

2015

Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the United States: A Best Practice Model





Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) is a national nonprofit organization that serves the highest-risk and highest-need children, youth, young adults and families.

YAP provides intensive, strengths-based, community-centered supports and services for individuals and families, while advocating for cities, states and the federal government to improve the policies and procedures impacting America's most vulnerable citizens.

Definitions

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is any sexual activity involving a real child in exchange for money or something else of value to the child or to another person or persons. CSEC is a form of violence against children and youth. CSEC victims are physically and/or psychologically entrapped by another person, usually an adult, who makes them participate in paid sexual activity, pornography or stripping.

"The Life" will be used to refer to the world of commercial sexual activity.

Survival Sex shall be defined as the act of a youth engaging in a sexual act for the purpose of obtaining money, food, shelter, clothing or any other material need that they would otherwise go without. It is important to note that the Federal Government includes survival sex in its definition of CSEC. The law recognizes youth who engage in survival sex as victims, not criminals.

Youth Advocate Programs' Guiding Principles

- **A No Refuse Policy:** We don't refuse kids – we take those kids at highest risk of out-of-home placement with the highest needs.
- **Individualized Service Planning:** All of our services are individualized, based on the unique need of each youth and family that is referred to us.
- **YAP's Approach is Family Focused:** We not only work with the young person but with the entire family. The family will be there long after we're gone, so it's important that we work with the family from the onset.
- **YAP is Strength-Based:** We identify a young person's strength's and we build on those strengths in each Individualized Service Plan.
- **We Are a Community-Based Program:** We recruit our staff from the same communities from which our kids are referred. Staff members are culturally competent and they know how to relate to the young people.

Introduction

Each year, 100,000ⁱ children and youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), and as many as 325,000ⁱⁱ American youth are at risk of becoming victimsⁱⁱⁱ. In every state, city and county in America, adults and sometimes other exploited youth seek out, groom and prey on youth. Most are between the ages of 12 and 14 when first approached^{iv}. Victims are female, male^{vi} and transgender^{vii}, and they are of all races and ethnicities^{viii} (according to the FBI, African-American children comprise 52% of all prostitution arrests for those under 18 — more than any other racial group^{ix} — despite the fact that African Americans represent only 13%^x of the total U.S. population). CSEC perpetrators use threats, coercion, trickery, bribery or other methods to compel them to sell their bodies and perform sexual acts for money, shelter or material items.

Who are these children? Most young people who fall victim to CSEC are those who've experienced trauma and victimization in their early childhood^{xi}, or who are homeless^{xii}. The majority of CSEC victims belong to one or more of the following subsets of already-vulnerable youth^{xiii}:

- Those who have experienced abuse^{xiv} and neglect^{xv}, including children and youth currently in foster care or whose families have a history of child welfare involvement^{xvi};
- Youth who have a history of being removed from their homes^{xvii}, institutionalized^{xviii}, who have lived or are living in group homes^{xix} or residential facilities^{xxi};
- Runaway and homeless youth^{xxii};
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning [GLBTQ]^{xxiii} youth (many of whom are kicked out by intolerant parents); and
- Youth who are substance users^{xxiv}

"These youths are so broken. They identify with the pimps.

Prostitution becomes their safe area, and they want to go back to where they feel safe. We want to keep them from running." – Susan Roske, Clark County, Nevada Chief Deputy Defender

Through no fault of their own, these children and youth are vulnerable to the multi-hundred-billion dollar CSEC industry, run by adults making pornography and selling children to other adults for sex. These adults manipulate and entrap their victims, who become psychologically, physically and financially dependent on pimps and other traffickers. Some youth are subjected to alternating periods of wooing and punishment/degradation by their pimps or traffickers, creating in the youth a trauma bond^{xxv} with their exploiter that is similar to that of domestic violence victims. Pimps usually rely on a five-step process that is difficult to escape and overcome: recruitment, seduction, isolation, coercion and violence.

For young people to escape the life and recover from the trauma and exploitation (which is commonly referred to by victims as "the life") takes years of counseling. It requires guaranteed physical safety and protection from the adult perpetrators. Most importantly, those leaving "the life" must be able to get a legal paying job, which is compromised if child victims have been prosecuted as "sex worker" criminals.

Since the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations as recently as 2013, U.S. law defines anyone under 18 years of age who is “induced to perform a commercial sex act” as a victim of human trafficking, not as a criminal^{xxvi}. Some states have responded in kind, passing Safe Harbor Laws that provide various degrees of protection and services to CSEC victims from diversion to legal immunity to services. However, not every state has a Safe Harbor law and not every Safe Harbor Law is sufficient. Despite these efforts at the federal and state levels, most CSEC victims remain unprotected and easily end up in juvenile justice halls where they are subjected to incarceration and more trauma.

Youth Advocate Programs’ Advocacy, Policy and Systems Change Work

For decades, young girls and boys have been bought and sold for sex in this country, often being recruited in their own neighborhoods and schools. Systems responded by simply treating these children, sometimes younger than 12, and teens who were arrested for soliciting sex as willing “prostitutes” deserving of punishment. Child advocates, lawyers and service providers have long advocated that these young people be recognized as victims, not criminals.

Some cry. Some stand blank-faced, some fume, some smile demurely, almost flirting. Different youths with the same problems: many are repeating vice offenders, are addicted to drugs, are victims of childhood abuse, are suffering from PTSD, are in love with their pimps, are combative and uncooperative and are utterly without family. Many are teen mothers, too.” – Clark County, Nevada Courtroom Staff Member

In the early 2000’s, Youth Advocate Programs began to recognize that a growing number of the young people they served were CSEC survivors. In 2006 in Las Vegas, Nevada, YAP became a partner with the juvenile court and, as part of the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI), began providing YAP’s wraparound Advocacy service model to sexually exploited girls in order to bring them safely home from the local detention center. In 2009, YAP partnered with the juvenile courts in Houston, Texas to develop policies and protocols for screening and referring CSEC-involved youth to our intervention program. To date, children and youth in Las Vegas and Houston have participated in YAP’s CSEC programs and have left “the life,” going on to continue their education and participate in job

training and supported work experiences. Program outcomes in YAP’s Las Vegas location include: 85% of youth living in the community; 72% of youth remained free of arrest while enrolled; 73% had no new adjudications while in the program; and 91% of youth had graduated high school, earned their GED or were attending school.

YAP worked with the courts, the judge and the detention center to plan and formalize methods of screening youth for CSEC involvement. The courts and the judge began referring young girls who were arrested for solicitation, prostitution or other sex crimes to YAP instead of to detention or as a formal disposition after they were adjudicated. Rather than being shuttled in and out of a juvenile justice system that, first, was designed for boys and, second, does not provide

trafficking victims with therapeutic services, these girls receive appropriate support leading them safely out of “the life”.

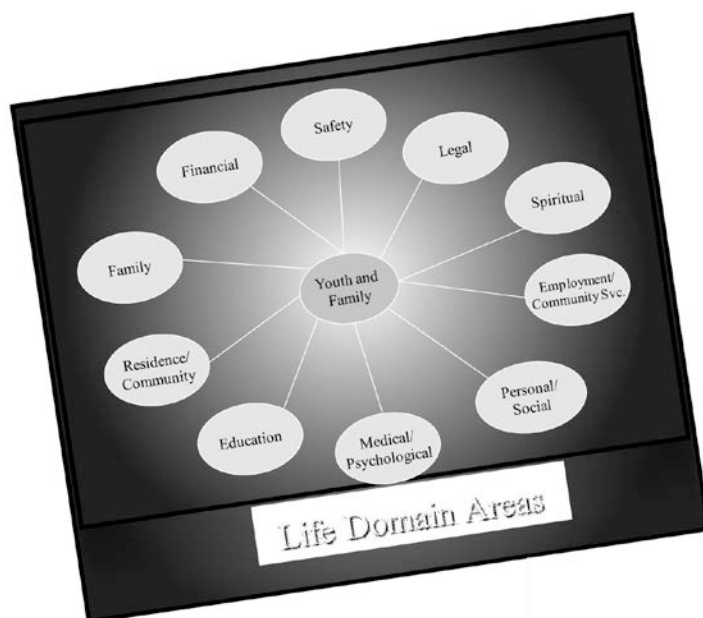
The YAP CSEC Intervention Model:

YAP rapidly engages the youth within 24 hours of receiving a referral in order to ensure their immediate safety. The locally-recruited YAP Program Director reaches the youth either in person or via phone for an initial conversation about services, their needs and their immediate safety. YAP staff develop and maintain relationships with safe and emergency housing resources in each YAP community. For CSEC survivor youth, housing must provide safety from victimizers and monitoring to prevent runaways.

After ensuring the youth’s safety and meeting their housing needs, we meet with the youth to conduct a strengths-based intake assessment, to assess them for substance use and abuse, and to orient them to the program. YAP follows a life domain model for Individualized Service Planning – each youth will help develop their own ISP that will include information about their current strengths as well as their needs in the following areas:

- Residential
- Financial
- Family
- Psychological/Emotional
- Social
- Legal
- Educational
- Safety
- Employment/vocational
- Medical/health
- Community service

In developing their ISP, YAP works with the youth and any positive adults in their lives, as well as necessary service providers, to form a Family Team that meets to agree on the ISP goals. Family Team participants often include the youth’s parents or guardians, grandparents or other extended family, neighbors, a coach, a leader in their community of faith, mental health service providers, a mental health clinician and the YAP Advocate who will be working with them. The Family Team Meeting ensure the youth and their caregiver(s) have voice, ownership and access to their plan, which is critical to the youth’s success. The YAP Advocate will implement the youth’s ISP, following a wraparound model of care, meaning the Advocate monitors and facilitates each Family Team partner’s work toward helping the youth achieve their ISP goals.



Laura's Story – From CSEC to College

Laura*, age 17, had lived on her own for over a year when the court placed her back with her parents and younger brother, and into the YAP program for support. Prior to this, she was living with a pimp and three other girls/women in an apartment. Laura was arrested and adjudicated for being a minor in a gaming establishment, and was finally ready to get back on the right track.

YAP's Las Vegas, Nevada Program Director, Daisy Hernandez and staff, worked with Laura to get her re-enrolled in school, into subsidized employment and into therapy to help address her trauma needs. Laura was interested in cosmetology, so YAP staff found a local hair salon that let her work 12-15 hours a week doing reception and cleaning. Laura was motivated, positive and energetic – the salon always called Daisy to compliment Laura's work. Laura hadn't attended traditional school in a very long time, so YAP staff tutored Laura at a library and at Starbucks. They also found a middle school close to Laura's home that offered GED preparation classes, helping her pass her GED exam.

YAP staff got Laura and her parents enrolled in individual and family therapy provided by a therapist who specializes in CSEC, which helped them all to mutually support each other going forward. Laura was also an enthusiastic participant in the YAP CSEC girls' group, which follows the Girls Circle evidence-based curriculum. Laura did so well in the group that she became a peer mentor for other girls.

While in YAP, Laura's ex-pimp was arrested. Laura wanted to testify so YAP staff helped Laura write a letter that she read aloud to the judge, with a YAP staff member by her side at court. Her pimp is now facing 2-4 years incarceration.

Laura was in the YAP program for a total of nine (9) months. During the monthly Family Team Meetings, YAP staff facilitated discussions about setting up aftercare plans for her eventual discharge from the YAP program. During these meetings, Laura indicated her interest in pursuing higher education. The College of Southern Nevada (CSN) is a partner with YAP's CSEC program. YAP asked a recruiter to talk with Laura. With tutoring and support, Laura passed her entrance exams for the college and enrolled for the Fall semester.

Laura is a fictitious name for a real CSEC survivor helped by YAP's Las Vegas, Nevada program.

Advocates are the linchpin in the YAP Wraparound Advocacy model of service. YAP utilizes thoughtful matching when pairing a youth with an Advocate. Program Directors making the match consider personal background and characteristics such as understanding of the specific issue affecting the youth's life (CSEC, gangs, substance use, foster care, identifying as LGBTQ, etc.), culture of origin, interests and goals. YAP Advocates are credible messengers because they speak in terms clients understand and on the basis of personal knowledge. **For safety and trauma reduction purposes, YAP pairs CSEC survivor youth with an Advocate of the same gender.** Advocates are recruited from the same zip code where the youth reside, ensuring cultural competence and "relatability." Advocates undergo extensive training, including specific CSEC intervention and prevention training, Trauma-Informed Care training and YAP's Basic Advocacy Training, which is certified by Rutgers University.

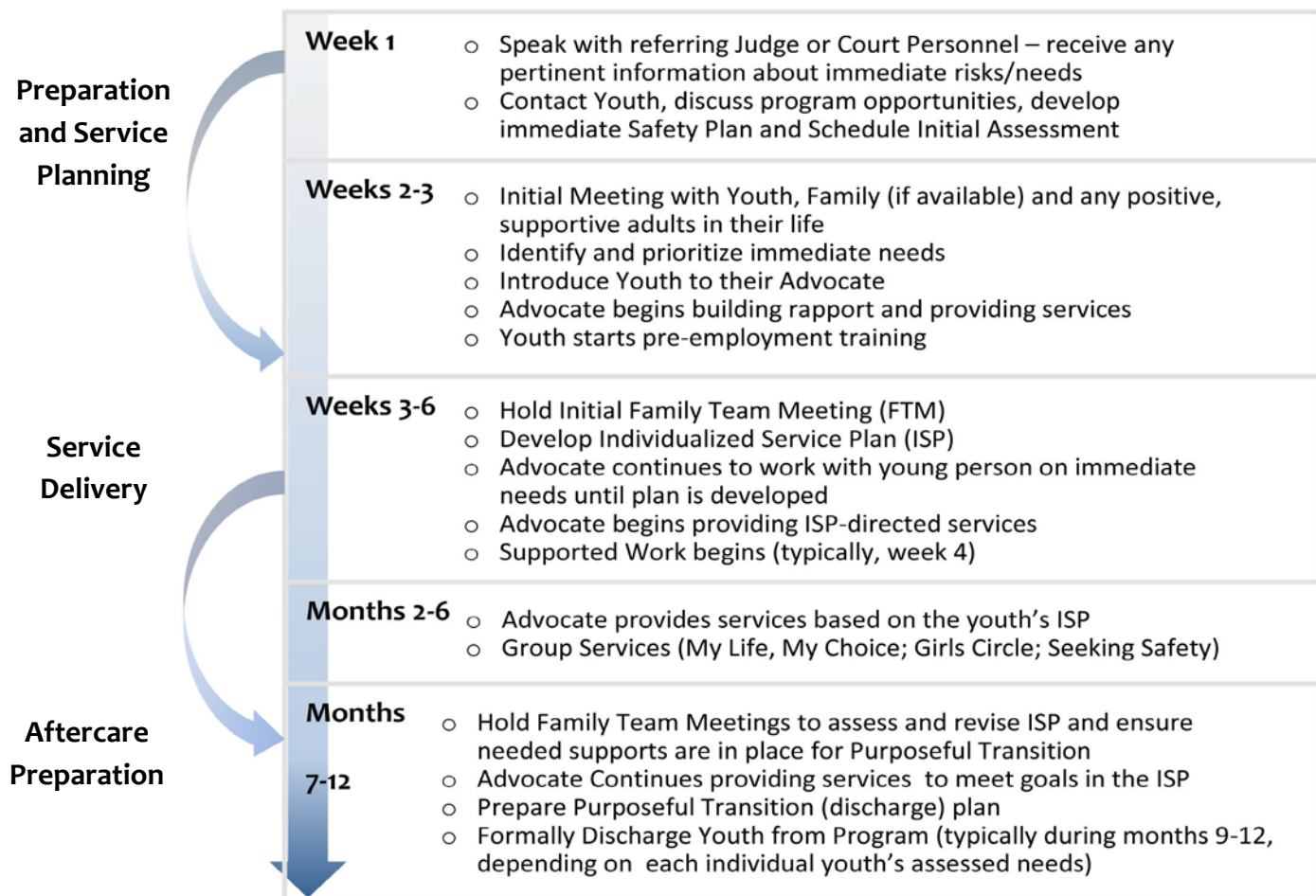
YAP believes in providing a holistic services model that incorporates individual wraparound community based advocacy, as well as group interventions, therapeutic services and linkages to additional supports. Services that Advocates provide or coordinate as part of the YAP Wraparound Advocate model for CSEC populations include:

- Crisis Intervention safety planning and safe housing referrals
- 24/7 availability to support youth during a crisis
- “No Reject, No Eject” policy incorporating inclusive intake and unconditional commitment
- A “flex fund” to pay for necessary items such as clothes, beds, food and services
- Family reunification and family-finding activities to facilitate permanency for all youth
- Support to access the services and resources in the community that can address youths’ needs and build on their strengths
- Educational and vocational Advocacy, including:
 - **Supported Work** – a form of subsidized employment with Advocate support to help youth transition to unsubsidized employment. Studies show that youth who fall victim to CSEC have experienced fewer opportunities for job training and employment^{xxvii} than their peers. YAP provides work readiness training and organizes and supports local employers who are able and willing to have youth in the program “train” as employees in their businesses. YAP’s Supported Work model pays the wages of the youth while they “train” as employees, relieving the employer of the financial responsibility for the youth during a period lasting typically from 3-6 months. During that time, the youth’s Advocate helps them perfect their workplace skills, mediates challenges they encounter, and supports the employer and the youth’s managers as well. Ultimately, the Advocate’s goal is to help the employer transition the youth to unsubsidized work when their training period ends.
 - Re-enrollment in school, GED preparation or a vocational program, as appropriate for each youth’s needs.
- **Referrals to clinical mental health and trauma counseling**
- **Referrals to Substance abuse treatment, if needed**
- Evidence-based curricula addressing CSEC intervention/prevention, PTSD and substance use prevention/intervention, and successful navigation of their emerging womanhood, including:
 - **My Life, My Choice** – the evidence-based, 10-session gender-specific My Life, My Choice is recognized by the United States Department of Justice as a national model for sex trafficking prevention. The program was developed by and for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. My Life, My Choice takes an empowerment approach and blends a variety of activities which foster youths’ self-reflection, understanding about sexual exploitation, and knowledge to help young people identify and avoid potentially exploitive situations in the future.

- ***Girls Circle*** – is a structured support group for girls aged 9-18 years, that integrates relational theory, resiliency practices, and skills training in a format designed to increase positive connection, personal and collective strengths, and competence in girls.
- ***Seeking Safety*** - is an evidence-based model that is present-focused treatment for adolescents and adults with a history of trauma and substance abuse. The treatment was designed for flexible use in either group or individual format, for male and female clients, and for a variety of settings (e.g., outpatient, inpatient, residential). Seeking Safety focuses on coping skills and has 5 key principles. *Seeking Safety Program* is the only evidence based model for co-occurring PTSD and substance abuse currently classified as "strongly supported by research."
- Court Advocacy and support to reduce unnecessary out-of-home placements and to help youth who want to testify against their victimizer(s) in court

Service Delivery Flow Chart

Referral through Discharge



Conclusion

Child welfare and juvenile justice systems nationwide can help CSEC victims become survivors with the right supports and partnerships facilitated by Youth Advocate Programs. YAP develops policies and protocols that coordinate the efforts of law enforcement and the courts with housing, education, vocation, therapeutic/clinical services, substance abuse services, LGBTQ services, homeless services, food and emergency shelter and other supports for youth. In addition to serving in this coordinating role, YAP provides evidence-based services for each youth, comprising holistic, individualized support at a level intensive enough to ensure their safety and success.

*For more information about how YAP can help your community better serve CSEC and human trafficking victims, or to request a sample proposal for services, please **contact Gary Ivory, National Director of Program Development and Southwest Vice President** at givory@yapinc.org or 214-417-7614.*

ENDNOTES

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