

NoVo Foundation Announces \$10 Million Funding Opportunity to Close On-ramps to Sexual Exploitation—and Open Exit Ramps

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ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN

Grants guided by decade of listening and partnership with survivors of sexual exploitation

February 20, 2019, NEW YORK – The NoVo Foundation today announced The Life Story Grants, a \$10 million, 3-year commitment for programs in the U.S that open exit ramps and close on-ramps to commercial sexual exploitation. NoVo is now inviting Letters of Inquiry for grants across six system-focused “moments”: Housing, Medical Needs, Law Enforcement, Trauma and Mental Health, Immigration, and Systems Impacting Youth.

“The core mission of the NoVo Foundation is to foster a transformation from a world of domination and exploitation—including sexual exploitation—to one of collaboration and partnership,” said Jennifer and Peter Buffett. “The Life Story Grants are a critical step in achieving that mission and building a more just and balanced world.”

NoVo’s work centers the lived experiences of girls and women from the most marginalized communities. The foundation’s 10 years of listening and partnership with survivors found that the vast majority of girls and women enter the sex trade because of on-ramps into exploitation such as poverty, violence, discrimination, and moments when systems fail them, like school expulsion or lack of housing. Survivors shared that their pathways into the sex trade—also referred to as “the Life”—began long before the first time they had to exchange sexual acts in order to meet basic needs. They reported that if it weren’t for these systemic inequities, they would never have had to do so.

“System failures call for systems-based solutions to create lasting change—and that’s where we see an untapped opportunity for anyone who wants to improve the lives of marginalized girls and women,” said Pamela Shifman, executive director of the NoVo Foundation. “Practitioners in critical systems—like teachers, social workers, bus drivers, police officers, emergency room doctors, and immigration officials—come into contact with people in sexual exploitation every day. By offering compassion, resources, and opportunity, these practitioners can close an on-ramp to exploitation—or open an exit ramp.”

For example, while 88 percent of survivors report they have been in contact with a healthcare provider, only six percent of healthcare workers report treating a victim of human trafficking at some point in their career.

“I believe that all staff at hospitals should be trained on what commercial sexual exploitation looks like in real life,” said Noel, a survivor and founder of a survivor services organization. “These women need to be shown care and compassion just like a domestic violence victim.”

The Life Story Grants approach is grounded in two influences:

1. The communities that are disproportionately impacted by the sex trade but are largely invisible—girls and women who are Native and Indigenous, immigrant, trans, as well as girls and women of color. This includes adult women and mothers of all ages in the sex trade, who currently don't receive the support they need.
2. The critical life moments where survivors shared that system interactions could have gone a different way and led to a different life trajectory.

One year ago, NoVo launched [The Life Story: Moments of Change](#) to illuminate the often unseen realities of commercial sexual exploitation. This online platform elevates the voices and hopes of survivors who were exposed to harm in school, foster care, housing, health care, law enforcement, and other systems; who experienced intergenerational violence and trauma; and whose paths led to sexual exploitation. It highlights the opportunities survivors see for change—to end oppression for all girls and women, and to shrink the sex trade so fewer people are harmed.

“From listening to girls and women who have experienced sexual exploitation, we learned that emotional, psychological, and physical violence is inherent to the sex trade,” said Puja Dhawan, director of NoVo’s Initiative to End Violence Against Girls and Women. “This trauma can last a lifetime, and it cannot be regulated away. Survivors shared that preventing vulnerable girls from getting into the Life altogether, and helping women in the Life leave when they are ready is one of the best things we can do in the short term, while working toward a world free of violence in the long term.”

The Life Story Grants seek to fund system-focused strategies in the U.S. that close on-ramps into commercial sexual exploitation and open exit ramps across six “moments”:

- Housing
- Medical Needs
- Law Enforcement
- Trauma and Mental Health
- Immigration
- Systems Impacting Youth

The NoVo Foundation is inviting Letters of Inquiry through Friday, April 19, 2019. Organizations focused on ending commercial sexual exploitation are encouraged to apply. Organizations focused on one or more of the six “moments” are also encouraged to apply—particularly those organizations that already see how commercial sexual exploitation intersects with their work.

To learn more and apply, visit novofoundation.org/thelifestorygrants.

ABOUT NOVO FOUNDATION

NoVo Foundation is dedicated to building a more just and balanced world. Created in 2006 by Jennifer and Peter Buffett, NoVo has become one of the largest private foundations in the world to support initiatives focused explicitly on girls and women, including a dedicated focus on ending violence against girls and women and supporting adolescent girls. NoVo’s deeply interconnected works also seeks to advance social and emotional learning, support Indigenous communities and promote thriving local communities.