



Shared Hope International conducted an assessment in the Dallas area to examine the practices and procedures used to identify and deliver services to victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - American children who are exploited for commercial sex. The Dallas Assessment may serve as a springboard to action for the North Texas Anti-Trafficking Task Force and the community in order to prioritize the identification and protection of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims in the Dallas area.

the COALITION

Dallas' commitment to combating commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of children is evident in the operation of the Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking (CE/HRVT) Unit of the Dallas Police Department. Additionally, its collaboration with the North Texas Anti-Trafficking Task Force has facilitated cooperation and education amongst service providers, law enforcement, and prosecutors on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. The operation of the Dallas Police Department, Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking Unit along side of the anti-trafficking task force and the willingness of its members to confront gaps and challenges honestly, is largely responsible for the many promising practices identified in this report.

the FINDINGS

The Dallas Police Department, Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking Unit (CE/HRVT) has developed a unique and effective investigative tool to combat Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking that flags all minors who have run away from home four or more times in one year as "High Risk Victims." Acknowledging that homeless youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into prostitution by traffickers/pimp this investigative tool exhibits key prevention efforts in the identification of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. In addition to flagging chronic runaways, the CE/HRVT Unit also identifies any minors that are repeat victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation as High Risk Victims.

In 2007, the Dallas Police Department, Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking Unit (CE/HRVT) identified 189 High Risk Victims cases, 119 of which were involved in prostitution. Officers throughout the Dallas Police Department have been trained to notify the CE/HRVT Unit immediately with any potential cases of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking- prostituted U.S. children in America- and treat these children with a victim-centered approach.

While the justice system and service providers are treating prostituted children with a victim-centered approach, due to lack of awareness among various members of the professional community these children are not consistently labeled as trafficking victims thereby withholding the protected legal victim status provided under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act- the federal anti-trafficking law that protects all victims of sex trafficking.

While prostituted youth are identified as victims, they are often charged with the crime committed against them. Systemic obstacles provide few alternate options for law enforcement to secure a Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victim in a protective location without charging the minor. Prostituted youth are often a high flight risk which can expose them to recapture and revictimization by their trafficker/pimp. Immediate protection and access to appropriate services is mandatory for children who have been violently exploited through sex trafficking.

While the practice of charging prostituted youth with offences related to their commercial sexual exploitation is in conflict with the victim-centered principles of the Dallas Police Department, Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking Unit, it is the only established recourse to deliver protection and access to services within the current system. A result of the juvenile justice system's agreement with Letot Center, most charges against Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims are deferred and never prosecuted.

The Letot Center is a promising practice in the Dallas area and the only identified model in the ten U.S. locations assessed by Shared Hope International that offers victims a diversion to a non-punitive placement. The Center's short-term treatment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims has allowed for a child charged with prostitution or a related crime to bypass the juvenile detention facility and instead transition directly to the Center. However, there is a need to grow protective placement and services - a critical need for a victim population that has been subject to extreme psychological, emotional, and physical abuse by traffickers/pimps and which requires specialized treatment.

Many of the individuals interviewed were not aware of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act – the federal anti-trafficking law that protects all victims of sex trafficking. Additionally, few individuals interviewed were aware of the Texas law on trafficking in humans.

Law enforcement and prosecutors are aggressively pursuing traffickers/pimps and 29 cases were filed by state prosecutors in 2007. In addition, 44 suspects were charged with 67 felonies on behalf of all identified High Risk Victims by the Dallas Police Department. Of those High Risk Victim cases, 75% included felony charges specifically related to Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. To be exact, 55 Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking related cases were filed on 33 of the 44 suspects.

The Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims & Trafficking Unit (CE/HRVT) expressed significant will to pursue the buyers of children exploited through prostitution, however legal and investigative barriers have caused minimal results. Often buyers operate with anonymity through the use of the internet and fake names thus limiting the trail of evidence. Despite these difficulties in 2007 CE/HRVT charged one buyer identified through a Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking investigation with sexual assault.

Juvenile Probation Services reported that in 2007, 22 minors charged with prostitution were placed in juvenile detention for some period of time. Of those 22 cases, 11 minors received a disposition of court-ordered probation, 3 received three to six months probation, 1 was placed in residential treatment, and 4 were placed under intensive supervision or supervisory caution.

Logistical and legal challenges hinder access to services for Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims – American children exploited through commercial sex. The federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act protects all victims of sex trafficking, however services funded by this federal law only exist for foreign national victims of sex trafficking, not domestic victims. Most local organizations are unaware of how to gain access to services for U.S. child victims.

There is a lack of public awareness and prevention programs targeting communities and youth. There is no outreach that specifically educates communities on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, and only one program operated by Promise House has outreach that specifically targets minors involved in prostitution. With the glamorization that society frequently associates with both pimps and the commercial sex industry, prevention programs that convey the dangers to youth are needed.

Legal changes to the Texas human trafficking law are necessary. A September 2007 revision to the Texas statute on human trafficking places all human trafficking under "forced labor" and has debilitated prosecutors from successfully convicting traffickers/pimps in cases involving the sex trafficking of minors.

Dallas quickly tackled a deficiency in its city ordinances governing the commercial sex industry after law enforcement discovered a 12-year-old dancing in a sexually-oriented establishment. The city ordinance previously hampered civil enforcement action by Dallas city officials against the strip club. The wording in the ordinance has since been changed and used against the establishment.

research METHODOLOGY

This report is based on qualitative and quantitative information provided during interviews with the wide range of professionals who interact with Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims at various stages of the minors' exploitation, apprehension, legal disposition and rehabilitation. Specific questions were created for seven different populations: Law Enforcement, Judiciary, Prosecution, Public Defenders, Juvenile 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 Dallas Assessment visit www.sharedhope.org