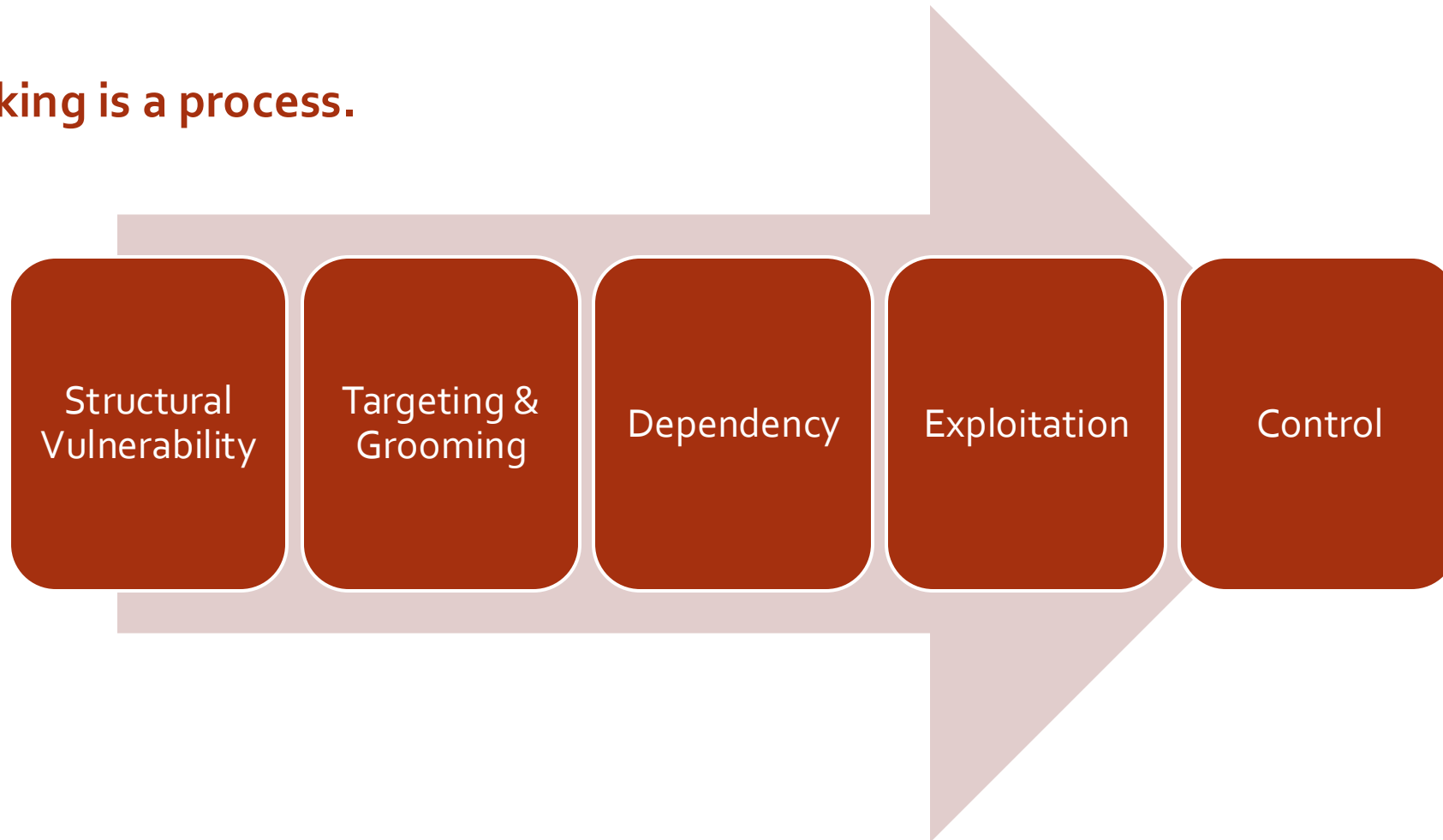


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Source: Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking

HOW HUMAN TRAFFICKING BEGINS

Trafficking is a process.



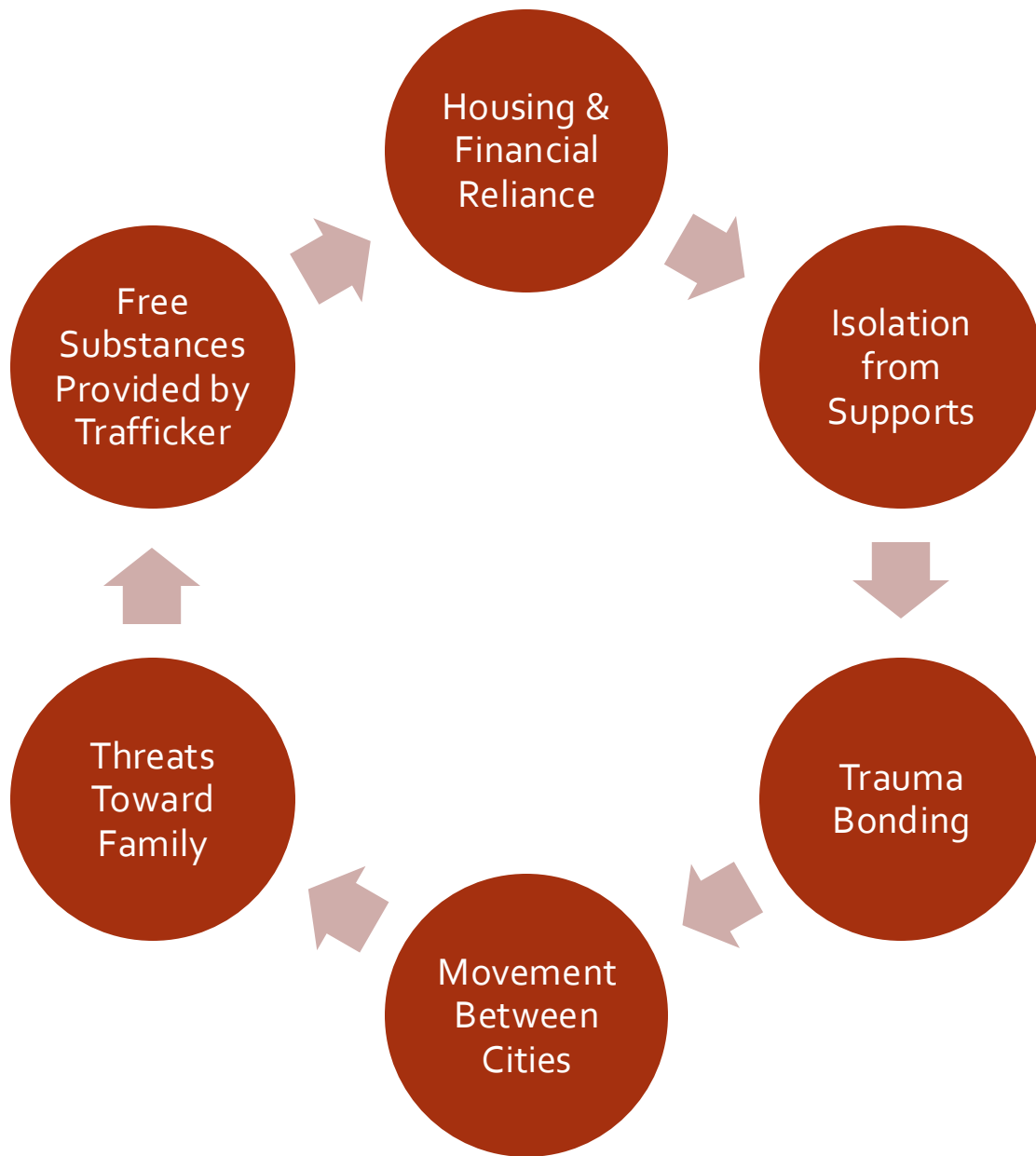
TARGETING & GROOMING

Traffickers often target:

- Youth leaving care
- Individuals experiencing housing instability
- Those facing violence or isolation
- Individuals experiencing poverty

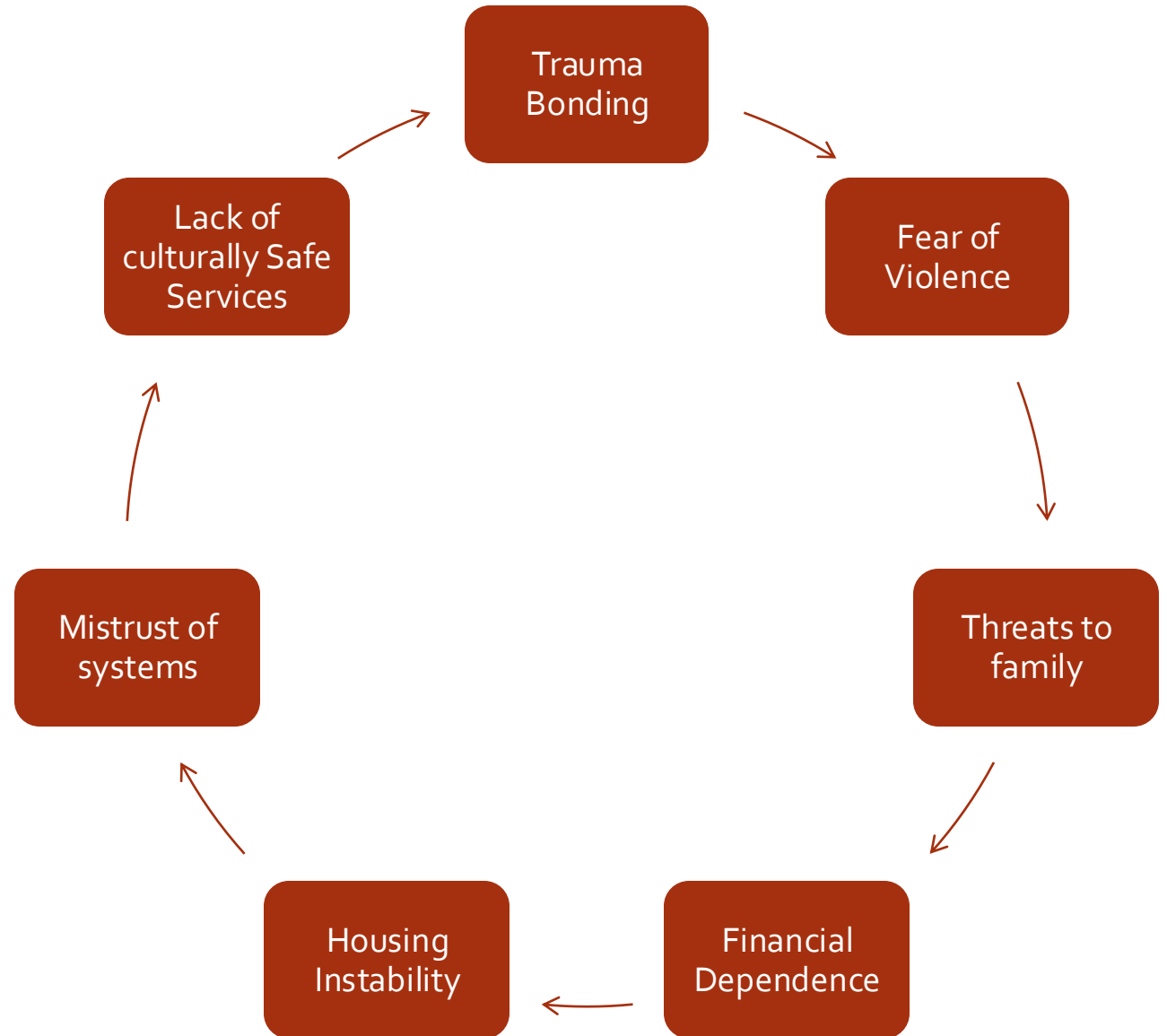
Recruitment occurs through:

- Romantic partners
- Peer networks
- Social media
- Gangs



DEPENDENCY & SURVIVOR EXPERIENCE

WHY SURVIVORS DON'T LEAVE:



**WHERE SYSTEMS
ENGAGE**

VS.

**WHERE
PREVENTION IS
NEEDED**



WHAT PREVENTION SHOULD LOOK LIKE



Early Vulnerability



Early Education, Awareness & Support
(Youth-focused, culturally grounded,
community led)



Stability & Connection
(Housing, culture, identity,
relationships, community)



Prevention of exploitation



Continued Support & Planning for
Success (long-term support, life
pathways, self-determination)

INTERSECTIONS WITH SYSTEMS

Trafficking intersects with:

- Child Welfare
- Housing systems
- Justice system
- Mental Health
- Substance use
- Gender-Based Violence
- Private Corporations (Social Economic Zones, Mines, Resource Extraction)
- Local Businesses

This matters because trafficking does not sit within one system – it requires coordination across all.

Demand Drivers

Demand for
commercial
sex

Gang
economies

Housing
instability

Online
exploitation

Economic
vulnerability

TRAFFICKING PATTERNS IN ONTARIO

Movement
between cities

Hotel and
short-term
rental use

Links to gangs
and drug
trafficking

Online
recruitment

Youth
Targeting

WHAT YOU MAY BE SEEING

- Controlling 'partner' present
- Unexplained income or gifts
- Hotel stays
- Youth travelling between cities
- Reluctant to speak alone
- Signs of exhaustion or injury

What are you seeing in your workplace/ community?

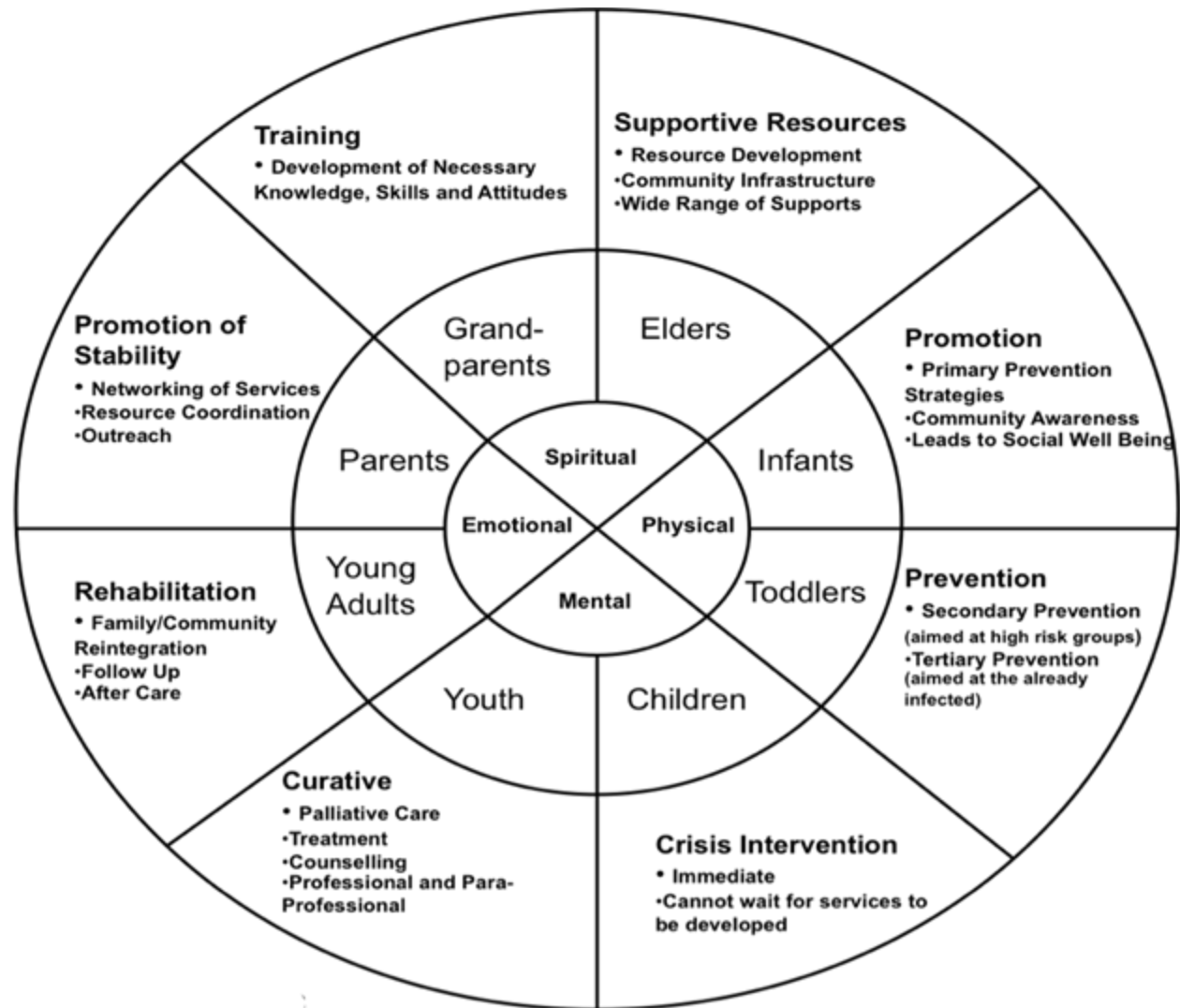
ROLE OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Friendship Centres provide:

- Culturally grounded supports
- Violence prevention
- Survivor navigation
- Youth and family programming
- Justice diversion programs
- Cultural reconnection & Healing
- Child Care

Examples: Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin, Children Who Witness Violence,

Healing Continuum



(For Generations to Come: Report of the Aboriginal Family Healing Strategy, 1993)

WHERE PREVENTION ACTUALLY HAPPENS

Prevention begins when systems respond to:

- Housing instability
- Culture & Healing
- Youth leaving care
- Gender-based violence
- Poverty
- Mental health crisis
- Gang recruitment

This is where many of you are already doing prevention work.

- **Recognize early indicators**
- **Intervene earlier**
- **Build relationships with Indigenous organizations**
- **Collaborate across sectors**
- **Avoid criminalizing survivors**
- **Address root causes**
- **Flexibility creates trust**

**WHAT THIS
MEANS FOR
YOUR
WORK:**

- **Trafficking is a process, not a single event**
- **Rooted in structural vulnerability**
- **Prevention must begin earlier**
- **Systems must move beyond crisis response**
- **Indigenous people deserve support to succeed – not just survive**
- **Friendship Centres are Key Partners**

KEY TAKEAWAYS



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Thank You! / Miigwetch!