On October 10, 2012 at Indiana University Bloomington, the Faculty Study Group Many Faces of Human Trafficking lunched with Christine Popp, JD, of Popp Law Office in Bloomington, IN. Popp specializes in immigration law and advocates for the rights of undocumented workers, including those who have been trafficked, and victims of domestic violence.

Popp began by introducing the federal Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act (TVPA), the United States government’s anti-trafficking law first signed in 2000. The law defines human trafficking and guarantees rescue, rehabilitation and other supports for trafficked individuals. Despite the protections offered by TVPA, foreign citizens in particular are frequently unaware of their rights, and remain with their traffickers rather than risk deportation. Popp helps trafficked individuals navigate various paths to residency, including T Visas (specifically for victims of human trafficking) and U visas (for victims of crimes, which may include trafficking). Under TVPA, the U.S. government makes 5,000 T-visas available each year. Last year, however, fewer than 2,000 individuals out of the tens of thousands who are potentially eligible applied for them.

Popp believes that the key to increasing the utilization of TVPA protections (including T visas) is education. Her clients, and individuals like them, need advocates who can recognize and report human trafficking cases. Popp recommends that police officers be trained to stop perpetrators and protect trafficked persons. As well, service providers need to be trained to be sensitive to trafficking cases.