

# DOMESTIC MINOR SEX TRAFFICKING

## CLEARWATER



**Shared Hope International** conducted an assessment in Clearwater, FL to examine the practices and procedures used to identify and deliver services to victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking – U.S. children who are exploited through commercial sex. The Clearwater Assessment may serve as a springboard to action for the Clearwater Human Trafficking Task Force and the community in order to prioritize the identification and protection of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims in Florida.

## the COALITION

In the face of many challenges a diverse coalition of groups and individuals in Clearwater has aggressively tackled the issue of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. These amazing professionals are engaging in remarkable levels of cooperation and communication as they move forward to address the numbers of prostituted children who pass through the system on a yearly basis. The assessment commends the seamless cooperation between federal, state, and local agencies.

## the FINDINGS

- There is more prostitution taking place in private residences than other locations and it is facilitated through various forms of advertising, such as on craigslist.org.
- It is estimated that more than 400 potential victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - U.S. children exploited through commercial sex - have passed through the hands of various agencies, organizations, and officers in Florida since 2000.
- The percentage of young females involved in the juvenile justice system for delinquency has grown from 24% to 30% since the early 1990s. The number of males referred to DJJ has declined significantly in recent years, while the number of females has not.
- When brought before a juvenile court judge, prostituted minors are advised to plead “guilty” to the prostitution charge without benefit of counsel from a public defender. Encouraging victims of prostitution to plead “guilty,” even if the intention is to keep them “safe” from their pimps in a juvenile detention facility confirms that they are viewed as criminals and not entitled to justice or services.
- Treatment must address the psychological influence that intermittent positive reinforcement from pimps/traffickers has on victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. The psychological manipulation endured is so severe that the minor will continue to return, defend, and cover for the trafficker/pimp until the bond is broken, which would then allow the minor to view her/himself as a victim.

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- In the Florida Statute on Human Trafficking there is no clear definition of sexual exploitation.
- Large numbers of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims have experienced sexual abuse prior to being commercially sexually exploited by a trafficker. Stronger protocols regarding treatment for childhood sexual abuse victims are needed.
- The large adult entertainment industry in the area increases the opportunities where a minor could be used for commercial sexual exploitation.
- The lack of appropriate and protective shelters that address the unique needs of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims - U.S. children who have been commercially sexually exploited - is a key impediment to proper victim identification, access to services, and pimp/trafficker prosecutions.

## research METHODOLOGY

This report is based on qualitative and quantitative information provided during interviews with the diverse actors who interact with DMST victims at various stages of the minors' exploitation, apprehension and legal disposition. Specific questions were created for six different populations: Law Enforcement, Judiciary, Prosecution, Detention, Child Protective Services, and Non-Governmental Service Providers. The protocol for this research was approved by the Western Institution Review Board (Protocol #20070540). Funding was provided by the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Award number 2006-DD-BX-K294.

## about SHARED HOPE

Shared Hope International rescues and restores women and children in crisis. Over the past decade, we have worked diligently around the world in partnership with local groups to prevent trafficking and to rescue and restore the victims of sexual slavery. Shared Hope International is bringing hope to women and children everywhere.

For more information about the Clearwater Assessment visit [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)