



Human Trafficking Newsletter #4

Child Sex Trafficking and Child Welfare Systems

In our last newsletter, we pointed out that

Child abuse in the U.S. has traditionally been defined by the abuse being perpetrated by a parent, caregiver or guardian. Thus the child victims of trafficking have generally been excluded from being served by child welfare systems. Often they are involved with, or in the control of a pimp or trafficker who is not recognized as a caregiver or guardian.

This is an issue our Department will be examining in the months ahead. Advocates for the victims of child sex trafficking point out that the children and youth impacted by trafficking are also victims of child abuse. That violence and rape is, in fact, child abuse and maltreatment.

Criminalization and Victimization

Advocates for victims of sex trafficking make strong arguments that children involved in trafficking need to be served by the child welfare system. Without our intervention, the children may be considered criminals (as being prostitutes) or otherwise "bad" or delinquent. They may not be seen as victims of crime, but rather as perpetrators of it.



Within 48 hours of running away, a young person is likely to be solicited for prostitution or another form of commercial sexual exploitation.

When the young victims of sexual trafficking are seen as criminals, they end up in the juvenile justice system. That system is not geared to the victim, and often lacks the ability to provide the trauma-informed services needed by children and youth impacted by sex trafficking.

Minors who have been involved in sex trafficking often have severe alienation from their family, adults, health systems, and their community. Even existing child welfare services for children who have experienced child sexual abuse may not be adequate to meet their needs. For a child welfare system to effectively serve these victims, we may need to reframe some aspects of our work. Some states have already begun this work.

There is still much to consider and learn, and often this involves

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our partner agencies. For example, in Los Angeles, there is a judicial program that serves approximately 75 youth in a special court program that sounds similar to drug court activities, in that it provides intensive services and supervision involving the probation department.

Resources:

[End Trafficking](#) - Administration for Children and Families

[PolarisProject.org](#) - National Human Trafficking Resource Center, which also operates 24 hours a day/7 days a week. It can be reached at 1-888-373-7888 or text BEFREE.

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