



Raise awareness of, and help prevent, human trafficking with online curriculum.



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A21

Leading the battle against human trafficking with an online program for teachers and students worldwide

Although human trafficking is associated with international crime networks, it is far more prevalent in the U.S. than most people think. In 2019, more than 22,000 survivors were identified, and 11,500 cases were reported.¹ Another overlooked fact is that victims are often exploited by someone they know, typically their romantic partner, spouse, and other family members, including parents.

Organizations such as A21 play a vital role in the battle against this form of modern-day slavery. The California-based, not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization operates in 15 countries and helps break the cycle of human trafficking through its “reach, rescue, and restore” strategy. This highly targeted approach protects vulnerable individuals, rescues victims from exploitation, and supports survivors with long-term aftercare.

A21 is funded through donations from individuals, faith-based organizations, and businesses. In addition to financial contributions, these partners contribute by sharing their expertise, including technology, which enables A21 to beef up its resources and meet its goal of helping to “abolish slavery everywhere, forever.”

A21's recent technology engagement with *VMware Tanzu Act* (formerly called Pivotal Act) helps advance that mission. Tanzu Act partners with nonprofit organizations at a discounted rate to drive social impact through designing and building technology with experts from VMware Tanzu Labs (formerly Pivotal Labs). The program contributes to *VMware's 2030 Agenda*, a 10-year commitment to address critical challenges facing the global community, focused on three business outcomes: Trust, Equity, and Sustainability. Specifically, this engagement falls within building equity by accelerating nonprofits' digital journeys.



A21's mission is to abolish slavery everywhere, forever. We do this by working to Reach, Rescue, and Restore lives—reducing vulnerability, assisting victims, and empowering survivors. We believe that when we all come together in the fight against human trafficking, we will see a world where every person is free.

INDUSTRY

Nonprofit

HEADQUARTERS

Dallas, Texas

VMWARE FOOTPRINT

VMware Tanzu Act services (formerly Pivotal Act)

1. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>

Thanks to a grant from the Dell Technologies Tech Pro Bono program, A21 was able to engage a partner with the expertise to modernize its programs from a technology standpoint. A21 selected Tanzu Act for a project focused on its prevention initiatives, specifically aimed at improving education and awareness of human trafficking.

Modernizing the curriculum with Tanzu Act

Central to its prevention work, A21 provides teachers at schools, universities, and orphanages with course materials and training, helping them to identify children at risk. Students are also encouraged to recognize the signs of human trafficking and are taught how to speak out with confidence and report suspected cases. The organization was keen to move its human trafficking curriculum online, in addition to widening the availability of these materials. But it lacked the in-house resources, including research and software development specialists, to undertake the project.

“We had a clear vision for an online Child Trafficking Prevention Education Curriculum Guide where we could keep teachers and students up-to-date with the latest statistics and methods for combatting trafficking. Our goal was to figure out the right way to develop this online experience, beyond simply digitizing the content,” says Kristen Morse, Global Reach Director, A21.

Valerie Ellery, Global Education Curriculum Specialist, A21, adds, “The timing was critical, with so many schools going online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to interview educators and learn how technology is used in the classroom and where it is going, so that we could align our learning materials with these advances.”

“We engaged Tanzu Act for an eight-week project to help us research and validate options for building an online curriculum. We especially wanted to know whether we should build the online learning solution, use something that already exists, or simply pause and wait,” says Morse.

The five-person Tanzu Act team included product management, engineering, and design experts. They applied an evidence-based approach to the project, focusing on A21’s mission, the needs of users including teachers and students, and mapping solution features to evaluate the technical feasibility of any solution.

The project began with a series of interviews with teachers and students to understand their use of online and offline learning. Having analyzed the interviews, the Tanzu Act team recommended a hybrid model where teachers facilitate lessons, supported by online materials including games and quizzes that widen the students’ understanding of human trafficking in an age-appropriate way.

“Human trafficking is a sensitive subject and we found that facilitation by an educator is an important complement to the online curriculum. As a result, our service blueprint captured not just online actions like going to a website to view curriculum material, but also the teacher and student interactions that happen before and after,” says Shruti Iyer, an engineer for Tanzu Act.

Teachers themselves needed additional guidance, including how to recognize the signs of exploitation. “All this ties in with a school’s wider processes for protecting students. It is important that A21’s human trafficking curriculum aligns with existing protocols,” says Elizabeth Reeser, a product manager and designer on the Tanzu Act project team.

A hybrid approach was also vital because A21 plans to roll out its education strategy to regions where high-bandwidth internet connections are not readily available. In addition, mobile devices are more widely used than laptops in classrooms in many places. “Tanzu Act has helped us plan for a curriculum that combines the right mix of online and offline learning, and caters to a broad range of devices,” says Morse.

The Tanzu Act team recommended using an existing online learning platform rather than building one from scratch. For the trial phase, it evaluated both Ministry Grid and Canvas for the central learning platform.

“We appreciate that nonprofits can be constrained resource-wise, so we wanted to make sure our recommendations would be sustainable from a financial and people perspective,” notes Reeser.

“By keeping our course materials current, we give teachers and students the confidence to take action in the fight against human trafficking. We have also learned a great deal about how to manage digital projects and how best to partner with other organizations. We feel better prepared than ever to break the cycle of human trafficking.”

KRISTEN MORSE
GLOBAL REACH DIRECTOR, A21

The Tanzu Act team steered A21 toward software-as-a-service options. “Choosing a SaaS-based learning management system helps make it more affordable, flexible, and scalable, to help position the project for success,” says Ellery.

An opportunity for impact

When it came to roll out, Tanzu Act recommended a phased approach. This led A21 to collaborate with the Florida Department of Education, Title IV, Part A Team, and another local, nongovernmental organization to roll out the pilot in Duval County. “By focusing on a state that has one of the highest levels of human trafficking reports in the U.S., we could gather definitive research from a niche group of testers. By starting small, we are laying the foundation for a curriculum that will scale sustainably for A21,” says Morse.

“Tight feedback loops with an established cohort in Duval County allow A21 to show a minimal concept while getting valuable input from teachers and students, even as the team continues to make improvements,” explains Sneha Rao, a designer on the Tanzu Act team. “This means we are able to quickly course correct if something isn’t delivering high value to our audience and to A21 as an organization.”

This is one of the most valuable outcomes of the partnership. “With the help of Tanzu Act, A21 has adopted a lean, agile, and user-centered approach. We can learn and iterate before scaling up the curriculum across the U.S. and internationally. Moving forward with less risk is crucial for a nonprofit organization where people’s lives are at stake,” says Ellery.

During the pilot project, the Tanzu Act team will define desired outcomes and success metrics, format some of A21’s curriculum content for online presentation, and configure the courses in the learning management system. The team will also research user interaction with the online modules, for example, to validate if educators feel better empowered and equipped to teach about human trafficking as a result.

The Tanzu Act team will continue to support A21 with a series of workshop sessions that will ensure a safe handover of the project after the pilot. “Our team is humbled to have the opportunity to collaborate with A21 and support this important cause with impactful technology and methodology best practices,” says Ellie Ereira, head of Tanzu Act.

Although this is just the first phase of the project, Morse says that it will accelerate the delivery of the online curriculum in two important ways. “By keeping our course materials current, we give teachers and students the confidence to take action in the fight against human trafficking. We have also learned a lot about how to manage digital projects and how best to partner with other organizations. We feel better prepared than ever to break the cycle of human trafficking.”



Leading the battle against human trafficking:
@A21 in partnership with Dell Technologies
takes first steps toward online classes
designed to combat modern-day slavery
with support from — **#TanzuAct #VMware**
#VMware2030 #ProgressMadeReal
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