

A case study with the
Poima Foundation

How Bark empowers survivors in recovery

bark 

Overview

For survivors in recovery from human trafficking, technology presents both dangers and hope. On the one hand, it provides access to crucial resources and meaningful social connection. It also presents dangers in the form of continued contact with abusers, decreased self-esteem stemming from social media use, access to illegal activities, and more.

The [Poiema Foundation](#) is an anti-trafficking organization based in Dallas, Texas, that supports human trafficking survivors of all ages through a multipronged approach consisting of education, outreach, and a residential safe house. They've long recognized the challenges of managing tech through every stage of the healing process.

To help residents in their safe house learn how to use technology safely — for many, often for the very first time in their life — Poiema uses the Bark Phone, a safer phone alternative that's designed to provide security, accountability, and peace of mind for both staff and survivors.

For this case study, we interviewed Gabi Keele, safe house program director at Poiema. Gabi works directly with survivors at the safe house,

and has witnessed firsthand the positive impact it's had.

“Every piece of Bark is so intentionally designed with safety in mind.”

Gabi stated when asked why the Bark Phone has become crucial to their organization. “It also increases relational skills and healthy relational conversations that have to do with technology.”

Using a gradual reintroduction approach to technology with the Bark Phone encourages healthier digital habits for survivors while helping to ensure their safety online and in real life.

This case study explores how the Bark Phone is aiding Poiema in its mission to transform the lives of survivors of human trafficking, and how other recovery and treatment centers can benefit from integrating it into their programs, as well.

The challenge: Tackling unhealthy relationships and dealing with unsecured devices

“Often women who come into the home have never really gotten to experience technology in a healthy way. Technology was a way that they made their money – a way of continuous exploitation. We’ve had, for example, survivors secretly begin using sites like OnlyFans.”

Poiema follows a structured, three-pronged recovery program that begins with complete separation from all tech devices and accounts. Survivors must agree to give up their personal devices for the first two phases of the program, which allows them to focus inwardly without external distractions or the chance to fall into old habits. However, when the final step arrives — as caretakers reintroduce technology — Poiema has experienced challenges with finding a safer and controlled way to do so.

“We struggled with iPhones because texts could be deleted, the internet could be accessed, and all sorts of dangers presented themselves. Apple Screen Time just wasn’t working.”

iPhones are designed with privacy for users in mind, which can be a hindrance for caretakers looking to help protect the survivors. **Some of the considerable dangers from iPhones when used at Poiema included:**

- Survivors **found loopholes**, even with Apple Screen Time restrictions in place.
- They could **delete text messages**, hiding potentially harmful conversations.
- Some used their phones to **reach out to prior dangerous contacts**.
- **Self-exploitation** occurred through digital platforms like OnlyFans.
- Access to **social media** often led to **low self-esteem and generally risky behaviors**.

The solution: A phone that aligns with the program phases

The Bark Phone is a groundbreaking smartphone that fits within Poiema's three-pronged approach, enabling the team to execute their strategy in a way that is safer for their residents.

Originally designed for children, it has proven to be an invaluable tool for vulnerable populations of all ages that need a supervised and completely customizable approach to technology.

technology with confidence around the safety of the residents, while providing teaching moments through Bark alerts, which are triggered via potential issues.

With contact approvals, screen time controls, app approvals, and real-time monitoring, the Bark Phone allows Poiema to reintroduce

Unlike standard smartphones, the Bark Phone provides:



Iron-clad contact approvals

Safe house employees approve every phone number, preventing unwanted communication with past abusers.



Customizable function ability

The Bark Phone can be stripped down to basic functions (talk, text, and camera), with the ability to add in other apps and features on an as-needed basis.



Texts that can't be deleted

Survivors can't erase potentially harmful conversations, ensuring full transparency.



Real-time alerts

Bark's AI-powered monitoring detects and flags potential dangers like self-harm, suicidal ideation, drugs and alcohol, and inappropriate content.

“The Bark Phone lets us hand over technology without having to “babysit,” creating a more equitable atmosphere for the survivor.”

Implementation: Gradual, controlled, and monitored tech access

At Poiema, survivors in Phase 1 and 2 share a single Bark Phone that's kept in a central location, with each resident having a designated list of safe contacts they can call and text. This ensures that phone use remains structured and intentional.

“The first two weeks are a black-out period. After that, we slowly allow contacts for texting and calling. Maybe it's a mom, a mentor, or a safe friend. We let them schedule calls because we want them to have a community beyond us. But it has to be done more safely.”

The Bark Phone in the safe house is set up for just talk and text only — no apps, games, social media, or web browsers. There's no way for the survivors to find loopholes or ways around the strict settings, so the Poiema Foundation can effectively execute the three-pronged approach they developed to support residents.

By Phase 3, when survivors begin transitioning to independence, Poiema is exploring ways to

introduce Bark's monitoring software on personal devices like iPhones, Androids, and laptops. This will allow them to continue fostering safe technology habits while providing an added layer of accountability.

Impact: Strengthening online safety skills and accountability

“We’re really excited about all of the relational conversations that we’re going to be able to have with survivors. Talking through relationships they might have, about people that they want to call – it helps us to really understand them and find out what they consider a healthy relationship.”

With Bark’s built-in safeguards, Poiema no longer has to rely on trust alone when it comes to technology use. Instead, they can support survivors with the right tools and guidance, ensuring that technology is a bridge to healing rather than a barrier.

Conclusion: Transforming recovery and outcomes

“The Bark Phone has helped us make the online world a little bit smaller for survivors. We can then increase exposure slowly and gradually throughout their time of healing so when they transition into independence they transition with healthy technology skills and boundaries.”

For survivors of human trafficking, technology can either be a tool for recovery or a means of continued control and potential dangers. By integrating the Bark Phone into its recovery program, Poiema has found a balance between security and empowerment that is helping teach survivors lifelong healthy tech habits while simultaneously helping to keep them safe.

With strict safeguards, real-time monitoring, and a structured reintegration approach, Poiema is proving that safer technology is possible — even for those with the most complex histories.

How other recovery and treatment centers can benefit from the Bark Phone

“The Bark Phone is different because it’s built for safety,” Gabi says. “You can’t just slap parental controls on a regular phone and expect it to work. Survivors are incredibly resourceful. They will find loopholes. But the Bark Phone is designed to help eliminate those risks while still giving them a sense of normalcy.”

As organizations across the country look for ways to better support vulnerable individuals in recovery, the Bark Phone stands out as a practical, effective, and life-changing tool.

The challenges Poiema faced with online safety, monitoring, and technology reintroduction are not unique. Many treatment centers, recovery programs, and safe houses struggle with the very same issues.

The Bark Phone offers a scalable solution that can be tailored to myriad recovery models.

- ✓ For **rehabilitation centers**, the Bark Phone can help prevent relapse-related digital behavior, like accessing harmful content.
- ✓ For **youth programs**, it ensures healthy social media engagement and helps prevent contact with unwanted contacts.
- ✓ For **domestic violence shelters**, it provides secure, monitored communication while helping to protect survivors from past abusers.

Want to **get started?**

If your organization works with individuals in recovery or treatment, the Bark Phone can be an ideal solution to help manage digital safety and technology reintroduction.

Contact sales@bark.us today to see how we can support your program’s needs.