

Next up we have Miss Melinda.

Melinda has been serving survivors of human trafficking for almost 10 years.

Now.

She is married to a wonderful man and together.

They have four adult sons and four grandchildren the Linda grew up in poverty being abused and often abandoned Melinda found herself being sexually traffic before finishing Middle School this lasted until she was able to From Life at age 40 now.

She spends their time helping women and children find peace during and after sex trafficking.

She's dedicated to fighting the fight for Freedom.

Welcome Miss Melinda started.

Hi, everybody.

First.

I'd like to thank the panel just for having me here such a it's such an honor and to think dr.

Santiago growing up here in Polk County.

Just knowing that she was out there fighting for me before I ever even knew about her.

So just so much gratitude for her and miss Celia Williamson, so knowledgeable and inspiring and I actually signed up while she was.

King so truly inspiring I would share a little bit about myself not much but on as my bio explained I was trafficked very young there was sexual abuse for me as an infant just

crawling in up until I say about seven or eight there was a lot of abuse and I was vulnerable and so one of the things that I would Add to the list of vulnerabilities would be familial trafficking.

We don't talk a lot about it.

But it is that's how I became, you know into this world or into this life I should say and so my my self-esteem and everything about me said I just wasn't valuable for any other purpose outside of sex and so it was very easy for me to be manipulated at Early age, unfortunately for me there wasn't the help there is today and and so that life lasted up until eight years ago.

And I was blessed to have someone help me escape that life and build a life and I love what dr.

Williamson said.

I'm sorry.

So your Williamson said about going from victim to Survivor to thriver that exciting.

Because I'm a thriver now.

I run three businesses going back to work with one more child soon. And I just love what I do.

So what I really wanted to talk about today with everyone is self care and I know it's such a trendy Ward right now and everybody's talking about it, but we as workers and advocates for this population.

We don't do it enough and it's something we'll say yeah.

Okay.

I'll take care of that, but we're working.

So hard and so many hours and we're so busy that we just  
we just don't think we have enough time for it.

And and how that affects us is that we end up being out of  
character. We start to lose our compassion.

We start to be tired losing compassion for coworkers not  
not being there for them.

You know, sometimes causing more pain for our children and  
adult women and men clients that we almost do more harm because  
we're just not taking care of ourselves.

And so I want to share that.

I have been working with survivors for around eight years,  
possibly more if he's because even in the life, I was taking  
care of my girls and and trying to teach them ways to take  
care of themselves as well.

So In that I was able to work at a safe home for a while  
and I started gaining weight.

I started eating really unhealthy crying a lot at work just  
exhausted, you know couldn't wait to get home.

I began to even lose the love of what I was there for and  
even forgetting why I was there on some days because I was  
just so exhausted and I was throwing myself into the Work  
and and and and I had the Savior complex as many of us do  
where we just feel like if we don't if we don't keep going  
like something terrible is going to happen.

And and so I ended up in a Survivor Mentor position and I  
can tell you that the signs were there but we're really good

at pushing things away pushing things underneath, you know,  
like I had a bad day.

We saw something.

So tragic that no human being should see but instead of dealing  
with that.

We just go to the next thing we might take a few breaths  
in the car or call somebody to complain about it which just  
adds to that stress level.

And so that just that kept happening.

I I noticed lots of things.

I noticed less compassion.

That's a big word for me right now, and we'll talk more about  
that for sure, but The early signs are important to see so  
if you dread going to work, if you are watching the clock  
can't wait to leave and I'm not saying if you have some something  
exciting like dinner with your husband or some great plans,  
but if it's just I don't want to be here those signs are  
important to notice and in this is where self care is going  
to come in for me.

I just didn't know how and I heard self-care we watched videos.

We saw these things but it was almost like this is the part  
where I can take a break and go do something else because  
I have so much to do and I know I can guarantee many of you  
are working right now.

While listening to me because it's just what we do.

So I understand that and no judgment for me.

But what happened for me is I burn out I didn't notice the

triggers in my work from my own trauma and many of us in  
are drawn to this work because we've had her own trauma.

We've had something happened to us or happen to someone we  
love and and that's that passion and that drive to get into  
the work to make a difference.

But if you're not healthy and you're not facing your healing  
first, you're going to have a lot of trouble and that's what  
ended up happening to me.

I was burn out to the point that I would lay on my floor  
and cry.

And and to be very transparent there was moments of suicidal  
feelings and just ready to just give up and quit and as a  
Survivor my identity became this work.

And so if I wasn't doing the work then I was sort of worthless  
and I didn't matter and and so I want to tell all of you  
who work in this field that that's not true.

I've been gone for almost a year and I can tell you that  
everybody's been okay and the work still being done.

And and I wasn't the most magnificent person who could do  
all things.

I am just a human being who loves working with this population  
who is this population and and it means the world to me and  
I want to do it for a very long time.

So I've had to learn about self-care.

one of the things about self-care is self compassion and  
self-compassion really is just learning to give yourself  
a break listening to your body listening to your mind setting

aside in your car or or go sit in a coffee shop or go sit  
at a park take your lunch break away from work if you can  
and if you can't go to the bathroom, whatever you need to  
do, but sit for a few minutes and ask your And your mind  
and your emotions like where they're at?

You know, who are you and how are you being in that moment  
so that you can adjust and you can start to figure out okay.

I need to breathe more today.

I'm really hungry my back hurts today.

I'm just not feeling feeling like I am connecting, you know,  
just sitting for a few minutes and realizing that that self-awareness.

This which is another key is the part of you that's going  
to say.

Oh, I'm going to get a go sit in a more comfortable chair.

If it's your back, I'm going to you know, some of us pray  
some of us do yoga or meditation.

You can do a three minute meditation just of mindfulness  
just where you are what you're thinking how you're feeling  
and that's going to help you.

It's going to help you go back to your coworkers.

And and be kind and be cast be compassionate for them compassion  
starts in ourselves.

And so we have to first have it for ourselves and that's  
saying like for me personally is Melinda.

It's okay like that wasn't your greatest work today, but  
tomorrow is a new day and and write down a list of the things.

I did very well write down a list of the things that I definitely

could have done better process that and then and then get some good sleep.

Okay.

So the answers.

To avoiding these things and these things are compassion fatigue compassion fatigue really just means I have been running my tail off.

I'm I'm you know, some of you have so many caseloads that well and I've been there to where there's just like, how am I going to stop?

Where where am I going to take a break and there are so many needs and I need to let you know very clearly.

There's always going to be so many needs.

There's always going to be stacks of more cases in more things that we have to kind of bury ourselves in and it to help other people.

But before we can do that, we really have to stop and give ourselves some love and acceptance congratulate yourself for just being in this world.

There are so many people out there who couldn't Who couldn't do what we do and so give yourself, you know and a pat on the back or some compassion about that.

Remember to notice your signs of burnout.

And so like I said, when you start kind of your coworkers are getting on your nerves, you're not being really nice at home your family starting to get on your nerves.

The dog barking is driving you crazy.

You just kind of feel like you want to run away.

or just bare yourself under the pillow like those are signs  
to reach out to somebody, you know, whether it's a therapist  
life coach a good friend somebody that's not in this work  
to have a normal conversation about normal things that don't  
involve this work that it's going to be so So healthy, it's  
going to help your performance and it's going to help you  
be who you want to be and how you want to be through yoga  
and meditation personally.

I've learned how to be kind to myself.

I'm serious about the time that I take in the morning to  
set my day with intention and acceptance.

So I leave the outcomes to God the universe to to the whatever  
it is outside of me.

The outcomes are not always our business.

Or our problem.

We reach here to do it a thing.

We all have our lanes in we're big on Lanes.

So if you're not a therapist, don't be giving that type of  
advice if you're You're not a Survivor.

Obviously choose words where you're not telling us that you  
that you understand.

And be authentic always with us authenticity is a big deal  
for us.

We'll see it.

If you're not being authentic and our trust for you will  
leave and sometimes you'll have defiant behavior from our



kiddos or sometimes you will have, you know, just disassociated  
and and we don't want that.

So if we're not taking care of ourselves the kids see it  
when you take your time to sit alone pay attention to your  
imbalances. I'm your emotional imbalance is your mental imbalances  
in your physical and balances the key to getting yourself  
calm and back in a place of Serenity and calmness is by noticing  
the way your body feels no noticing the way Everything feels  
where you just want to get more line.

So if my head's all over the place my heart's in the work  
and my body's tired my body and my head are going to win.

And if I if I keep trying then then then everything's going  
to get more messed up.

So I have to stop and I have to align those things I particularly  
love yoga It's My Thing meditations my thing.

I actually teach trauma yoga now and and Emma life coach  
for those dealing with compassion fatigue burnout and just  
the overwhelmingness of the work that we do so there are  
other ways, too.

Self-care and and and they can be fun.

They can be simple, you know go ride a bike.

If if you like getting outside and you like biking do that  
for yourself go for walks, even in the middle of your day.

There has to be a moment where you can take like a 5 to 15.

Preferably minute break and just go walk take your shoes  
off walk in the grass like whatever it takes to Just bring  
you back to Center, you know to remind yourself that you

also deserve joy and and peace of mind.

It's going to be difficult to work with our with our population.

If we're not okay, you can do crafts.

You can do arts painting.

I've been painting I can't paint adults also, but it's healing because it's something about getting what's inside of me out on paper.

I'm sorry.

I also recommend writing writing a journal just to keep up with your feelings and your thoughts and and and and someday be able to look back and see how you grown as a human being as a person and as a person who's responsible to care for this population seeing dance laugh.

He talked to other people who are not involved in this work.

It's so important to have normal conversations.

Ins it's so easy to get caught up in the darkness of what we see and we start being very hyper hyper Vigilant with ourselves and even our own children, you know.

In the world can be pretty ugly if we only see it Through The Eyes of what we see in this work.

So we have to we just have to get away when working with this population.

We asked as a Survivor.

We really are pretty Discerning.

We've had to protect ourselves for so long and we've had to learn to just not not trust people and so when you're coming into Into our our space we need you to be.

Okay.

We need you to be healthy, you know eating eating right once in a while.

I eat processed foods or go out to dinner and eat pizza, but for the majority of the time I'm putting nutrition in my body so that I can I can have the energy that I need.

I can feel good about feel good about myself so that my confidence those ups when I walk into your room with another Survivor, they're not seeing me tired and overwhelmed not making eye contact with them treating them as if they're the next thing and sometimes it's hard to do because we get exhausted and and we get not sure what the word is but jaded, you know, I can say there were years.

I was jaded before the work and so it can definitely happen in the work.

It's like that vicarious trauma that were carrying and we do carry trauma.

We carry burdens with those that we work with and we do take that home.

So the self-care is just so genuinely important.

compassion talking about compassion it starts within ourselves and then we share it with those around us, right and so The only way to do that is to take the time to take care of yourself if I'm eating fast food and I'm gaining weight and I'm working 12 16 hours a day, which a lot of us end up doing when I show up for a client.

They're like, huh?

How are you gonna help me you look a mess yourself, and then there have been times where I feel like the client has done more for me at the end of visit than I did for them.

And I'm and that's just it's not okay.

It's not right.

So we just really have to honor that and take care of ourselves.

Is there a way to have questions now, first know your perfect.

Thank you.

You for being so vulnerable with us.

And this is definitely something that we as caregivers and individuals that pour into others each and every day, like I mentioned in the beginning we are from all walks of life and there are varying professions here and all individuals whether you're a parent a Community member were all point.

You know this Or teachers the guidance counselor's the case managers the investigators the probation officers wherever you are representing.

We are pouring into others each and every day and so it's so important that we keep ourselves full like you mentioned and that's a very very difficult for caregivers because we often put others before ourselves.

Definitely speaking to me today for sure.

Sure, we do have Q&A and and people are able to put in so there are a couple of things here.

Thanks for sharing.

So true.

Thank you so much for sharing your journey and thank you

for Melinda and for talking about the importance of self-care.

We appreciate what you're doing for our community question.

How are you able to finally break away from that lifestyle  
and being in for so long?

Why was there?

For was there certain person who helps you?

Oh my gosh.

Yes.

Okay love this question.

So Krista Hicks who you will be.

Some of you will be seeing later had a Ministry called into  
the Jordan Ministries and Fort Myers Florida and myself and  
my now husband had gone there to a program that would help  
us get clean.

We had both had drug addiction and alcoholism issues for  
several years.

I Started using it 12 he started at 14 or no.

I think it was 13.

But at any rate up until our you know, we're in our third  
late 30s forward 40.

So it's a lifetime of that.

And so anyway, I met her and my intention was to go and start  
my own type of Ministry for four girls that were on the streets  
in the area that I was in and Krista brought me in I'm better  
at church actually and She brought me in to talk to her about  
possibly getting money Ministry and she asked me if for six  
months we could work together so that I could learn you know

more about trafficking because I didn't relate I I honestly thought that the things that were happening to you or my fall or even my choices because of the manipulation from those who trafficked in harmed me and so sick.

Six years later, I agreed and six years later.

I became part of that Ministry into the Jordan and so what it took for me was we had weekly meetings on Tuesday that we're group meetings.

And in those meetings, I was taught how to do laundry honestly how to how to dress appropriately even though no one said anything to me about that.

I learned by watching them.

I learned how to Be a mom.

I learned how to find programs to get off of the drugs and the alcohol I learned to love myself.

I learned to communicate with other survivors and sharing our stories together and sharing our pain was an incredible part of our journey to true survivor hood and and there are several of us from that early group will are thriving and and And starting our lives so it took it for me.

It took that Survivor who had decided to start something that would that would bring us all out of that darkness and into the light and into this work.

So I'm forever grateful for her.

It was not easy and it's not easy for any of us, but if we didn't have the support of Advocates like all of you that are out there, I would most likely be dead today or For in

prison because eventually I would have done more to the street prosecution. Mine was a little different but I would have eventually gone to some deeper more painful things, especially at 40.

So yeah, that's my answer.

Advocacy people like all of you who cared enough to teach me how to how to lift.

Yeah.

I think that's all the I think that's all the questions any more questions.

That was a wonderful question.

Looks like It was from her student in the class.

Perfect.

Wonderful and just thanking you for sharing your ideas about your hobbies and preventing bone out.

You're speaking with empowerment and conviction is very appreciated.

And it looks like that's all.

It's so important to help survivors life's help teach survivors life skills and continued support comment for sure.

Yes, when listening to Cecilia.

Those were the there were support and what was it about and empowerment? No, it's like oh, yeah.

And they're asking for email address.

And what would you say to your younger self?

That's a great question.

Oh, okay.

So to my younger self this is this an is it an experiment

that Chris dad did with us very early and so it has changed  
in the years.

And so today it's not as it's not as dramatic and painful,  
but it's real and I would just let her know.

That some things are going to happen and that in life's going  
to be very hard and she's going to feel like giving up often  
and I would tell her that to stay strong and to trust her

Creator, which is where I'm at personally trust the universe  
trust that there's an outcome that will end up being quite  
beautiful. I had my children and in extreme of Said relationships,  
but the gifts were them so I wouldn't change that.

I would tell her that someday she's going to be in this place  
of peace and serenity and she's going to be able to help  
other girls and boys just like her and that nothing that  
happened to her.

Will be more than what she gets to do.

Now if that makes sense now if I could tell her to run by,  
you know, I might have told her run but it's okay today,  
you know, what what happened to me and there were some terrible  
terrible things that you know won't minimize that but it  
made me the woman I am today and I'm so darn proud of me  
today, and I really think I care.

Carter I love deeper.

I you know, everything about me is so intense and experiencing  
as I you know, I I got to know what it was like to have no  
voice. So I don't know that I would change it ladies and  
gentleman, you know, I don't lie that makes sense.



Absolutely that radical acceptance of you know, this is who this made me who I am and I love who I am today, and I appreciate what I'm able to give back to the world because of What I've been able to experience.

I'm an amazing Mom.

I'm an amazing granny.

And and I yeah, I loved you beautiful.

Thank you so much.

There is a question about the best.

I know you mentioned being genuine, but there's a question best way to gain trust from survivors as a therapist aside from those already mentioned.

Okay.

Well therapist have been hard for me.

It is hard in one of one of our big things and I believe simply also mention.

This is that it is hard for me to trust someone who hasn't been my shoes especially early.

So I'll say my childhood me would not have wanted to talk to therapist in any way because there's also the parts where families are telling us.

We can only share certain things we're being threatened if we say up like the real stuff so we do give you signals that That you just have the recognized in and it will be a lot of eye movement around the room will kind of you know, either will be defiant and give you like a hard time the whole time or will just kind of melt and not talk much enough.

And so I say the best way is to is to not necessarily say  
you understand, you know, the situation because that is just  
hard because you don't and so what?

Like to hear specifically today with my therapist is I've  
had experience working with other survivors in this is what  
I've learned from them because now you're using the language  
of other survivors, and we will trust them and so knowing  
that you've worked with them and in that they continue to  
see you and that you've had progress is a good way for us  
to begin to trust you always be genuine.

I'm learning, you know, don't share too much about yourself  
but share enough to relate to us because we need to know  
that you see us.

I think that's the most important thing is that you see us.

I've had a therapist cry in her office and and tell me she  
couldn't see me because she wasn't Adequate wasn't prepared  
for that Anna and that devastated me for a couple of years.

So definitely make sure you're ready to work with us as well.

But authenticity is everything be compassionate.

And let us know you know what you're doing.

I think that's going to be really important.

Absolutely.

All right.

We have a really good question.

How did you deal with the guilt regarding parenting?

And at the same time find your way to healthy parenting?

Okay, that is so huge.

So a lot of the suicidal things that I spoke up and in that life all came from that shame specifically I didn't get to raise my older two children and I would see them once in a while and I was in the middle of these like very abusive.

Scenarios and trap houses.

And so they saw things they should have never seen in and saw me get beat up on a few times which you know, you just can't unsee those things.

So how I dealt with the guilt.

Honestly, I the 12 steps of programs helped me a lot therapy helped me a lot and then just there's just a moment where you for me.

I had to look at my own mom and how how angry I was That her for the things that she did or didn't do and then I had to go to my grandparents and and and I'm when I was able to realize that myself I've being raised by dysfunction and incest and familial trauma that's coming from my mother and her sisters which came from my grandmother and her sisters which came from her mother and her sisters.

There was a moment when I realized that I didn't break.

The cycle because I caused all that harm and I did all those same things but there was a moment where I realized my children didn't have to and so my first thing I had to get sober I had a process on my past and make peace with it make amends with with those that I needed to make amends with and then start pouring into them.

And and as as you build the relationships with those children

and you really start to see them Start engaging with the things they're interested in really show interest with them.

And as that relationships healing that guilt starts to fade out. There is just no way to describe that piece and and that that moment of like, okay now I'm now I'm a good mom how I became a good mom was watching other good mom's watching my tours Krista Hicks for sure many women from into the Jordan Ministries many of my co-workers still today.

I'm 48 years old only eight nine years out of the life still learning how to not not get not get offended and not yell and and learn to like really hear them.

I've allowed my children to tell me how they feel and what I've done to them and I've accepted every word and And I validated them and that validation it's going to bring.

Like genuine love and they trust me.

So now today I'm the person they call when things are really bad on the person they call when their friends are in a dictionary or maybe falling into the slide.

So I've I've earned my way back but not really buy anything that I've done other than just learn to love them be compassionate love myself forgive myself.

I did the best I could with what I had and and teaching my children a Away, did that answer all of those questions I get emotional about that.

It sounds like it that beautiful again.

Thank you for being so open and so vulnerable with the group and I think there may not be any other questions just a bunch

of thanks.

Thank you.

A lot of people mentioned how beautiful and how much they  
love you.

I love you.

I think that is all.