



University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

Survivor Alliance

An Appreciative Inquiry

2020



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Image credit: Minh Dang

About Survivor Alliance

Survivor Alliance¹ is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) whose mission is to unite and empower survivors of slavery and human trafficking around the world. Launched in 2018, Survivor Alliance builds sustainable survivor communities that are focused on meaningful survivor inclusion, economic empowerment, and wellbeing. All communities are led by survivors, for survivors. Through its survivor leadership programmes, Survivor Alliance ensures that people with lived experience have the skills and knowledge to become engaged in the anti-slavery movement. Survivor Alliance also runs a social enterprise that harnesses the expertise of its members to inform the anti-slavery field and ensure survivor voices shape anti-slavery policy and programming.

Appreciative Inquiry – aims and purpose

The purpose of this inquiry is to understand if and how Survivor Alliance has influenced its key stakeholders and partners. The inquiry seeks to understand whether stakeholders have made any changes to their organisational culture, policy and practice as a result of engagement with Survivor Alliance. This inquiry also seeks to understand if and how the working relationship with Survivor Alliance can be strengthened going forward and, more generally, to better understand organisational aspirations for becoming more survivor-informed and survivor-led.

The aims of this inquiry are to support inquiry participants to:

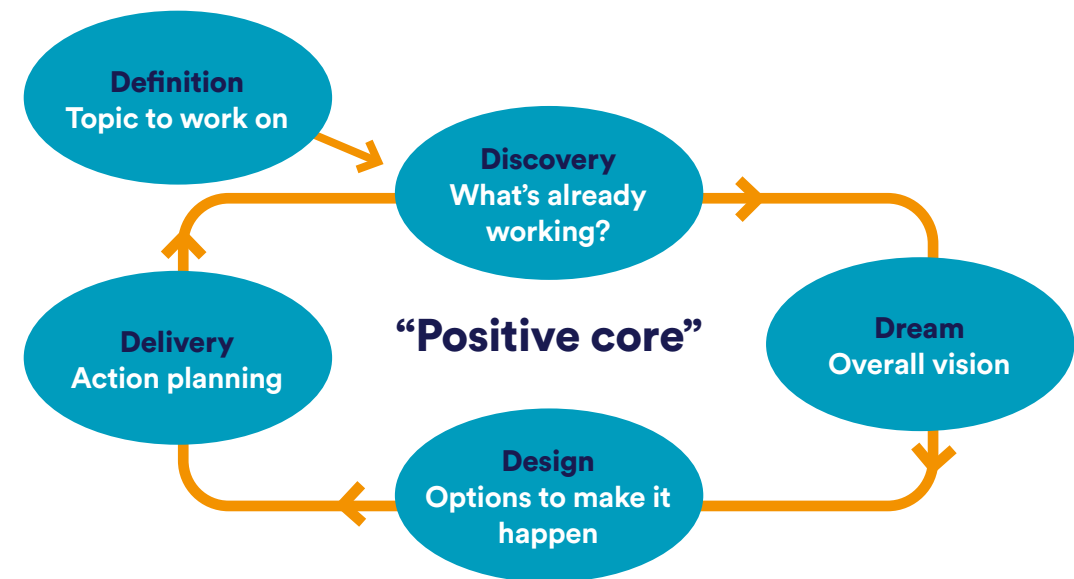
- reflect on their engagement with Survivor Alliance and other survivor leaders/groups to date, celebrating the perceived ‘successes’
- reflect on what changes to organisational culture, policies or practice have occurred as a result of this engagement
- consider what their organisational aspirations are for becoming more survivor-informed and survivor-led
- identify individual and organisational strengths and opportunities for realising these aspirations
- consider the practical steps that need to be taken to realise these aspirations.

An Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative, strengths-based approach to change in organisations and other human-based systems, and is about discovering the root causes of success rather than exploring the causes of failure.² This type of inquiry focuses on what is working rather than on what is not, and on how to work towards desired change.

¹ <https://www.survivoralliance.org/>
² Cooperrider, David L, and Diana Kaplin Whitney. Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change. San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler, 2005.

The inquiry took a qualitative approach, which was felt to be more appropriate to provide participants the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their engagement with Survivor Alliance, rather than attempting to quantify this engagement and its impact. The set of survey and interview questions were framed around the 5D method (‘Definition’, ‘Discovery’, ‘Dream’, ‘Design’, ‘Delivery’) of Appreciative Inquiry, as depicted in the model overleaf. The full list of interview and survey questions can be found in Annex 1.

The 5D model of Appreciative Inquiry³



Methodology

As one of its founding partners, the Rights Lab has worked closely with Survivor Alliance since its inception and has a keen interest in seeing the organisation’s impact grow. The author, Vicky Brotherton (Rights Lab Head of Policy Engagement and Impact), worked closely with Minh Dang (Survivor Alliance Executive Director) to design the inquiry. Key stakeholders, with whom Survivor Alliance has engaged with since its inception, were invited by Minh Dang to participate in the inquiry and were provided a copy of the Inquiry questions. The participants were asked to respond to the questions in writing or take part in a telephone interview with the report author. Thirty-one individuals were contacted and nineteen responded: 12 responded in writing, and seven took part in a telephone interview. Five participants were based in the US, and fourteen in the UK. Participants ranged from directors, senior representatives and volunteers from 11 anti-slavery organisations (14 participants in total), academics (3), an anti-slavery partnership coordinator (1), and an independent human rights consultant (1). The full list of participants can be found in Annex 2.

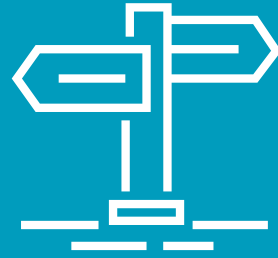
Interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was undertaken on both the interview and survey data to identify key concepts and themes.

³ Image of 5D Appreciative Inquiry model from <https://coachingleaders.co.uk/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>



Image credit: Joel Bergner and community partners

Key inquiry findings



Types of engagement

Inquiry participants have engaged and collaborated with Survivor Alliance in a range of ways, including on:

- **Research design and delivery** – Including the co-development of a peer-led research project with Anti-Slavery International, the development of research grant applications, representation on and chairing of ‘Research Advisory Boards’ (or ‘Lived Experience Advisory Boards’), and the delivery of research activities by Survivor Alliance members, including interviewing and transcription.
- **Project design and delivery** – Survivor Alliance input has helped to shape project design including for the Freedom Fund’s ‘Freedom Rising’⁴ leadership programme and its Employment Fellowship for two individuals with lived experience of trafficking.
- **Campaigns and policy development** – Survivor Alliance worked with Freedom United to develop its My Story, My Dignity guidelines⁵, and provided comment on draft Home Office policy documents as part of the Modern Slavery Strategy Implementation Group on victim support.
- **Organisational advisory/working groups** – Survivor Alliance is represented on a number of organisational advisory boards; for instance, one member sits as an advisor on the Shiva Foundation’s Advisory Board, and on the Freedom Fund’s Council of Advocates; a select group of activists and philanthropists who support the organisations mission to end modern slavery.
- **Training** – Multiple participants have attended Survivor Alliance’s ally training and workshops.
- **Signposting** – Participants have referred and recommended Survivor Alliance to their clients/service users and to other anti-slavery organisations.
- **Direct support provision** – Members of Survivor Alliance have received direct support e.g. therapeutic support, from organisations such as the Sanar Wellness Institute.
- **Events** – Participants had attended events with Survivor Alliance staff or spoken alongside them on panels, or had Survivor Alliance staff participate in and speak at events they had organised.
- **Funding** – Freedom Fund is a donor to Survivor Alliance.
- **Volunteering** – Survivor Alliance matches survivor leaders with mentoring volunteers who work with them one-on-one to develop their resumes and CVs.

Perceived benefits of engaging with Survivor Alliance



Participants were asked to comment on whether they felt they had benefited from engaging with Survivor Alliance and were unanimous in their positive response. The below list provides a collated summary of these key benefits, listed in the order of frequency they were reported.

1. Improved individual and organisational knowledge regarding survivor involvement and survivor leadership, and increased confidence in undertaking this work

This increased knowledge came as a result of the training delivered by Survivor Alliance and/or as a result of collaborating with Survivor Alliance on specific projects. Several inquiry respondents noted that they had a greater understanding of the time and resource implications of involving survivors. One noted that they now appreciated that costing in survivor involvement meant more than just costing in the time that survivors were present at a meeting; survivors also need to be financially compensated for the time it took to prepare for, and travel to and from, the meeting.

There was also recognition that organisations had to build in, and fund, training and capacity building activities for survivors in order to equip them with the knowledge and skills to be able to take part in research and project design.

“Survivor Alliance pushed us to think not just about meeting costs to serve our purposes but also to build in training costs... to think about how we make this a valuable process too, to build [survivors’] skills around research design, or conducting research, and analysing research. That’s been great to be pushed to think about it in a way that feels fairer and less exploitative.”

Engaging with Survivor Alliance helped increase awareness and understanding of a broader range of survivors’ experiences, and the variety of issues they may face throughout their recovery, and that in some cases this challenged the assumptions they held. One respondent noted that their work with Survivor Alliance had helped them to improve the language they used and become a better ally.

“I still have a long way to go but it has increased my confidence to push back where appropriate (e.g. someone asked me to connect them with a survivor to speak at an event but without clear purpose and with the possibility of re-traumatising the speaker – I explained why this request was not appropriate and they changed their approach).”

2. Survivor Alliance input helped to shape and improve research, projects and programmes

Respondents from academia and from NGOs reported that their work had benefited from input from Survivor Alliance. Being able to consult with survivors on specific projects, when developing written materials and campaigns, having survivors sit on Research Advisory Boards, or on organisational advisory boards, helped improve the quality of the work. As one respondent noted, they benefited from “being able to think through ideas with survivors and sense-check assumptions”. This engagement led to shifts in the direction of existing pieces of work as well as the identification of new areas of focus.

“Being able to engage in co-production activities and integrate a lived experience perspective into research projects is vital to ensuring that knowledge production is fit for purpose and meets survivors’ needs.”

⁴ <https://freedomfund.org/programs/community-building/freedom-rising/>
⁵ <https://www.freedomunited.org/my-story-my-dignity-guidelines>

3. Provision of timely resources and a trusted source of knowledge and support for the sector

“Survivor Alliance (and in particular Minh) have been a vital resource of information, learning, thinking and teaching for new ways for anti-slavery organisations to work, to make sure we are putting survivors at the centre.”

Several respondents commented on how useful and timely they had found Survivor Alliance resources, and how the sector as a whole had benefited from the organisation’s work to bring survivors together and support them to be a voice in the sector. Rather than approaching an individual survivor, organisations can contact Survivor Alliance who then work to identify the most appropriate individual or group to respond to that particular consultation request.

“Survivor Alliance carry an authority, which, in itself, embodies the mission statement of the organisation – as Survivor Alliance speak from experience and provide knowledge and understanding to the sector from a place of lived experience, they carry an authority and weight that non-survivors can learn from and look to for support.”

4. Increased credibility and buy-in from NGO partners and funders for specific projects and for survivor involvement more generally

“Our relationship with Survivor Alliance has been a major driving force in the promotion of survivor leadership and survivor inclusion, with Survivor Alliance acting both as a catalyst in making this happen and as a means of support as we seek to implement change.”

Having Survivor Alliance involvement helped to drive the interest and support from funders and NGO partners for particular pieces of work, and helped to secure buy-in from senior management that survivor involvement and leadership should be made an organisational priority.

“There has been a notable shift in the recent 5 years in the extent to which the sector seeks the expertise of survivors, and it is likely much of this is because of the push from Survivor Alliance to do just that.”



Image credit: Minh Dang



Notable strengths

Participants were asked to reflect on whether Survivor Alliance had any notable strengths or qualities that they felt were worthy of mention. The below list reflects those most commonly mentioned, in no particular order, together with selected explanatory quotes from participants.

<p>1. Ambition – “Survivor Alliance are ambitious and clear in their mission for survivor-led work. They have done a lot of thinking on this, developing models and ways of working to support the wider sector in this.”</p>	<p>2. Leadership – “You have a powerful leader in Minh Dang.”</p>
<p>3. Ethos and values – “Survivor Alliance’s ethos and values are a fantastic example to the sector and Survivor Alliance live out these values in all that they do.”</p>	<p>4. Integrity – “Survivor Alliance work within their values and are not afraid to challenge professionals if they disagree with their methods – not many organisations advocate as a value.” “A lot of lip service is paid to being ‘survivor-centred’ however Survivor Alliance is actually walking the talk.”</p>
<p>5. Representation – “I think what I’ve noticed Minh trying to do, and by extension the organisation trying to do is ensure that the expert by experience isn’t entirely an echo of that individual’s own experience.”</p>	<p>6. Collaboration – “I think that Survivor Alliance’s collaborative approach to working with allies is key to their success in embedding their values and ethos in the anti-trafficking sector – they are keen to work with allies to help improve their processes and policies and this collaborative approach is a key strength of the organisation.”</p>
<p>7. Respectful – “Their leadership and campaigning is always very respectful of where organisations are at in their learning on survivor inclusion, creating a culture where mistakes can be learnt from and resilient relationships can be built and maintained in order to spur Allies on to develop and improve their survivor engagement practices and policies.” More than one participant mentioned the concept of ‘resilient relationships’, one of Survivor Alliance’s core values, as one that it puts into practice when working with other organisations and individuals.</p>	<p>8. Pragmatic – “Pragmatic and take a solution-focussed approach to tackling challenges as they arise.”</p>
	<p>9. Self-reflective – “Anything I’ve read from Survivor Alliance, or heard from members or Minh, or seen through working together, seems to be rooted in honest reflection, critical thinking, and challenging perceptions.”</p>
	<p>10. Responsive – “I appreciate my interactions with the staff team...they are responsive to my questions.”</p>

One respondent did comment that they wished that they could receive notice of Survivor Alliance events further in advance, so they could share the event wider so more people could attend.

Survivor Alliance's impact



The most common reflection from respondents when asked whether engagement with Survivor Alliance had resulted in any changes to their ways of working, either personally or organisationally, was that it had given them a greater appreciation and understanding of survivor involvement, and a greater recognition of the importance of this work. The need to plan for survivor inclusion, actively seek survivor input, ensure there is sufficient time built in for meaningful engagement, and appropriately budget for this work were all noted as consequences of their collaboration with Survivor Alliance.

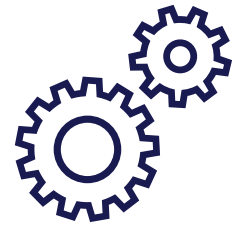
“Working with the Survivor Alliance has reaffirmed my commitment to meaningful co-production and demonstrated the value of lived experience within the modern slavery research space.”

One participant noted that the input from the organisation had made her re-evaluate the approach she was taking and seek to “centre survivors better in the way we conceptualised the project (as collaborators, not simply research subjects)”. For another, this engagement had forced them to consider the unintended consequences of their work; ensuring that the work is empowering for survivors and not exploitative or retraumatising.

Respondents provided practical examples of how working with Survivor Alliance had resulted in changes to their ways of working, both organisationally and individually. These include:

- Organisational policy being amended so that survivors and survivors' families were now paid to speak at events, rather than only paid for their travel expenses.
- Internal policies being formalised so survivors were systematically compensated for their work and time.
- Greater survivor representation amongst the board and the Senior Management Team.
- Donor expectations changing with regard to what they expect on survivor inclusion and what they expect from other grantees on survivor inclusion.
- The Board [of Directors] understanding about survivor inclusion changing as a result of the board meetings and conversations held with Survivor Alliance.
- Greater consideration to preparing project participants to exit a research project following conversations with Survivor Alliance.
- Changes to organisational programming – taking on new programmes and stopping existing ones as a result of conversations with a survivor-led advisory board.

Future aspirations



There was an appetite expressed by the majority of respondents to continue working with Survivor Alliance to deliver the ongoing and planned portfolio of work, as well as an interest in broadening and deepening their work on survivor inclusion.

Specific, concrete examples of future aspirations included wanting to work with survivors in the process of research design, to support survivors to undertake research field work and undertake research analysis; training new and existing staff on survivor inclusion and leadership; and developing survivor inclusion and leadership strategies at a national and international level using the learning received from Survivor Alliance.

“I hope SA continues to grow and impact the field at large both changing the narratives around survivors experiences, but also their futures/leadership journeys, and ultimately being a more effective, inclusive and impactful movement.”

Some respondents spoke of wanting to work with a wider group of survivor-led organisations and networks in order to see “more of a diversification of survivor voices and perspectives”, and the hope that more survivor groups would exist so that it was possible to have survivors as regular partners when speaking into research and policy. As one participant stated:

“[The aspiration is that involving survivors] will be expected, funded and ‘as standard’, that it will be considered unacceptable to make decisions on slavery in the absence of people directly affected by the systems discussed. This is exciting because it prevents policies being disconnected from reality – which is so often the case at the moment. Survivor input into policy cuts through other interests.”

More than one participant noted that they wanted to see as the norm for survivor leaders to be running anti-slavery/trafficking organisations and sitting as board members and trustees to advise on organisational strategies and approaches. It was noted that the anti-slavery/trafficking sector would benefit from the wider sharing of good practice models and examples of survivor involvement for others to learn and grow from.

However, it was acknowledged that to realise these aspirations there needs to be adequate funding for this work, and enough survivor leaders need to be trained and supported to be able to input into research, policy and campaigns. Several participants provided examples of the work they would like to undertake if money was no object, such as hiring Survivor Alliance to provide technical assistance to their organisation to see how they could better elevate survivor voices. As one respondent noted when asked what practical steps need to be taken to turn their aspirations into reality:

“Funding! The openness is there, and the desire is there, but the funding and resource isn't there.”

Several participants stated that they would like to see more capacity building for members of Survivor Alliance so that the organisation can be involved in more consultation opportunities.

“Donors need to contribute to the organisational growth of survivor-led organisations, investing in core funding and playing a key role where it is necessary. We need to continue to connect survivor-led organisations and promote their work.”

Practical issues that survivors face, such as securing their immigration and ‘right to work’ status, also need to be addressed if they are to be paid for their contributions and involvement.

Two respondents noted that they would like more clarity on the mission of Survivor Alliance to better understand the direction the organisation was heading in and the types of work it was planning to undertake. As one respondent said:

“How many projects can Survivor Alliance take on? It’s difficult because if everyone is wanting to do more work with survivors, what do you do with that appetite and desire if Survivor Alliance can’t manage to keep up with demand? How do they grow? Is their aspiration to be the go-to organisation or is it their aspiration to seed multiple organisations? Do they do the whole spectrum [of potential work strands] or are they going to specialise?”



Image credit: Joel Bergner and community partners

Conclusion

Respondents to this inquiry were either academics or NGO practitioners working in organisations whose sole or partial focus was on addressing modern slavery and human trafficking. Whilst the number and range of individuals or organisations that Survivor Alliance engages with is ever growing, the make-up of the respondent pool is reflective of the Survivor Alliance’s collaborations to date.

Survivor Alliance engagement has ranged from the delivery of training on survivor inclusion, to the provision of guidance and support on discrete projects, to advising on organisational strategy and programme design. Regardless of the type of engagement, all respondents to the inquiry felt like they had benefited from working with Survivor Alliance. There was an uptick in knowledge and understanding about ethical and effective survivor inclusion, and projects and programmes benefited from being shaped and guided by those with lived experience. In some cases the involvement of Survivor Alliance had an immediate impact, for example, in discrete, time-limited projects; and in others the impact of Survivor Alliance involvement is likely to be realised in the longer-term.

Although the organisation has been in existence for a relatively short amount of time, it is clear from participant responses that it is highly respected in the sector, both in terms of the work it has undertaken and the ways in which it carries out its work i.e. its ethos and approach. There is a common desire across participants to continue working with Survivor Alliance, and in many cases plans already in place for this to happen. However, there was also a shared recognition that for this work to continue and flourish, Survivor Alliance and other survivor-led groups need support and funding to build their capacity to meet the ever-growing demand. The increasing interest shown by anti-slavery organisations to be more survivor-informed and survivor-led is encouraging, and is, in part, due to the existence of Survivor Alliance and the work it undertakes.

Image credit: Minh Dang



Annex 1. Interview and survey questions

Discovery phase – What’s already working?	1. How have you and your organisation worked with Survivor Alliance to date?
	2. Have you worked with other survivor groups or survivor leaders, aside from Survivor Alliance? If yes, what did this work entail?
	3. Have there been any benefits of engaging with Survivor Alliance?
	4. Does Survivor Alliance have any notable strengths or qualities that you would like to mention?
	5. Is there a specific element of your work with Survivor Alliance that you are proud of or that excites you?
	6. Did this engagement result in any changes to your ways of working, personally or organisationally?
	7. Did this engagement result in any changes to organisational practice or policy?
Dream – Overall vision (envisioning possibilities, thinking and imagining)	8. What aspirations do you and your organisation have for working with Survivor Alliance, and other survivor groups and leaders, in the future?
Design – Options to make the dream happen	9. What existing strengths and opportunities do you have as an organisation to make these future aspirations a reality?
Delivery – Action planning	10. What practical steps need to be taken to turn this dream into a reality?

Annex 2. Inquiry participants

Amber Cagney	Development Manager, West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network
Amelia Knott	Independent Consultant, Romanac Consulting
Cathy Avila-Linn	Leadership Coach & Consultant and volunteer for Survivor Alliance
Professor Cornelius Katona	Medical and Research Director, Helen Bamber Foundation
Donovan Palmer	Chief Strategy Officer, Hope for Justice
Dr Hanni Stoklosa	Executive Director, HEAL Trafficking; Assistant Professor and Emergency Physician, Harvard Medical School
Joanna Ewart-James	Executive Director, Freedom United
Kate Kiesel	Chief Executive Officer, Sanar Wellness Institute
Kate Roberts	UK and Europe Manager, Anti-Slavery International
Lucy Walker	Program Manager, Freedom Fund
Professor Laura Murphy	Professor of Human Rights and Contemporary Slavery, Sheffield Hallam University
Miriam Karmali	Senior Advocacy Officer, Freedom United
Natasha Dolby	Co-Founder, Freedom Forward
Dr Nicola Wright	Associate Professor in Mental Health, Rights Lab
Olivia Nightingale	Independent Modern Slavery Advocate, Hope for Justice
Rachel Smith	London Project and Survivor Policy Lead, Human Trafficking Foundation
Sian Lea	Managing Director, Shiva Foundation
Dr Sian Oram	Senior Lecturer in Women’s Mental Health, Kings College London
Tamara Barnett	Director of Operations, Human Trafficking Foundation



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