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EMERGING PRACTICES WITHIN CHILD WELFARE RESPONSES

The child welfare system provides an important safety net to protect youth who are vulnerable to human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Professionals in the child welfare system are in a position to lead efforts in strengthening the identification, prevention, and early intervention in child trafficking cases. This briefing provides a non-exhaustive list of examples of efforts already underway across the United States, spotlighting simple and low or no cost solutions that child welfare agencies have put into practice.

1 Institute Mandatory Screening

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families screens every child who enters its system for commercial sexual exploitation. Each region has an appointed Human Trafficking Liaison to oversee human trafficking cases, collect and report data, and coordinate communications. The Trafficking Clinical Team of licensed clinicians assesses victims within 72 hours.

Multnomah County in Oregon has a 4-5 person commercial sexual exploitation-specific unit that coordinates on all cases identified across the county's child welfare system. There is a designated point person within the department who can respond to and collaborate with other partners on active cases within their jurisdiction.

2 Place Specialized Advocates in Child Welfare Centers

Alameda County's Department of Children and Family Services in California houses advocates from a local organization devoted to serving child sex trafficking victims in its assessment center. They are on site each day to talk to any youth who come into the center and they also provide trainings to the center's staff, foster parents, and group home workers.

3 Coordinate with the Department of Juvenile Justice & County Courts

Florida's Victim Identification Pilot Project trains staff at the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Assessment Centers to use a research-based, trauma-informed tool to identify victims as soon as they enter the facility. Once victims are identified, DJJ staff reports them to the Florida Abuse Hotline and an alert is entered into DJJ's data system to track the child and ensure they receive appropriate services. The tool lists indicators of commercial sexual exploitation and provides tips on how to interview and talk to children about sex trafficking.

The Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services coordinates with the County's Probation Department which operates the STAR (Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience) Court working with youth who have been commercially sexually exploited.

4 Train Case Workers

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families, trains foster care parents and caseworkers in care facilities and other therapeutic settings on warning signs of trafficking, its dangers and risks, and ways to facilitate engagement with youth.

5 Participate in a Broad Coalition

Suffolk County in Massachusetts formed a coalition to fight the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) is a partnership between more than 35 public and private agencies, including law enforcement, child protection, medical, street outreach, social service providers, schools, and survivors. The goal of SEEN is to have a coordinated multi-system response to provide comprehensive services to victims and protect the community against the traffickers exploiting children.

The Governor's Office for Children and Families in George formed the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Task Force in 2008 to work collaboratively across seven work groups based on the seven goals of the Task Force, comprised of state, local, federal government, law enforcement, service providers, and non-governmental organizations.

6 Centralize Listing of Victim Services

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (CDCF), along with its partners, are developing an online resource guide that will be available on CDCF's website, providing information about services available to child victims of human trafficking in one location.

7 Coordinate with Local Children's Hospitals & Child Advocacy Centers

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families works with the Connecticut Children's Medical Hospital as the designated emergency room for victims in acute situations needing medical and psychiatric assessment.

Suffolk County in Massachusetts coordinates responses to child trafficking cases with its Child Advocacy Center (CAC), including the ability to conduct forensic interviews of victims at the CAC.

8 Coordinate with Local Rape Crisis & Sexual Assault Centers

Multnomah County in Oregon coordinates county-wide responses to commercial sexual exploitation with the Sexual Assault Resource Center (SARC), where licensed clinicians are available 24 hours a day to conduct initial assessments of potential victims and to provide safety planning.

9 Coordinate on Data Collection

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) created a tracking system to identify the number of victims in Connecticut and is able to analyze how many children are repeat victims, which cities have the highest rates of trafficking, victimization while on AWOL status, and congregate care settings with multiple victims. DCF also created the ability for the DCF Careline to accept reports of human trafficking as child protection cases without the identification of a guardian or entrusted person listed as a perpetrator. DCF trains child abuse hotline staff on how to deal with reports and track cases.

10 Provide State Guidance for Child Protective Services Investigations

The Florida Department of Children and Families includes human trafficking as a form of maltreatment under the child abuse reporting guidelines, outlining how to identify victims, collect evidence, and follow investigation procedures. Illinois and other states provide similar guidance.

The Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel at the Office of the Child Advocate created State Model Child Abuse Protocols, issuing guidance to all counties. The Model Protocol includes commercial sexual exploitation of children as a form of abuse and includes information on how to identify signs of victimization.