

New York City's Safe Harbor Plan
Submitted by the NYC Administration for Children's Services
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I. Introduction

New York City currently provides a continuum of services spanning several city agencies targeted at preventing sexual exploitation of children and providing services to victims of sexual exploitation. However, the needs of this population reach beyond the resources of existing services. New York State's Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) allocated \$622,220 in Safe Harbor funds to New York City. The Mayor's office selected the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to plan for and distribute the funding so that the City can expand upon this continuum and fill gaps in existing services. Children's Services has partnered with the Division of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and other city-wide stakeholders to develop this proposal.

II. Community Needs Analysis

Due to the hidden nature and the stigma associated with sexual exploitation, the identification of victims of child sexual exploitation and data collection is difficult. However, numerous studies clearly identify child abuse and foster care involvement as one of the highest risk factors in child sexual exploitation. A 2007 study estimated the number of sexually exploited children in New York City to be approximately 2,200 and also found that 85 % of trafficked youth had prior child welfare involvement¹. In July 2012, The New York Women's Foundation released a report on Sex Trafficking of Minors in New York. Their findings highlighted that the risk factors for child sexual exploitation include prior sexual abuse and domestic violence, homelessness, foster care placement, and Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) petitions, school absence/truancy, drug abuse and gang participation².

To determine how best to utilize the Safe Harbor funds, Children's Services informally surveyed a variety of stakeholders including community advocates, children's attorneys, provider agencies and other city agencies serving sexually exploited youth to assess and prioritize the needs of this population within New York City. In addition, Children's Services reviewed the utilization of our

¹ Gragg, F, Petta, I., Petta, I., Bernstein, H., Eisen, K & Quinn, L. (2007, April 18). *New York prevalence study of commercially sexually exploited children*. Rockville, Maryland: WESTAT.

² Hines, E., & Hochman, J. (2012, July). *Sex Trafficking of Minors in New York: Increasing Prevention and Collective Action*. New York, New York.

existing preventive and foster care contracts serving this population. Children's Services contracts with Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) to provide specialized residential services and foster care services for sexually exploited youth. The residential program houses twelve youth and remains at or near full capacity at all times. The foster care program is currently being developed and expects to serve 24 youth once fully operational. In addition, Children's Services-funded St. Luke's Sexually Exploited Preventive Services program served 38 families in 2012.

DYCD collects data regarding self-disclosure of sexual exploitation for youth who enter both their residential programs and their drop-in centers. From July 2011 to June 2012, 56 of the youth served by these programs self-identified as having been sexually abused and/or exploited. These low numbers reflect the challenges with data collection when youth often do not disclose their history of sexual exploitation to service providers.

Based on our informal survey, there appears to be a strong continuum of services available to sexually exploited youth in New York City. However, providers and city agencies struggle to engage youth in services. After careful consideration, Children's Services determined there was a need to increase services aimed at engaging foster youth at high risk of sexual exploitation and to do more comprehensive, long-term planning on the City's response to child sexual exploitation.

III. Proposed Services

Children's Services proposes several approaches aimed at preventing and reducing exploitation of youth:

- 1.) Expand street outreach services focused on engaging foster youth in areas known to be frequented by youth at high risk of sexual exploitation;
- 2.) Co-locate provider staff experienced in serving sexually exploited youth at the Children's Center (the NYC facility that cares for children who are in the custody of Children's Services awaiting foster care placement) to provide direct services and capacity building of Children's Center staff;
- 3.) Add forty additional slots to DYCD's Summer Jobs Programs dedicated exclusively to high risk youth in sexually exploited foster care placements or at the Children's Center;
- 4.) Build capacity of Children's Services staff, preventive and foster care providers to identify, engage and appropriately refer to sexually exploited youth services;

- 5.) Incorporate issues of sexual exploitation into Juvenile Justice trauma focused initiatives and create a resource guide for youth upon discharge from Non-Secure Placement or Detention;
- 6.) Provide technical assistance to specialized sexually exploited foster care and preventive providers to improve program treatment models, recruitment of foster parents and referral outreach efforts;
- 7.) Evaluate current data collection methods and identify opportunities to improve data collection, analysis and reporting; and,
- 8.) Conduct a system response analysis with the assistance of a consultant who will work with city-wide stakeholders to develop a comprehensive vision and plan that specifies the needs, types of services, and philosophical approach to providing services for sexually exploited children in New York City.

This comprehensive span of initiatives utilizes Safe Harbor funds to provide immediate direct services to sexually exploited youth while simultaneously supporting a comprehensive, city-wide analysis and planning process for New York City's response to child sexual exploitation.

A. Foster Youth Focused Street Outreach

Children's Services proposes using \$207,000 of the Safe Harbor funds to increase DYCD's street outreach work and build outreach workers' capacity to identify and engage youth at risk of sexual exploitation who may be AWOL from foster care placements. DYCD's current contracts with Safe Horizon will be amended to increase outreach services and create and implement training and tracking mechanisms around engagement of sexually exploited youth to encourage them to return to their foster homes. These funds will also be used to purchase an additional van for the specialized street outreach team. Safe Horizon is an experienced provider with expertise serving underserved populations who have survived sexual exploitation including boys and girls, no matter their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

Vehicle-based, street outreach services will focus primarily on those areas where youth are known to congregate. The purpose of the program will be to reach out to foster care and other vulnerable youth, distribute information about services, provide resources, materials and referrals, and transport youth to their homes, foster homes, crisis shelters, or other safe environments.

The provider, Safe Horizon, would target public spaces, subway stations, transportation hubs and other areas where foster care and vulnerable youth are known to congregate. By

developing rapport with youth in the streets and elsewhere, outreach workers would directly inform youth at risk for homelessness and sexual exploitation about available services, refer youth and their families to services and engage foster youth to encourage them to return to foster care.

To improve information sharing, street outreach teams will communicate regularly with provider staff co-located at the Children's Center and the Children's Services AWOL Unit that is charged with assisting provider agencies with identifying and re-engaging youth who have run away from foster care placements. Hours of operation will be determined after assessing the peak times provided by Children's Service to interact with youth who have absconded from foster homes and facilities. Current street outreach units serve approximately 480 youth per month. Children's Services projects this additional street outreach will serve approximately 4,300 more children at high risk of sexual exploitation.

B. Sexually Exploited Service Providers Co-Located at the Children's Center

Children's Services proposes using \$77,400 of the funds to place staff from DYCD provider agencies experienced in providing services to sexually exploited youth at the Children's Center to engage youth and prevent AWOLS. Provider agency staff will also train and consult with Children's Services staff to build their capacity to identify and engage sexually exploited youth. Provider agency staff will work at the Children's Center during times when youth are at higher risk of leaving the facility such as evenings and weekends. In addition to capacity building, provider staff will provide direct services to youth at the Children's Center to engage them in services and encourage successful placement of youth in specialized sexually exploited foster care or residential programs.

Existing DYCD contracted providers Girls Education and Mentoring Service (GEMS) and Safe Horizon will co-locate Master's in Social Work Counselors from existing sexually exploited services programs at the Children's Center for up to sixty hours per week. GEMS demonstrates expertise in serving commercially sexually exploited girls and young women and Safe Horizon demonstrates expertise serving all populations of youth at high risk of sexual exploitation (boys and girls no matter their sexual orientation or their gender identity). Children's Services expects this combination of capacity building and direct services to improve service delivery to all high-risk youth, ages 11 and older, entering the Children's Center, which sees approximately 8,000 youth per year.

C. Additional Summer Youth Employment Program Slots for Sexually Exploited Foster Youth

According to a recent report by the Center for an Urban Future³, 50% of foster care youth are failing to connect with the world of work. To address this issue, Children's Services proposes utilizing \$66,520 to serve forty foster care youth ages 14-24 placed in a specialized sexually exploited foster care placements or at the Children's Center by providing opportunities to become familiar with the world of work, gain employment experience, and identify educational pathways that support career and life goals. Participants will work in summer jobs for 6 weeks during the summer for 25 hours per week, and take part in focused educational activities that integrate life skills, life-long learning, and career planning. This will specifically addresses the needs of vulnerable foster care youth. Providers will be specialists who will provide the individualized supports that will enable vulnerable youth participants to succeed. Youth often face extraordinary challenges in the areas of mental health, education, employment, and finances. Vulnerable youth, faced with the high cost of housing in the City coupled with the low wages that they can earn as unskilled workers, find self-sufficiency a daunting challenge that may cause them to turn to illegal street activities for survival.

Vulnerable youth have strong survival and self-advocacy skills as a result of the many challenges they have faced. These characteristics can become unique strengths when youth become engaged with workforce development and supportive services. Vulnerable youth who participate in youth development and youth leadership experiences are more likely to do well in school, be involved in their communities, and transition successfully through adolescence to adulthood. Employment and work-related activities can help youth to validate their self-worth, as well as to explore their abilities and interests.

D. Capacity Building of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Staff and Providers

To improve earlier identification and engagement of sexually exploited youth in specialized preventive, foster care and juvenile justice services, Children's Services proposes utilizing \$50,000 of the Safe Harbor funds to build the capacity of ACS staff and service providers by developing Program Champions within key areas of Children's Services to be a resource for their divisions, to create a training curriculum and train the trainer model for Program Champion's and the ACS Training Institute, and to create a tool to assist staff and providers assess for and identify child victims of sexual exploitation. Program Champions will be a resource and liaison for all issues related to sexual exploitation within child protection, foster care and preventive program areas

³ http://www.nycfuture.org/images_pdfs/pdfs/FosteringCareers.pdf

with an increased focus within the Education, AWOL and Older Youth Services units. Children's Services will release a Request for Proposals to engage a provider experienced on the issue of child sexual exploitation who can utilize their expertise in serving all populations of sexually exploited youth (regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation) to provide the deliverables described above. Upon completion, the Program Champion model design and curriculum will be shared with other city agencies serving similar populations.

E. Capacity Building and Incorporation of Sexual Exploitation into Juvenile Justice Initiatives

Children's Services will utilize \$37,300 of the funds to hire a consultant with expertise in child sexual exploitation to build the capacity of the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) Case Managers, Placement and Permanency Specialists and Youth Counselors to identify, understand and appropriately refer youth to specialized services. The consultant will work with DYFJ to coordinate the training with the trauma-informed care initiative that DYFJ is currently implementing in partnership with Bellevue Hospital Center as part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) initiative ACS is launching to comply with new regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Justice to help juvenile facilities prevent, detect and respond to sexual misconduct.

In addition to training, the consultant will produce a resource guide staff can utilize to make appropriate referrals for youth upon discharge from juvenile placements and detention. Upon completion, the model designed to build and sustain staff capacity, the curriculum and the resource guide will be shared with other city agencies serving similar populations, including the NYC Department of Probation.

F. Technical Assistance for Specialized Sexually Exploited Youth Foster Care and Preventive Service Providers

Children's Services contracted providers serving sexually exploited youth continuously struggle with the challenges related to serving this population. Children's Services proposes using \$60,000 of Safe Harbor funds to provide technical assistance to strengthen and provide additional expertise to Jewish Child Care Association and St. Luke's specialized sexually exploited programs. Technical assistance will be provided by a consultant with extensive experience engaging and treating sexually exploited youth and their families and will include guidance on further development of their treatment service models, assistance creating strategies to recruit foster homes for sexually

exploited youth and for improving outreach efforts to ensure specialized programs are receiving appropriate referrals and are fully utilized.

G. Evaluation and Improvement of Data Collection and Reporting in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Populations

Advocates and Stakeholder's city-wide, including the New York City Council, have expressed the difficulties with and the need for an increase in collection of data on sexually exploited youth. Children's Services proposes utilizing \$54,000 to evaluate the current data collection methods of city-funded sexually exploited service providers and identify both short-term and long-term opportunities to improve data collection, analysis and reporting. Children's services will utilize a consultant to review existing data collection forms and databases, conduct a process analysis to determine if there are opportunities outside of existing points of data collection to capture additional data and make recommendations for the revision or adoption of new data collection processes. In addition, the consultant will work with stakeholders to develop a process for the regular collection and sharing of data.

H. City-Wide System Response Analysis

Service providers and advocates agree there continues to be a need for a comprehensive plan on how best to respond to the issue of child sexual exploitation in New York City. Children's Services proposes utilizing \$70,000 of the Safe Harbor funds to hire a consultant with significant experience working on the issue of child sexual exploitation to assist city-wide stakeholders to develop a comprehensive vision and plan to enhance coordination among city agencies and courts. The plan would include an analysis of needs, types of services available, gaps in service, prioritization of new service needs for future funding allocations and outline both short-term and long-term goals towards an improved response to child sexual exploitation in New York City.

IV. Projected Outcomes

Children's Services projects that the combination of capacity building and increase in service provision proposed above will provide both immediate and long-term improvements in the outcomes for sexually exploited youth. Some anticipated outcomes include:

- Fewer foster youth leaving foster care placements to live on the street , exposing them to high risk of sexual exploitation;
- More youth leaving the street to return to foster placements or to their families;
- More youth being identified earlier as at risk of or victims of sexual exploitation and more youth being referred to specialized services;

- More youth engaged in treatment programs through juvenile justice placements, foster placements and job programs resulting in fewer placement moves, AWOLS and less school absences;
- More comprehensive data collection and reporting; and
- More effective use of future funding informed by comprehensive city-wide planning to ensure services are best meeting community need

Outcomes will be measured through ongoing data collection and analysis by Children's Services, DYCD and provider agencies.

V. Conclusion

The challenges of identification and engagement of youth at risk of, or victims of sexual exploitation require comprehensive, well-informed, and focused service interventions. NYC's Safe Harbor proposal provides new and improved services and capacity building with social service providers to identify and engage at-risk and sexually exploited youth. In addition, Safe Harbor funds will enable experts and city-wide stakeholders to develop a system response plan to inform both short-term and long-term goals to improve New York City's response to the issue of child sexual exploitation.