

2026 WOMEN UNITED GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Organization Information

Organization Name

North Star Initiative

EIN

27-3129156

Project Name

Trauma-Informed Sexual Health and Healing Group

Address

PO Box 315
Lititz, Pennsylvania 17543
United States

Contact Name

Megan Young

Contact Phone

7172689124

Contact Email

myoung@northstarinitiative.org

Executive Director / President (If different)

Melinda Clark

Eligibility Criteria

Is your organization a registered nonprofit organization with an official letter of determination of 501c3 status from the Internal Revenue Service?

Yes

Has your organization operated in Lancaster County for at least one year (operating in Lancaster before July 1, 2025)?

Yes

Does your organization or program you are requesting funding for in this application serve primarily women and/ or teen girls?

Yes

Does your organization provide services to families at or below the ALICE threshold in Lancaster County?

Yes

Is your organization delinquent on any state or federal debt?

No

Does your organization share United Way's view of collaborative and inclusive service to the entire community, without excluding anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, ethnicity, national

origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other factor not relevant to a person's eligibility for service or ability to contribute?

Yes

Has your organization update your listing with PA 211 in the last 12 months?

No - All applications are required to update with PA 211, please reach out to [Trish Houser](mailto:houser@uwlanc.org) (houser@uwlanc.org) to complete your update

Application Elements

Executive Summary

North Star Initiative seeks funding to support a trauma-informed sexual health and healing group for women survivors of trafficking and exploitation. Through licensed sex therapy services, participants engage in structured group sessions and individualized consultations that address trauma recovery, healthy relationships, and bodily autonomy. This program directly supports women's mental and physical health by reducing the lasting impacts of trauma and increasing participants' confidence, self-worth, and ability to make healthy choices. Funding will cover critical therapy costs, ensuring consistent access to specialized care that is essential to long-term healing, stability, and overall wellbeing.

Organization Description

North Star Initiative is a Lancaster County-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting women who have experienced sex trafficking, exploitation, and complex trauma. Motivated by the love of Jesus, we work to end trafficking and empower survivors to reclaim the lives they were created to enjoy through healing their whole person.

In 2017, North Star opened The Harbor, the first long-term restoration home for survivors of sex trafficking in the region. We serve women ages 18-55 through a residential program that provides a safe, structured environment for healing and growth.

Our program is trauma-informed and strength-based, offering comprehensive support including case management, life skills development, mental health services, and specialized therapeutic care. Women in our program often face significant barriers, including trauma, unstable housing, and limited access to healthcare.

With 24/7 staff support and a strong network of volunteers, North Star provides consistent, relationship-based care that helps women build stability, develop confidence, and move toward independent living. We also work to educate the Lancaster County community on the realities of trafficking so that we can become a community that is trafficking-proof.

Commitment to Equity

North Star Initiative serves women 18-45 who have experienced sex trafficking and exploitation. Women in our program come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including individuals who have been trafficked into the United States. While referrals are received nationally, participants often choose to remain in Lancaster County after completing the program.

Residents enter the program with significant barriers to stability, including unstable housing, limited or non-traditional work histories, and inconsistent access to education. Many survivors have levels of family estrangement, involvement in the foster care system, or the criminal justice system. These backgrounds and experiences make it difficult for survivors to trust systems, seek out services, or stay connected to care over time.

A core value of North Star's work is the belief that survivors are experts in their own experiences. We are intentionally creating opportunities for individuals with lived experience to shape and inform our programming, so that we are able to better understand and address the barriers that often prevent survivors from accessing care. This includes employing and engaging survivors in meaningful roles within our organization, ensuring that services are responsive, relevant, and grounded in real needs. We also believe that honoring survivor expertise includes providing fair and

dignified compensation for their contributions, recognizing lived experience as a critical form of knowledge and leadership. This approach helps ensure that women who have been historically underserved are able to access and remain connected to meaningful, effective support.

Proposal Details

Main Priority Area

Women's and/ or Teen's Health

Grant Dollar Amount Requested

\$20,000.00

What percent of the overall project budget is covered by the Women United grant?

20

Will this program/project start or continue to operate if you do not receive 100% of the funding requested?

Yes

Project Description

Women served by North Star Initiative have experienced significant sexual trauma, exploitation, and abuse, which deeply impacts their mental, physical, and relational health. Every woman in our program has endured situations where her body was not her own, often experiencing repeated sexual exploitation over extended periods of time.

When women enter our program, that reality shifts dramatically. In a safe, structured environment, they are no longer in situations of exploitation and often go extended periods without any sexual or intimate relationships. While this safety is critical, it can also bring new challenges as they begin to process their experiences, reconnect with their bodies, and redefine what healthy relationships and consent mean to them. Without appropriate support, this transition can feel confusing and overwhelming.

North Star Initiative is seeking funding to support the Trauma-Informed Sexual Health & Healing Group, a core component of our restoration model. This program is facilitated by a Board-Certified Clinical Sexologist with over 20 years of experience and specialized training in trauma-informed care, ensuring that survivors have access to the highest quality, specialized support. Through approximately 20 group sessions annually, residents engage in guided conversations and therapeutic activities that promote healing, reduce shame, and support a healthier understanding of themselves and their relationships. In addition, one-on-one consultations provide individualized support as participants navigate their own healing process. North Star is committed to ensuring that women who have experienced sexual exploitation have access to clinicians specifically trained in addressing sexual trauma, recognizing this as a critical component of long-term healing.

This program is entirely psycho-educational and therapeutic in nature and does not incorporate religious instruction. It is designed to create a safe, inclusive space where participants can explore topics such as consent, body awareness, and healthy relationships. These sessions are grounded in evidence-based approaches that build self-awareness, emotional regulation, healthy relationship skills, and a stronger sense of personal agency.

For many women, this includes unpacking and redefining beliefs shaped by past trauma.[MC2.1] The program also affirms that healing includes not only safety, but the ability to experience comfort, connection, and pleasure in a healthy and empowered way. This work also includes intentionally deconstructing shame narratives around sex, intimacy, and connection, including addressing stigma and misconceptions about exploitation. While exploitation is often misunderstood as choice or freedom, participants are supported in exploring and understanding the realities of coercion, control, and survival in a way that is grounding and empowering.

This program directly supports women's mental, physical, and sexual health by helping them rebuild a sense of safety, autonomy, and confidence in their bodies and relationships. By addressing the lasting impacts of trauma and

promoting healthy relationships and body awareness, participants gain the tools needed for long-term healing, stability, and overall wellbeing. This work contributes to North Star Initiative's broader vision of a community that is trafficking-proof because the vulnerable are loved, equipped, connected, and healed.

Collaboration

North Star Initiative collaborates with a wide network of partners[MC3.1] across Lancaster County to ensure women in our program receive comprehensive, coordinated care. These partnerships span key areas including physical healthcare, mental and behavioral health services, substance use recovery, housing support, legal advocacy, and workforce development. Residents also have access to medical and mental health providers who work collaboratively to support their overall health and wellbeing. North Star is an active member of the Lancaster County Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the District Attorney's Office, and works alongside partners such as YWCA Lancaster and ZOE International to support coordinated responses for identified survivors.

In addition to receiving support from community partners, North Star is also recognized as a trusted resource for professionals across Lancaster County. Organizations and providers frequently consult with North Star when they encounter individuals who may have experienced trafficking or exploitation and need guidance on best practices for care. Through this collaboration and community education, North Star contributes to increased awareness, improved responses, and the identification of more survivors in Lancaster County.

Through these partnerships, North Star is able to remove barriers to care and provide a continuum of support that extends beyond our residential program, helping women access the resources needed for long-term stability and wellbeing.

Implementation Plan

The Trauma-Informed Sexual Health & Healing Group is implemented as a core component of North Star Initiative's residential program and is intentionally introduced during the first phase of each participant's stay. This early placement allows residents to begin foundational healing work related to their bodies, relationships, and sense of autonomy at the start of their recovery journey, supporting deeper engagement throughout the remainder of the program.

The group is led by a Board-Certified Clinical Sexologist who collaborates with North Star staff to inform each resident's individualized care plan. The program is delivered through approximately two rounds of ten sessions annually. Sessions are held bi-weekly and last approximately 90 minutes, providing a consistent and predictable structure that supports emotional safety and routine.

This group structure was refined through a pilot program implemented by North Star Initiative. Feedback from survivor participants directly informed key changes, including the shift to a bi-weekly format to provide a more consistent and immersive experience. The pilot also demonstrated the importance of offering individual sessions following group participation, both as an ethical response to the depth of topics explored and as a critical component of continuity of care.

The group model prioritizes safety, trust, and confidentiality and is intentionally designed to be a non-stigmatized, transparent space. Participants are encouraged to engage in open and honest dialogue about topics that are often avoided or misunderstood. The environment challenges traditional, limiting ways of learning and speaking about sex by creating space for authentic, participant-led conversations grounded in respect, autonomy, and lived experience. Participants are able to engage at their own pace and may contribute anonymously through written questions or prompts, allowing space to address unspoken questions and concerns. This approach increases participation, reduces isolation, and helps create a supportive environment where women can share their experiences without fear of judgment. Group sessions are intentionally participant-driven, allowing residents to shape discussions based on their lived experiences and current needs. This process promotes shared learning, mutual encouragement, and a sense of connection among participants. North Star staff do not participate in sessions, preserving privacy and reinforcing a sense of ownership and autonomy within the group.

Each session is designed to provide a structured yet warm and personal space where participants can explore topics related to sexuality, intimacy, and self-worth. Sessions follow a consistent format that includes grounding and

regulation practices, guided discussion, and opportunities for reflection and application. Activities are immersive, interactive, and reflective, allowing participants to actively engage in their healing process. This includes guided body awareness exercises, boundary-setting and communication practice, anonymous question submission, and facilitated conversations around consent, relationships, and personal experiences. Sessions intentionally support participants in unlearning body shame and self-critical beliefs, while developing a more compassionate and connected relationship with their bodies. Topics are responsive to participant needs and commonly include consent, boundaries, body acceptance, anatomy, and healthy relationships.

Sessions also incorporate somatic practices and evidence-informed approaches that support emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and relational healing. A key component of this work is helping participants deconstruct shame-based narratives around sex, intimacy, and connection, while also addressing stigma and misconceptions about exploitation. Participants are supported in exploring the realities of coercion, control, and survival, challenging the harmful belief that prostitution or sexual exploitation is always a choice or a form of freedom. Through guided discussion and skill-building, women begin to rebuild a sense of control, confidence, and autonomy in their relationships and decision-making.

Through this structured, participant-centered approach, North Star ensures that women receive consistent, specialized support that is both responsive and integrated into their overall healing process, leading to stronger engagement, skill development, and long-term outcomes.

Outcomes & Evaluation

North Star Initiative evaluates all programming through a structured framework grounded in our organizational theory of change, which outlines a phased approach to healing and long-term stability. Within this model, participants progress from safety and stabilization toward healing, empowerment, and ultimately autonomy. The Trauma-Informed Sexual Health & Healing Group directly supports this progression by building foundational skills related to emotional regulation, healthy relationships, personal agency, and overall wellbeing.

If awarded funding, North Star will provide approximately 20 group sessions annually and individual sessions per recommendation for residents who would benefit from continued work one-on-one with her.

Expected outcomes include:

- 80% of participants will demonstrate increased understanding of healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries
- 75% of participants will report increased confidence, self-worth, and a sense of personal autonomy
- 70% of participants will demonstrate improved ability to identify and regulate emotional responses
- 80% of participants will participate in at least two individual consultations

North Star evaluates each class and service area in alignment with our theory of change, allowing us to measure how specific interventions contribute to overall program outcomes. Participants complete pre- and post-assessments to measure growth in areas such as body awareness, relationship skills, emotional regulation, and personal development.

In addition, North Star utilizes validated research tools to assess changes in mental health, wellbeing, and self-sufficiency over time, including measures related to anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and overall quality of life. Progress is tracked at multiple points throughout the program, including intake, midpoint, program completion, and one-year post-program completion.

Program staff track engagement, attendance, and observed progress, while participants also complete self-assessments using the same core areas of measurement. This approach allows North Star to compare observed progress with participant-reported experiences, strengthening the accuracy and depth of evaluation.

These outcomes contribute to long-term goals within North Star's theory of change, including improved mental and physical health, the ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, and increased independence and stability.

Documents

Required Documents

- [Project-Budget.pdf](#)
- [NSI-2026-Budget-Treasurer-v2.pdf](#)
- [Board-List-with-bios.pdf](#)
- [501c3-Letter.pdf](#)