



Youth Services Network

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 2021

Introduction and Overview of Youth Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking and Safe Harbor

Racism and Racial Disparities

White supremacy, racism, and systematic inequities have persistently impacted Indigenous, African American, and youth of color for centuries. The past year, 2020, increased the visibility of racial and systemic injustices.

A study conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2014 found that “youth victims of sexual exploitation were predominately youth of color living in poverty.... while sex buyers were men from all communities and social economic backgrounds....”. v Systemic racism directly affects the physical health, mental well-being, and daily lives of youth and families experiencing homelessness. Youth have been directly impacted by the public uprising for racial justice and our collective community trauma related to the pandemic. This has only perpetuated trauma within many young peoples’ lives.

Societal, institutional, systematic and policy change must happen. As leaders within our communities, we have a responsibility to address the impacts of racism and systematic oppression. We call upon decision makers to implement more inclusive policies and institutional practices that reduce racial and health disparities. One concrete example is to support the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Taskforce recommendations ([Minnesota Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women \(mn.gov\)](#)) along with the legislative proposal authored by Representative Ruth Richardson to create a similar taskforce for Missing and Murdered Black Women.

The Youth Services Network is committed to addressing racial disparities, a vital component to the root causes leading to and reproducing youth becoming homeless and experiencing sexual exploitation. As service providers, we know and understand these disparities and our work with youth is a testimony to the difference that can be made in the lives of our future generations who have been impacted by systemic racism. As youth serving agencies working with Minnesota’s marginalized young people, who disproportionately represent communities of color, we urge policy makers to centralize the short and long-term impacts of the systematic racism and intergenerational trauma as you make policy. We encourage policy makers to join us in eliminating the barriers that keep racial and health disparities entrenched.

The following pages provides concrete steps for the Minnesota Legislature to address systemic racism and its impact on youth experiencing sexual exploitation. Legislative language, administrative rules, and requests for proposals should all reflect a commitment to addressing and eliminating systemic racism and uplifting our young people, who are the future of our communities.

Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Overview

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 According to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) *at least 5,0000 youth between the ages of 15 and 19 have traded sex. This is believed to be a conservative and underestimate as the MSS is only completed by students who are enrolled in school. It does not include youth who were not in school on the day of the survey or who do not attend school. Young people may also be reluctant to answer “yes” for many reasons including shame or fear.* Youth who have histories of sexual abuse ii, 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 youth 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.

Prevention, Regional Navigators and Supportive Services:

Since the implementation of the Safe Harbor No Wrong Door Response, 9 regional navigator programs have been opened along with 29 supportive services programs. Regional Navigators and Safe Harbor Supportive Services provide advocacy and awareness building, training and victim-centered services designed to heal the trauma of youth who have experienced sexual exploitation and/or trafficking. Services include but are not limited too case management, legal services, physical and mental health care, education, employment, counseling and support groups, family support, street outreach. Another critical component of Safe Harbor is prevention in hopes of reaching those youth who are highest risk of becoming sexually exploited and trafficked before the exploitation occurs. Efforts that have been developed and implement include but are not limited too: prevention awareness campaigns such as "I am Priceless" which is a prevention awareness campaign and curriculum designed by youth with lived experience of sexual exploitation with The Link; a prevention campaign targeting the demand developed by Men as Peacemakers called "Don't Buy It"; a prevention curriculum called "Not a Number" which has been implemented in many Safe Harbor grantee agencies across the state; targeted Street Outreach Programs and collaborations with schools and further training within organizations that see high numbers of at risk youth such as homeless youth shelters, child welfare and juvenile justice professionals. It is also important that all components including the Safe Harbor network include culturally specific programming for youth most disproportionately impacted by sexual exploitation and trafficking which in Minnesota are Black, Native American and/or LGBTQ+ youth. According to reports from the MN Department of Health, between March 1, 2019 and February 12th 718

youth received support through the Safe Harbor 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, 27 emergency shelter beds and 86 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, 2019 and June 30, 2020 - 164 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 there were 477 reports made to child protection for sexual exploitation and trafficking between January 1, 2020 and December 31st, 2020. 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:

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) created a taskforce (the BCA Human Trafficking Investigators Taskforce) made up of law enforcement officers and investigators from different jurisdictions to work together on human trafficking investigations. During 2019 the BCA conducted 470 human trafficking investigations resulting in 35 people charged (and 18 of these being convicted) of sex trafficking charges.

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 there are 5,000 youth who experience some form of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking according to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey. We also know that within 2020 there were 477 reports made to child protection agencies across the state of children who were sexually exploited and/or trafficked; that there were 718 youth served with Safe Harbor Supportive Services between March of 2019 and December of 2020.

Safe Harbor grantee shelter, housing and service providers are seeing a large need. A few examples of this are from a Safe Harbor funded grantee, Life House, located in Duluth and The Link, based in north Minneapolis.

In 2015, Life House responded to the need for safe and supportive long-term housing for sexually exploited and/or human trafficked youth. Life House’s Safe Harbor housing programs include Sol House, a 24/7 residential and transitional living site with 8 beds for youth ages 15 to 20, who are survivors of sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking, and 2 beds in The Loft, an emergency shelter for youth ages 15 to 19. In 2020, Life House launched Northern Lights Housing program, which provides 8 additional units in the community for youth up to 24 years old where they have a specific case manager to connect with in this program. These programs also include an after-care advocate to support our young people through the process of transitioning to independent living. Life House served 800 youth and young adults last year, of which 224 self-disclosed having experienced sexual abuse and/or exploited (actual rates are undoubtedly higher as young people are uncomfortable disclosing this information). Life House’s Safe Harbor housing programs, The Loft emergency shelter and Sol House, currently provide 8 beds for youth who have experienced sexual exploitation and/or trafficking.

The Link opened a specialized emergency shelter and housing program for sexually exploited and/or trafficked youth in September of 2014 which includes 8 emergency shelter beds for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 and 10 units of housing for youth between the ages of 16 and 24. The program is open to youth of all gender identities along with parenting youth with children in our housing program. Since opening there has been a strong demand for the program serving between 50 and 60 youth survivors each year and has waiting list to get into the housing program.

We also know that the Safe Harbor Response is helping youth-one of the many examples of this is with The Link's Safe Harbor Programs, which hosts the Safe Harbor West Metro Regional Navigator Program, Safe Harbor Supportive Services Program along with a specialized emergency shelter and housing program for sexually exploited youth (Passageways Emergency Shelter and Housing Program) served 56 victims of exploitation in 2020 with emergency shelter and housing and an additional 160 through the Safe Harbor West Metro Regional Navigator Program and Supportive Services. Seventy one percent of the youth in shelter and housing improved their education and one hundred percent; 84% of the youth successfully completed the program and 100% improved their mental and emotional health.

- 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 and trafficking within the state of Minnesota.
- 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 Strategic Plan which was conducted by the University of Minnesota UROC. 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 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 2021 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

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- 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.