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As a survivor of human trafficking, my story can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for others who are striving for change. My courage and willingness to speak out can become a catalyst for change not only for me but for many others as well.

Anastasia Khmeleva

In conversation with Anastasia Khmeleva: Survivor Leader and Member of the Winrock International Survivors Advisory Group

Anastasia, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. How would you describe yourself in a couple of sentences?

I am someone who has endured pain and loss but found the strength to recover and move forward. My story is not just about survival, but also about resilience, hope, and a desire to help others who find themselves in similar situations.

Who has been the most influential person in your life?

For me, the most cherished and influential person in my life has been Nina Borisovna Kosyuk. Her support and understanding were a true lifeline during those difficult times when I felt lost and hopeless. She became not only a mentor and a friend but also someone who restored my faith in myself.

Nina Borisovna always taught me that I deserve a better life and that my hardships do not define my worth. She helped me understand myself, comprehend the reasons behind what happened, and develop an action plan to overcome my challenges. Thanks to her wisdom and experience, I was able to overcome fear and start a new life.

I will never forget how Nina Borisovna shared her knowledge with us, inspiring me to change and grow personally. Because of her, I learned how to set goals and strive to achieve them. She not only saved me from bondage but also taught me to be strong and persistent, even when life presents challenges.

Every time I face difficulties, I remember her words and try to apply them in my life. Nina Borisovna became a symbol of hope and strength for me, and I will forever be grateful for everything she did for me.

What motto do you live by?

"Believe in yourself, act boldly, and you will achieve the incredible!"

"Challenges make us stronger."

At an institutional level, what reforms are necessary to bridge the gap in engaging trafficking survivors in policy development?

- Formation of advisory councils consisting of survivors and experts in human trafficking. These groups can participate in policy development and evaluate existing programs.
- Ensuring a safe environment for survivors.
- Providing survivors with access to information about the policy-making process and opportunities to participate. This may include educational events and the creation of informational resources.
- Establishing official channels for gathering feedback and suggestions from survivors, allowing them to influence policy and practice changes.
- Securing funding and resources for organizations representing survivors' interests so they can effectively engage in the political process.
- Organizing training programs for survivors to increase their understanding of political processes and develop advocacy skills.
- Including human rights defenders with experience working with trafficking victims in policy development, which can lead to a deeper understanding of their needs and rights.
- Creating positions or structures responsible for human trafficking issues, with mandatory representation of survivors or their advocates.
- Encouraging collaboration between various sectors (government, private, NGO) to develop comprehensive and inclusive programs.
- Implementing monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at supporting trafficking survivors, taking into account their opinions and suggestions.

These reforms will help create a more inclusive and transparent policy-making process that considers the needs and voices of trafficking survivors.

What would you like to say to women and girls suffering from exploitation and violence?

I would like to tell women and girls suffering from exploitation and violence that they are not alone, and their pain matters. There are people and organizations ready to support them and help them find a way out of difficulties. They should not be afraid to seek help: this is a brave and important step. Their rights and safety matter, and they deserve love, respect, and a dignified life. They are strong, and their voices deserve to be heard.

Looking to the future, how do you think the role you play can inspire others to strive for change?

As a survivor of human trafficking, my story can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for others who are striving for change. Here are a few ways I can influence those around me: My courage and willingness to speak out can become a catalyst for change not only for me but for many others as well.

1. By sharing my experience: Openly talking about my journey can help people understand the scale of the human trafficking problem and show that recovery is possible.
2. Supporting others: My experience can provide support to those currently going through difficult times. I can become a mentor or volunteer at organizations that help victims.
3. Participating in community initiatives: By supporting or initiating campaigns and projects aimed at combating human trafficking, I can contribute to real change in society.
4. Showing the strength of recovery: My example can inspire others not to give up despite hardships and to believe in the possibility of change.
5. Working with policymakers and organizations: By participating in the development of programs and policies aimed at preventing human trafficking, I can play a crucial role in changing systemic approaches to this issue.

My courage and willingness to speak out can become a catalyst for change not only for me but for many others as well.

Anastasia Khmeleva is a member of the Winrock International Survivors Advisory Group within the framework of the US Department of State's project to combat child trafficking in Kazakhstan. She conducts lectures for vulnerable segments of the population and those who can identify victims in their work with the support of the Damitu. Moreover, Anastasia works directly with victims, providing them with psychological support. In her work, she took part in multiple trainings of government agencies, teachers, psychologists, medical workers, and labour inspections jointly with the Centre for Socio-Psychological Rehabilitation and Adaptation for Women and Children "Rodnik" and the Legal Centre for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim". Anastasia joined the Grant Committee for the review of project applications together with representatives of USAID and the US Embassy in Kazakhstan for financing projects. Finally, she volunteers at the Kazakhstan Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health.

[BACK](#)

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