



# Benefits of providing modern slavery survivors with funded public transport

## Research briefing on the findings of a multi-stakeholder study, Nov 2020<sup>1</sup>

*Travel is an essential enabler of recovery, yet transport is currently unaffordable to survivors. In order to access their most basic rights, survivors often have to make sacrifices of food and other basic necessities for themselves and their children.*

### Key research findings

One hundred modern slavery survivors being supported in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)<sup>1</sup> in London were provided prepaid Oyster cards topped up with £50 per fortnight, for a period of 12 weeks. Participants were asked to complete surveys and interviews to understand the impact that free transport had on their recovery.<sup>2</sup> The study found that:

- Prior to the study commencing, survivors reported regularly missing appointments for services they were entitled to and social activities important for their wellbeing and recovery because of the expense of travel.
- Survivors make sacrifices and trade-offs to stretch their weekly subsistence allowance in cover travel costs. The most frequently cited sacrifice was food.
- There are administrative and practical barriers to claiming reimbursements.
- Funded travel had significant health and wellbeing impacts on survivors, including less stress, less isolation, greater confidence, a sense of independence, empowerment to make decisions, the ability to build and maintain social networks, and feeling of use to others. These benefits extended to survivors' children too.
- There were also benefits to advocates supporting survivors, who could spend more time concentrating on supporting other aspects of recovery rather than journey planning for clients.

### Why is this important?

Modern slavery survivors are entitled under international law to receive a range of support services to aid their recovery. However, in order to access these support services and take part in other activities that facilitate their recovery, survivors in the NRM must often travel. Those who are also asylum seekers are required to attend Home Office interviews and reporting appointments on a regular basis, as well as meeting with solicitors. At present, the subsistence payments that survivors receive under the NRM (either £35 or £65 per week at the time of the study, plus additional allowances for children), are insufficient to cover all of the travel costs required to attend appointments, and consequently, many cannot fully access their support entitlements.

In fact, the strategies that survivors employ to manage their transport needs cause stress and have negative impacts on health and wellbeing, further hindering the recovery process.

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate the myriad benefits of providing access to funded travel for survivors and their children in the NRM. Providing funded travel could be one of the most cost-effective ways to improve the lives of survivors because of the knock-on benefits it has and because it may reduce the need for ongoing post-NRM support.

### Recommendations for the UK Government

1. Provide funded transport as part of the basic support to all survivors, without a threshold, in addition to the subsistence allowance and prior to any individual needs assessment. Eliminate the need for lengthy reimbursement procedures that confuse survivors and place an administrative strain on the support organisations that oversee them. There are three ways this could be done:
  - Via a nationwide bus pass
  - Via regional travel passes
  - By increasing the subsistence allowance.
2. Recognise the holistic nature of recovery and the way in which social activities and opportunities support survivors. Socialising can be as important as medical attention in enabling recovery and helping victims to come to terms with their trauma.

### Recommendations for support providers

3. Provide service users with adequate maps and information about activities and places to visit, together with information about transport options to reach them.

<sup>1</sup> The NRM is the system through which modern slavery survivors are formally identified by the UK Government and provided access to specialist support - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>.

<sup>2</sup> To ensure that the research was appropriate and survivor-informed, the project team ensured that project participants understood that they were under no obligation to participate in the surveys or interviews, that they could opt out at any time with no penalty and that they could support only the quantitative data collection (aggregate Oyster card data analysis) if they so wished.

## Research overview

This three-month study, conducted between 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020, involved providing 100 adult survivors in the UK NRM with an Oyster card topped up with up to £50/fortnight to spend. The survivors were being supported by Hestia, the largest support provider for adult survivors of modern slavery in London. Participant selection began by identifying a minimum of 20 Hestia advocates willing to support the project and then using a combination of random and purposive sampling on their client lists. Efforts were made to ensure that the participants were representative of Hestia's overall client base. The 100 survivors invited to participate in the project included 80 adult females, 19 adult males, and 1 transgender adult, ranging in age from 19 to 64 years.

The mixed methods study collected baseline, and end of project, data – through surveys - from the 100 study participants. The study also involved semi-structured interviews with some survivors, as well as advocates from Hestia. Interview questions focused on the challenges survivors faced in travelling to their appointments prior to the study, as well as the benefits they experienced from having funded travel during the project period.

Participants provided information on their weekly subsistence allowance to allow the research team to determine whether the survivors had enough money to pay for transport to attend their ECAT appointments and participate in other activities. The weekly subsistence allowances, reported by the survey participants, ranged from a minimum of £35 per week<sup>ii</sup> to £145.50 for an adult with two dependent children<sup>iii</sup>. **The majority of respondents in the study reported that they struggle on a weekly basis to stretch the subsistence allowance to cover transport costs, with only 19% claiming the allowance was sufficient.**

### Sacrifices

The study found that survivors often sacrificed basic necessities or other activities that can support recovery, such as seeing friends, in order to pay for transport to attend necessary medical or legal appointments. 81% of survey respondents reported making regular sacrifices, with the most frequently cited sacrifice being food. Adults with and without children reported having to make this sacrifice. However, in the latter group the respondents emphasised that while they sacrifice food for themselves, they make sure their children have enough.

The study found that these sacrifices and the inability to cover transport costs had a range of knock-on impacts to survivors' health and wellbeing, including exacerbating feelings of stress, social isolation and shame.

The cohort of participants that spent the most each week on transport tended to be women with children and survivors studying English. Women with children reported struggling to keep their children engaged and well socialised. They have no funds to pay for toys, child friendly technology, cinema visits, concerts or similar activities. They can only take their

children to free activities – such as museums or parks – many of which are in central London and therefore prohibitively expensive to reach. In addition to foregoing food so that their children could eat, mothers reported purchasing fewer nappies, not purchasing clothing for adults (even second-hand clothing), and not purchasing any toys for children.

### Benefits of funded transport

The research identified a wide range of benefits to project participants and their family members of funded transport, illustrating the holistic nature of survivor recovery. The study found that funded travel had significant positive impacts in practical terms and in relation to health and wellbeing. These benefits included:

- **No missed appointments** – At the end of the 12-week period of funded transport, 100% of survey respondents declared that they had not missed any ECAT or other appointments. This compares with the baseline where most respondents noted that they regularly had to miss medical appointments, English classes or other activities because they could not afford the journeys.
- **Less stress** – Participants reported improved mental health due to not having to worry about how they would afford journeys, and being able to maintain and build social networks.
- **Independence and empowerment** – Survivors were empowered to make decisions about how they would spend their money. This sense of independence is crucial to recovery.
- **Socialising and helping others** – Having funded travel meant survivors could visit friends and help them in their time of need, giving them a sense of purpose.
- **Increased confidence to travel** – Funded travel allowed participants to explore London and overcome their fear of getting lost, and feel more settled in the UK.
- **Benefits to children** – Parents were able to buy better food for their children and spend more time with them doing enjoyable activities. They used the funded transport to take their children to nursery, to school, to play groups, to see their friends, and to do various leisure activities.

Hestia staff who supported the survivors reported worrying significantly less about the survivors who took part in the study. They could spend less time on journey planning for clients and instead focus on other activities and individual needs to support their recovery.

### Journeys to recovery

Travel is an essential part of recovery, enabling survivors to access their support entitlements and participate in activities, such as socialising and exploring, which contribute to recovery. While this research concentrated on London, it is likely that many of the findings and lessons will be relevant to the experience of survivors nationwide, particularly in relation to the challenges identified. However, it would help to expand this study nationwide as transport needs and provision differ by location and the solutions may vary accordingly.

<sup>i</sup> "Going places: Journeys to recovery. A study on the benefits of providing survivors in the UK National Referral Mechanism with funded transport", November 2020. Authored by Dr Deanna Davy, Research Fellow at the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham, and Amelia Knott, Director of Romanac Consulting. Available at:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2020/december/going-places-journeys-to-recovery.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> A single adult in outreach services not claiming financial support through the National Asylum Support System (NASS).

<sup>iii</sup> This person would be receiving money from both NASS and Hestia.