ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF SEXUALLY TRAFFICKED/EXPLOITED TEENS: SAFE HARBOR LEGISLATION AND THE RUNAWAY INTERVENTION PROJECT

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Confusion of Current Law: Delinquents or CHIPS?

Provisions of Bill:

- Effective 8/1/14, anyone UNDER 16 YOA prostituting self, no longer Delinquent or Petty Offender;
- Effective 8/1/11 adds to definition of CHIPS youth who are “sexually exploited”;
- “Sexually Exploited” defined to include any youth prostituting self, any child victim of CSC 1, 2, 4 & 5, or victim of sex trafficking.
Safe Harbors Bill: 16 & 17 Year Olds

- Effective 8/1/14: Mandatory referral to diversion for engaging in prostitution for those not previously charged, diverted or under CHIPS jurisdiction for prostituting self;
- If fail diversion, can prosecute;
- Effective 8/1/11: Increased penalties by $250 for adults traffickers or those who hire a minor to engage in prostitution;
- Increased penalties distributed as follows:
  - 40% to city/county of investigating agency for training & education;
  - 20% for prosecuting authority for training and education;
  - 40% to the Commissioner of Public Safety to be deposited in the “Safe Harbor Account” for distribution to “crime victim services organizations that provide services to sexually exploited youth.”
RCAO Policy

- Applies only to youth prostituting themselves;
- Directs these youth to be treated as victims of sexual abuse/exploitation – not prosecuted.
- Youth are to be referred to our Runaway Intervention Project or to Child Protection.
- Focus for youth: victim-centered, public health approach that uses principles of trauma-informed care.
- Focus for adults: prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those persons, including juveniles, who are engaged in the sexual exploitation and abuse of prostituted children.
The Numbers

- Statewide, very few prostitution cases;
- Ramsey County 2006-2010 (after intervention created) = 3
- Ramsey County 2004-2005 (before intervention created) = 6
- BUT..... Running away is often the precursor to this problem....
Runaways

- Each night in Minnesota, 550 youth (11 -17 ) are homeless without their parents.
- 40% or more of runaways experience sexual exploitation – survival sex, prostitution, gang rape.
- Once a girl runs away, she has a one in three chance of becoming sexually active within a year (average age is 14-14.5)
- The youngest runaways lack cognitive developmental resources to avoid being victimized.
- Teens who are younger when they first run away are more likely to become involved in high-risk and health-compromising behavior, such as sexual exploitation, unprotected sex, drug use, criminal activities, and violence.
- With each runaway episode, a youth’s risk of being victimized increases, this is even more likely if youth experiences homelessness or is GLBTQ.
Who is Most at Risk?

- Girls often runaway at earlier age than boys.
- Girls experience more sexual abuse inside their home and more sexual assaults outside of their home compared to boys,
- Extra-familial sexual assault is 3 times more common than incest.
- GLBT youth experience high rates of sexual assault.
- 20% of sexually exploited youth were still living at home when they were first exploited.
- Youth that runaway or are homeless MAY still be attending school.
What the Problem Looks Like

- Youth don’t define as sexual abuse or exploitation.
- Most youth under 16 talk about trading sex for:
  - Money or Drugs (33%-69%)
  - Food (10%-24%)
  - Shelter (21%-38%)
  - Transportation (15%-24%)
  - Supporting a friend or partner (25%-52%)
Many runaways have serious mental or physical health problems, including:

- Depression
- Suicidal or self-harming behavior
- Anxiety
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Substance Use/Abuse/Dependency
- Pregnancy
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Diabetes
- Asthma
Which Came First?

- 75% or more used alcohol or marijuana at a younger age than trading sex
- 66% were kicked out before trading sex
- 78% ran away before trading sex
- Among younger teens, 66% street-involved before trading sex
- Among older teens 32% traded sex before street-involved, 46% street-involved first
RAMSEY COUNTY’S RUNAWAY INTERVENTION PROJECT
In 2010, 1,637 youth from St. Paul were reported as missing or runaway.

- 84% were youth of color (1368),
- Nearly 58% (941) were age 15 or under.
- These numbers do not include “throw-away children” – children not reported as missing.
GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR RAMSEY COUNTY’S MODEL

- Use evidenced-based interventions when available.
- When there is no evidence available for an intervention, evaluate our outcomes.
- Conduct research with the highest ethical standards using Children’s Hospitals Institutional Review Board for guidance and approval.
GOALS OF RIP

- Build resiliency;
- Increase family and school connectedness;
- Improve protective factors;
- Reduce future risk and improve outcomes for runaway girls who have been or are at great risk for being sexually abused/exploited;
- For those not identified as having been sexually abused, reduce the likelihood that they will be victimized;
- For those identified as sexually abused, reduce their traumatic response and improve their health and protective factors.
GOALS OF RIP

- For moderate-risk runaways, intervene to reduce the risk of further harm by improving school attendance and connecting to programming via school-based Empowerment Groups.

- For high-risk (sexually abused/exploited runaways) provide intensive services through a hospital-based child advocacy center to:
  - Reduce their traumatic responses;
  - Reduce risk behaviors;
  - Improve health behaviors and self-esteem;
  - Reconnect to supportive relationships with family, school, other adults.
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Conduct risk screenings for at-risk girls, 9th grade or younger, identified by police as runaways;
- Refer girls to appropriate services:
  - Low- and Moderate-Risk: Truancy Intervention Program (TIP).
  - High Risk: Intensive Intervention Services through Midwest Children’s Resource Center (MCRC) – those who have been sexually abused/exploited and are considered a risk for continuing to run.
What is Missing?
Appropriate Housing Options.....
TEN QUESTIONS OFFICERS ASK

1. Why did you leave home?
2. How long have you been away from home?
3. Who have you been staying with while away from home?
4. Has anyone hurt you or tried to hurt you while you were away from home?
5. Has anyone touched you in a way you did not like? If so, who? Describe the incident.
6. Did you get injured or have any health issues that you need to see a doctor or nurse for?
7. Are you ever afraid at home? If yes, why? Will you be safe at home?
8. Do you have someone you can talk to at home or school?
9. Do you drink or do drugs?
10. Are you a gang member or do you associate with gang members? (10 point criteria)
The Numbers: 1/06-12/11

- 2030 girls have been referred to at least one component of the three levels of programming;
- 991 have received services from some aspect of the program
- 977 girls have received a health assessment from an APN
- 367 girls have received intensive services from an APN
- Over 350 girls participated in weekly groups for moderate-risk girls
Severe levels of sexual exploitation/assault (some reporting multiple types of experiences)

- Average age 14.05 years (range is 12-16);
- 40% reported sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators at different times;
- 17% reported repeated abuse by the same person;
- 20% reported sexual assault one time by one perpetrator;
- 10% had been prostituted;
- 3% had been gang raped;
Intensive Services Girls at Entry

- 50% reported self-mutilation (cutting, self-harm)
- 60% reported suicidal ideation
- 36% reported a previous suicide attempt
- High rates of emotional distress
- Low levels of parent connectedness or school connectedness
After 6-12 Months

- 99% school re-engagement;
- Significantly Improved self esteem;
- Improved family connectedness (both sides);
- Improved ability to talk to parents;
- Increased feelings of being cared about by other adults;
- Higher educational aspirations;
- Reduced use of alcohol & drugs;
- Improved sexual health, improved contraception use, fewer sexual partners & 25% no longer sexually active;
- Pregnancy rate of 3.1%
- Much lower emotional distress
- Reduced suicidal ideation & almost no attempts
- Reduced running away (52% had less –data thru 2010 only)
Comparing amount of improvement between entry into program and at 6 and 12 months:

- Those who had lowest connectedness, lowest self-esteem, highest distress improved the most;
- By 6 and 12 months, girls in the Intensive Services component of the program were doing as well in most health outcomes as girls their age who had never been abused as measured by MSS.
More Results: 2006-2010 data
Conclusions

- Safe Harbors Bill provides alternative approach, more consistent with the definitions of the Child Protection laws;
- Statewide, we need more appropriate & effective interventions;
- RIP ‘s strength-based approach is a highly effective intervention for extremely vulnerable runaways;
- RIP helps restore healthy developmental trajectories – almost as if never abused.
- BUT... housing/shelter continues to be a struggle