

SAFE HARBOR NO WRONG DOOR RESPONSE FOR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

Providing safety, healing and empowerment for children and youth who are victims and survivors of sexual exploitation.

February 2019



Introduction and Background:

Sexual exploitation is an experience that no one should have to face. However, it happens across the country and within the state of Minnesota—in urban, suburban, rural and tribal communities. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children conservatively estimates that 100,000 children are exploited each year in the United States.ⁱ Youth who have histories of sexual abuseⁱⁱ, runaways and youth experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk for becoming sexually exploited. Research studies have found that at least one in five homeless youth experience sexual exploitation.ⁱⁱⁱ Sadly, these children who have already experienced trauma are then recruited through places and people that are supposed to be safe for them—their own family members or friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, at school, at a court ordered placement or juvenile detention facilities.^{iv}

A study conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2014 found that “youth victims were predominately girls of color living in poverty....while sex buyers were men from all communities and social economic backgrounds....”^v Another local study to the Minneapolis area found that 85% of sexually exploited youth were youth of color with the majority being African American followed by American Indian youth. This same study found that one third of sexually exploited youth self identified as LGBTQ.^{vi} Last but certainly not least, studies have shown that girls/young women and boys/young men are sexually exploited at equal rates.^{vii}

The Minnesota State Legislature has been instrumental in the support and implementation of the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response. This law and response changed how our state supports victims of exploitation. The Safe Harbor Law decriminalizes “prostitution” offenses for youth under the age of 18. The No Wrong Door Response provides a new trauma informed and multidisciplinary response for youth age 24 and younger which includes outreach, supportive services, emergency shelter and housing and partnerships with systems such as child welfare and law enforcement. *Please see the attached Minnesota Department of Health's Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Flier for more information.*

Since the passage of the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door were implemented, multi-disciplinary partners have come together to work hard to put the No Wrong Door model in place. A high level overview and examples of some of the work are highlighted below:

Training and Protocol Development:

Training was developed through state, county and nonprofits on how to identify victims of sex trafficking and the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response. Some examples of these trainings include: Minnesota Department of Human Services created a training for child protection and child welfare social workers on sexual exploitation; Streetworks created trainings for youth street outreach workers; The Link created training for the Mall of America, Minneapolis Public Schools Check and Connect Program and the

Super Bowl Crew 52 Volunteers; the Ramsey County Attorney's Office created a training for law enforcement and the state Departments of Human Services and Health created training for Safe Harbor grantees and providers.

The Minnesota Department of Health and MNCASA (MN Coalition Against Sexual Assault) coordinated the development of state-wide Safe Harbor Protocols for best practices for responding to victims of sexual exploitation and established five regional grants to further develop localized protocols.

Supportive Services:

Since the implementation of the Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Response, 8 regional navigator programs have been opened along with 20 supportive services programs. These services offer a range of supports including advocacy, legal, mental health, culturally specific services, street outreach and more. According to reports from the MN Department of Health, between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018 - 480 youth received support through the Regional Navigator and Supportive Services Programs.

Emergency Shelter and Housing:

Prior to the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response our state did not have placement, emergency shelter or housing options that were designed to meet the specific needs of sexually exploited/trafficked youth. If these youth were identified by law enforcement often times the only option they had was to place them with a Juvenile Correctional Facility. Since the implementation of Safe Harbor in August of 2013, 17 emergency shelter beds and 54 units of housing have been opened with partial funding from the state's Safe Harbor funding, local government and private donations. According to reports from the MN Department of Human Services, between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018 - 173 unduplicated youth were served by these shelter and housing programs.

Systems Change:

Child Protection and Child Welfare:

The passage of the Safe Harbor Law amended the child protection statutes to include "sexual abuse/trafficking" as a form of childhood abuse requiring mandated reports. The Minnesota Department of Human Services states that initial numbers of reports to child protection for sexual exploitation and trafficking were 651 between May 29th, 2017 and October 31, 2018. Additionally several counties across the state have trained their child protection and welfare staff on the issue of sexual exploitation/trafficking and some counties such as Hennepin County have hired social workers specifically for victims of sex trafficking.

Law Enforcement:

Many law enforcement jurisdictions are now responding to youth age 24 and younger as victims instead of perpetrators of a crime. The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) created a taskforce made up of law enforcement officers and investigators from different jurisdictions to work together on human trafficking investigations. During 2018 the BCA conducted 216 human trafficking investigations, made 117 arrests of people for solicitation for sex.

Responses for Large Scale Events:

Due to the state of Minnesota having the Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Response in place we were in a much better position to respond to the request to provide awareness campaigns, training and increased services, emergency shelter and support for law enforcement operations during the 10 Days of the Super Bowl.

This included increased street outreach, services, drop-in center hours, emergency shelter and support for law enforcement operations. The Super Bowl also provided an opportunity to train 10,000 Super Bowl Crew 52 volunteers and advertise two sex trafficking campaigns "I am Priceless" developed by youth survivors of sex trafficking from The Link and "Don't Buy It" created by Men as Peacemakers. *Please see the attached Super Bowl Infographic for details.*

This response was documented and is being used to help inform other cities anti-trafficking response during the Super Bowl as well as other large scale events within our state such as the upcoming Final Four.

Additional Opportunities for Growth and Expansion:

Although there has been incredible progress made, there are many opportunities for both improving and building the capacity of our state-wide No Wrong Door Response.

The Need:

We know that just one population of youth at risk for exploitation (youth experiencing homelessness) are conservatively estimated to be at a staggering 6,000 youth per night. Research studies have shown that 20% of these youth or 1,200 are also sexually exploited. We also know that there were 651 reports of minors being sex trafficked between May 29th, 2017 and October 31, 2018.

Our Safe Harbor agencies are also seeing a huge need, one example from Life House in Duluth found that Life House served more than 400 homeless teens and young adults last year, of whom 30% disclosed having been sexually exploited or trafficked *on initial intake in the drop-in center* (actual rates are undoubtedly higher as young people are uncomfortable disclosing this information to "strangers"). So we know that *at least* 120 homeless, sexually exploited young people sought help at Life House last year.

Life House's Safe Harbor housing programs, The Loft emergency shelter and Sol House, currently provide 8 beds for trafficked teens. In 2018, 82 sexually abused/exploited youth requested assistance from Life House's Mental Health & Wellness Program; however, due to limited resources only half (44 youth) received supportive mental health and substance abuse services at Life House. Similarly, The Link in the Twin Cities Metro Area's emergency shelter and housing program for sex trafficked youth (Passageways) carries a waiting list to get into our housing program.

We also know that the Safe Harbor Response is helping youth-one of the emergency shelter and housing programs (The Link's Passageways Program) showed in 2018 out of all youth served: 80% made progress with their school/education; 86.5% improved their physical, mental and sexual health; and 90% improved their knowledge of how to stay safe.

The current providers of Safe Harbor shelter, housing and services, along with youth victims/survivors of sex trafficking, have identified the following needs:

- An independent academic research evaluation that would establish state-wide prevalence of sexual exploitation along with measuring the effectiveness and outcomes of the current Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Model and offering recommendations for improvements.
- Additional training for service providers, child protection and child welfare system professionals, foster care and adoptive parents, criminal justice system, mental health and chemical dependency treatment providers, hospitals, schools, law enforcement among others.
- State and local work to implement the multi-disciplinary protocols and best practices for responding to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation.
- Additional capacity within both the supportive services, emergency shelter and housing programs for sexually exploited youth. Currently the existing state wide response is not able to serve all of the youth who need help. Additionally-the age range has increased within the Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Response from 18 to 24 which is wonderful, however, adds a significant number of youth between the ages of 18 and 24 that also need access to specialized emergency shelter, housing and services options through Safe Harbor-No Wrong Door.
- Capital resources for emergency shelter and housing for sexually exploited youth. In order to be able to support the creation and maintenance of emergency shelters and housing programs there needs to be resources for the physical buildings that these programs are provided in.
- Increased culturally specific services and support for victims of sexual exploitation. This is critical due to the fact that there are disproportionate numbers of youth of color and/or LGBTQ youth that are being sexually exploited within the state of Minnesota.

Conclusion:

Advocates and Survivors of Sexual Exploitation for the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response have always recognized the importance of supporting infrastructures and the continuum of services, shelter and housing (and expansions of them) within our state that support populations that are vulnerable to becoming sex trafficked. These include but are not limited to:

- Homeless Youth, Family and Adult Service, Shelter and Housing Providers
- Supportive Services for Victims of Child Abuse
- Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter, Housing and Services
- Sexual Assault Services
- Children and Adult Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Treatment
- Investments to Support Law Enforcement and Court Systems

In order to truly help to prevent and end sexual exploitation our state must have strong infrastructures within all of these continuum of cares.

We also strongly support the Safe Harbor for All policy work being led by the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights. We know that just because a person turns 18 does not mean they are no longer victimized by sex trafficking-they need our support just as much as much as the youth do.

State, local government and private investments have been made to create a new trauma informed and victim centered approach for sexually exploited youth – and it has made a significant impact on the lives of many youth, however, there are many more children, youth and adults that are being victimized by sex trafficking that are falling through the cracks due to the lack of capacity of the No Wrong Door Response.

The 2019 Legislative Session offers an opportunity to make additional progress on the work to reduce and end sex trafficking in our state by supporting the following:

1. An additional \$4 million for Supportive Services, Emergency Shelter, Housing, Training, Protocol Implementation and Evaluation of the Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Response.
2. Safe Harbor for All
3. Investments for additional Law Enforcement Training
4. Homeless Youth Act and Homes for All Campaigns
5. Shelter Linked Mental Health Grants

For more information please contact Beth Holger, Executive Director for The Link at bholger@thelinkmn.org or 612-636-4260.

ⁱ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Testimony of Ernie Allen for the U.S. House of Representatives, July 19, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Wilson, H.W. & Widom, C.S. (2010). *The role of problem behaviors in the path from child abuse and neglect to prostitution. A prospective examination.* Journal of Research on Adolescence, 20(1), 210-236.

ⁱⁱⁱ Halcon, L.L. & Lifson, A.R. (2004). *Prevalence and predictors of sexual risk among homeless youth.* Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33(1), 71-80.

^{iv} Martin, L. and Pierce, A. *Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis: Structures, Functions, and Patterns.* University of Minnesota-UROC, 2014.

^v Martin, L. and Pierce et al.

^{vi} Holger-Ambrose, B.; Langmade, C.; Edinburgh, L. and Saewyc, E. *The Illusions and Juxtapositions of Commercial Sexual Exploitation Among Youth: Identifying Effective Street Outreach Strategies.* Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 2013.

^{vii} Edwards, J.M.; Iritant, B.J. and Hallfors, D.D., *Prevalence and Correlates of Exchanging Sex for Drugs or Money among Adolescents in the United States.* Sexually Transmitted Infections., 2006.