



# **Practice Implications for Commercially Sex Trafficked Youth**

EXAMINING DATA AND OUTCOMES



COALITION TO  
ABOLISH SLAVERY  
& TRAFFICKING

## Practice Implications for Commercially Sex Trafficked Youth: Examining Data and Outcomes Executive Summary

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### INTRODUCTION |

Human Trafficking is the exploitation of human beings through force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of commercial sex or forced labor, and can affect individuals of all ages and backgrounds. For youth under the age of 18 who are engaged in commercial sex, the presence of force, fraud, or coercion is not required to be identified as a survivor of human trafficking. Merely inducement into commercial sex for minors is sufficient when defining human trafficking.

The trauma that survivors experience can deeply impact all aspects of their lives and effective services are essential in addressing these complex needs. Recently, many youth providers are seeing more trafficking survivors come through their programs, and are looking for guidance in serving the unique needs of this population.

Between July 2015 and May 2018, CAST conducted a youth program evaluation utilizing data from 147 youth (between the ages of 15-24) survivors of sex trafficking served through CAST's Empowerment Social Services Programs (including Emergency Response and Youth Program). The evaluation is based on a mixed method approach whereby quantitative data was gathered through existing Empowerment Social Services service documentation and assessments from CAST's services database while qualitative data was gathered through interviews to

understand the experiences of youth in the program. The quantitative data included demographic information of the youth served, the services the youth were provided, and outcome metrics used to assess the impact of services. The qualitative data drew on interviews with youth who were invited to share their perspectives and experiences in CAST's Youth Program. The youth participants who shared their experience were provided compensation for their time and contribution to this study.

Though CAST serves victims of all forms of trafficking, including all ages, all gender/gender identities, all sexual orientations, all immigration statuses, all nationalities/ethnicities, and all types of disabilities, this report focuses specifically on commercially sex trafficked youth survivors due to receiving specific funding from the William M. Keck Foundation to conduct an evaluation study on this population. Youth survivors of sex trafficking comprise 81% of the clients served by the Youth Program and 37% of the clients served by CAST's overall Empowerment Social Services Programs. With an increase of the identification of youth survivors of sex trafficking over the past few years, the need for specialized services has increased. And yet, despite the ongoing efforts of experienced youth agencies and well-intended service providers, high rates of re-exploitation remain a challenge among this population. Providers have struggled to both understand how to serve the diverse needs of young survivors and keep survivors engaged in existing programs long enough to analyze results over time and improve outcomes. Thus, the W.M. Keck Foundation supported this study to analyze data regarding point of entry, survivor history, service interventions, and outcomes to inform service provision for youth survivors of sex trafficking.

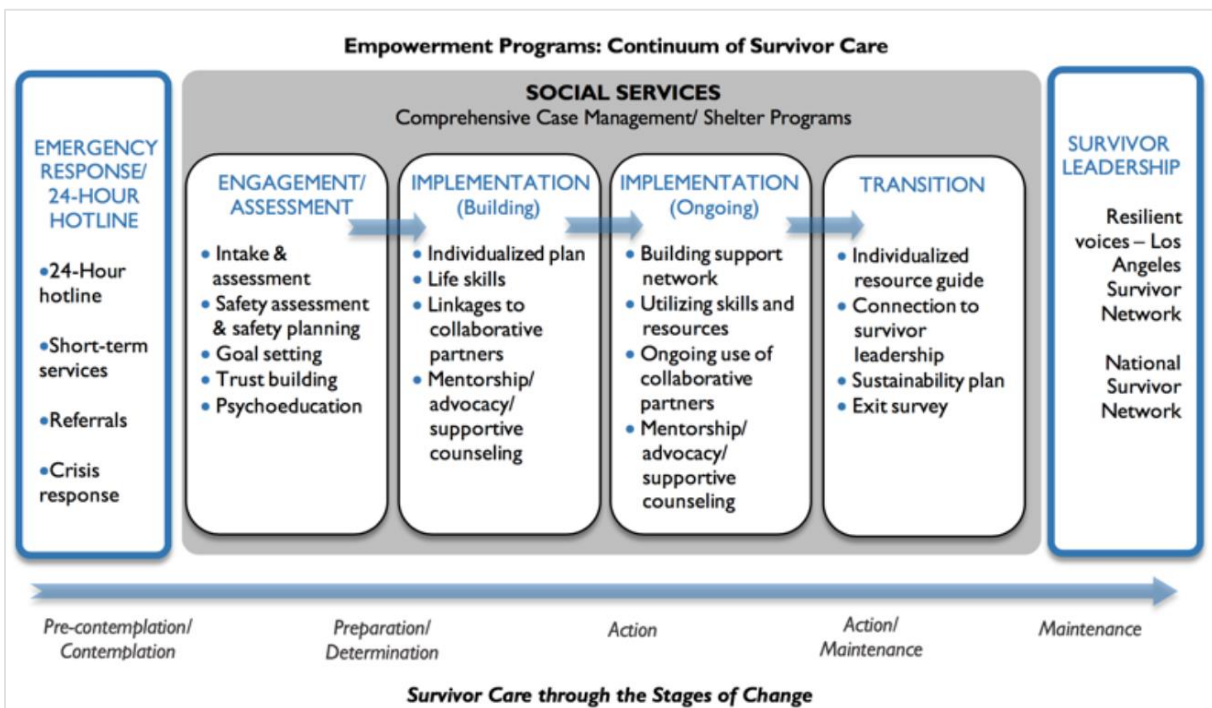
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## WHAT we do |

### CAST's Continuum of Survivor Care

Established in 1998, CAST is a multi-ethnic human rights organization dedicated to serving survivors of all forms of human trafficking through its model data-driven direct service programs and partnerships. CAST offers comprehensive trauma-informed client support services, legal assistance, state and federal policy advocacy, and training and technical assistance to providers in Los Angeles and nationwide. CAST provides services to survivors of all forms of human trafficking (including labor and sex trafficking) and does not discriminate based on age, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, and disabilities.

Utilizing an Empowerment approach, CAST offers support all along the continuum of a survivor's journey including: emergency response care, supportive counseling, life skills mentorship, comprehensive case management, housing, legal representation in civil/criminal/immigration matters, and survivor leadership. The Survivor Leadership Programs include the local Resilient Voices (Los Angeles Survivor Network) group and the National Survivor Network, where survivors are empowered to utilize their voices and experiences to create systemic and policy change in the anti-trafficking movement. CAST's Continuum of Survivor Care is driven by the Stages of Change model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). CAST offers services at each stage of change in a survivor's journey and recognizes that survivors may cycle through the stages of change during their course of healing and recovery.



### CAST's Youth Program

CAST's Youth Program was created in 2014 in response to an increase in referrals of youth survivors of trafficking and the specialized needs of minor and transition-age youth (TAY) survivors. Prior to the development of the Youth Program, CAST served youth survivors of trafficking in its individualized Case Management Program. However, the specialized care and higher number of service hours required to meet the intensive needs of youth survivors resulted in the development of CAST's Youth Program. The Youth's Program's mission is to provide youth-centered trauma-informed services to survivors 24 years and younger by empowering them to transform their trauma into their own story of healing and resiliency by supporting the youth and their support system. The Youth Program provides intensive case management services with youth-specific interventions, monthly youth activities, and a youth survivor internship program.

The Youth Program is made up of a team of Intensive Care Case Managers who provide an array of supportive services from crisis care to addressing long-term goals that lead to the decrease of vulnerabilities and the increase of protective factors. These services include provision of basic necessities, advocacy, court accompaniment, housing support, goal planning, employment/school support, linkage to trauma-informed mental health and medical care, mentorship, and supportive counseling. The Youth Program adapted CAST's 4-Phase Case Management model (see graphic above), a client-centered model with a proven track record in serving trafficking survivors, to focus on engagement, support, trust-building and interventions specifically for youth.

## KEY FINDINGS |

CAST provides comprehensive services to survivors of **all** forms of human trafficking (both labor and sex trafficking), regardless of age, gender/gender identity, nationality and background. From July 2015 to May 2018, fifty-two percent (**52%**) of **all** clients served by CAST's Empowerment Social Services programs were U.S. citizens and **48%** were foreign nationals. The greatest proportion of clients served were female (**80%**), followed by male (**18%**), and **2%** transgender. More than half of survivors served (**61%**) were sex trafficked, **33%** were labor trafficking cases, and **6%** included both sex and labor trafficking. It should be noted that CAST serves youth who have been survivors of labor trafficking and sex trafficking, but the focus of this overall report is on **commercially sex trafficked youth**. Therefore, when the term "Youth Served" is used in this report, it will only be referring to commercially sex trafficked youth.

This evaluation study provides a snapshot of the **147 commercially** sex trafficked youth who received services from CAST's Empowerment Social Services programs (including Emergency Response Services and Youth Program) during July 2015 to May 2018.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Average age when youth entered services was **20**.
- **94%** of youth served identified as female, while **3%** identified as male and **3%** identified as transgender.
- **Race/Ethnicity**!

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| African American/Black        | 50% |
| Hispanic/Latinx               | 20% |
| Non-Hispanic White            | 12% |
| Bi-Racial                     | 8%  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander        | 4%  |
| Other                         | 2%  |
| Native American/Alaska Native | 1%  |

- **86%** of the youth were U.S. Citizens compared to **14%** who were foreign nationals (including Latin America, Asia, and Europe).

### DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH HISTORY

- **57%** of youth served reported having a mental health diagnosis and **15%** had a reported disability.

### HISTORY OF SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

- **44%** of youth served had a history of involvement in child protective services.
- **37%** of youth served had a history of involvement in probation.
- **19%** of youth served had a history of being involved in a diversion program.

### TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCE

- The approximate length of trafficking of the youth **averaged 1 year and 9 months** with some reporting as few as 1 day in their trafficking experience to as much as 13 years.
- **10%** of the youth also had a history of labor exploitation (in addition to their sex trafficking history).

#### Reported Forms of Control by Trafficker

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Physical abuse                     | 61% |
| Psychological abuse                | 56% |
| Sexual assault/Sexual abuse        | 53% |
| Emotional abuse                    | 51% |
| Domestic violence                  | 29% |
| Advertised or sold on the internet | 24% |
| Recruited on the internet          | 16% |
| Forced to use drugs/alcohol        | 14% |

- The youth were most likely to be trafficked by a **romantic partner (31%)**. The breakdown of type of trafficker was the following:

- **31%** Romantic Partner
- **17%** Acquaintance
- **12%** Gang
- **8%** Pimp
- **32%** Other

### POINT OF ENTRY

The youth survivors of sex trafficking served through the Empowerment Social Services Programs (including emergency response and Youth Program) entered CAST services through the following referrals:

- **30%** (44) Law enforcement
- **28%** (42) Self-referral
- **27%** (40) Community service provider/community member
- **7%** (10) Public defender
- **5%** (7) Other government agency (e.g. court, probation)
- **3%** (4) National Human Trafficking Hotline

- Youth who entered the Youth Program through community service provider/community member referrals were more likely to remain engaged in services.
- Youth who entered through self-referral were more likely to leave services without contact.

### DURATION IN SERVICES

- The average length of time in CAST services was **9 months**, ranging from 1 day to more than 2 years.

### SERVICES PROVIDED DURING WEEK AND MONTH I

|                            | Week I     | Month I     |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Average number of hours    | 6 hours    | 13 hours    |
| Average number of services | 8 services | 18 services |

## KEY FINDINGS | (continued)

### ENGAGEMENT

- All of CAST services are voluntary. Therefore, engagement is a critical aspect of the work with youth survivors. Of those with closed cases (44) in the Youth Program, **almost 3 out of every 5** youth remained engaged, as they did not leave services due to loss of contact.



**Nearly 3 in 5**  
Youth remained engaged in services

### OUTCOMES OF YOUTH ENGAGED IN SERVICES FOR 6 MONTHS OR LONGER

**28 youth remained in services 6 months or longer<sup>2</sup>. Their case closure outcomes were the following:**

- 100%** Had at least one supportive person outside of CAST
- 78%** Had access to medical services
- 60%** Had safe housing
- 43%** Were attending school and/or employed
- 42%** Were accessing mental health services

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUTH ENGAGED IN SERVICES FOR 6 MONTHS OR LONGER

**Of the 28 youth who received services for six months or longer, on average, they were:**

- Slightly younger than the overall youth in the program when they entered CAST services (**19 versus 20**).
- Slightly younger than the overall youth served at the age when first trafficked (**16 versus 17**).
- The average trafficking experience was slightly shorter than that of the overall youth in the study<sup>3</sup>.
- The youth who remained in services 6 months or longer were most likely to enter services through a community service provider/community member (**32%**) or through a self-referral (**29%**) despite the fact that youth survivors most commonly enter CAST's Services programs through law enforcement referrals.

### OUTCOMES OF YOUTH PROGRAM GRADUATES

**9 youth graduated the youth program services.** Of the youth who graduated youth program services:

- The length of time in service averaged **1 year and 3 months**

**Case closure outcomes for youth program graduates included the following:**

- 100%** Had at least one supportive person outside of CAST
- 100%** Had access to medical services
- 100%** Had safe housing
- 89%** Were attending school and/or employed
- 44%** Were accessing mental health services



**Approximately 3 in 4**  
Youth reported having previously been arrested

### EFFECTS OF ARREST ON TRAFFICKED YOUTH HISTORY OF ARRESTS

- Arrest data was available for 54 youth. For the 54, almost three out of every four youth (**72%**) reported that they had a history of being arrested.
- Of those who had been arrested, **22** had been arrested anywhere between 1 – 4 times, while **12** had 5 – 10 arrests, **3** had 11 to 15 arrests, and **one youth** had 50 arrests.
- Youth with an arrest history had a lower Survivor Outcomes Assessment (SOA) score for housing and employment compared to youth without an arrest history.

“I got arrested for loitering. From then on, everybody saw me as a prostitute. Before we were **children**, we were seen as **prostitutes**. Everything changed. Foster homes were no longer an option. My only options were placements, camps, or out-of-state placements. I tried to understand the safety concern, but I was 14, **confused**, and **alone**. One mistake cost me the opportunity of a **home**. I’ll never forget feeling like Annie in an orphanage.”

-19 year old survivor, first trafficked at age 14



## PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS |

This section of the executive summary focuses on recommendations for program services with commercially sex trafficked youth and future program evaluations, which are informed by the findings of this evaluation study.

### OUTREACH

- There needs to be increased outreach to transgender and male communities to increase awareness and identification of these under-identified and underserved populations of youth sex trafficking survivors.
- With the disproportionately high rates of African-American and Latinx youth being trafficked for sexual exploitation, there is a need to provide more prevention and intervention services for communities of color, which often face multiple areas of marginalization, including institutionalized racism, systemic oppression, and challenges in access to resources.
- Since the youth who were referred through community providers/community members had a longer engagement in services, it is important to conduct outreach and training on awareness/identification of trafficking survivors with community agencies. Often times when community providers/community members are referring survivors to services, there is a trust relationship already built that contributes to increasing initial engagement.

### SPECIALIZED INTERVENTIONS

- With disproportionately high rates of African-American and Latinx youth being sex trafficked, cultural humility and cultural awareness needs to be part of all services provided to ensure that services are culturally appropriate and affirming for youth of color.
- With the high numbers of youth with mental health diagnoses and disabilities (also potentially under-reported or under-identified), it is important to develop partnerships with agencies that provide services to those with disabilities and mental health diagnoses. In addition, it is important that these partnerships include training on human trafficking to increase the knowledge of service providers in providing necessary mental health and disability-related services to youth survivors.
- Due to the high rates of arrest for the youth, it is also important to form partnerships with legal services organizations and re-entry programs that can provide legal assistance for expunging criminal records and specific re-entry resources for those with criminal records.

### FUTURE PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

- This program evaluation focused on youth survivors of sex trafficking, but it would be beneficial to expand this study to include youth survivors of all forms of human trafficking, including both sex and labor trafficking. This would provide a more comprehensive view of human trafficking and the specific needs and outcomes for all youth survivors of human trafficking.
- A larger-scale evaluation study with a larger sample size will benefit the continued evaluation and analysis of types of services, point-of-entry, and other key factors in affecting outcomes. A longitudinal study that can follow youth survivors for a longer period of time would be beneficial in identifying long-term outcomes as well.
- CAST recommends offering compensation or a stipend to survivors for their time and contribution to any program evaluation or future studies.

- CAST began collecting data regarding sexual orientation for each survivor to strengthen linkages through service provision during the course of this study. However, this information was not available for all youth since the beginning of the study, thus future evaluation studies should include this information. We found it is important to collect this information for all survivors of trafficking as this may provide information directly connected to and impacting the LGBTQIA community.

### POLICY

- 3 out of every 4 youth survivors of sex trafficking in this study had a history of being arrested. This had long-lasting impact on their housing and employment outcomes, as well as the impact represented in the anecdotal experiences of individual survivors. It is important that survivors of trafficking are not arrested, as this affects their outcomes in achieving self-sufficiency and creates a negative perception and feelings of judgement for the survivor that hinders their healing and recovery process.
- Comprehensive laws ensuring that youth are not arrested for crimes their traffickers forced them to commit should be prioritized and passed across the United States. This includes – (1) ensuring that no child can be arrested and/or convicted of prostitution/loitering and that additional screening by law enforcement is required to screen for sex or labor trafficking (2) an affirmative defense is available to trafficking survivors if the crime is directly related to their trafficking; and (3) criminal arrest records and convictions/juvenile petitions must be sealed and vacated. “Safe Harbor” laws should be enacted in every state, but should be seen as only one of many necessary tools to allow trafficking survivors to be treated as survivors/victims rather than as criminals.
- Funding should be available to assist survivors vacate any criminal records where they were forced to commit crimes during their trafficking experiences.
- Additional funding at the local, state, and federal level should be put in place to provide specialized, voluntary, comprehensive services to sex and/or labor trafficked youth.
- Funding is necessary at the state level for prevalence studies to collect better data on sex and labor trafficking, especially among youth to gain a better understanding of the specialized needs of youth survivors.
- System-involved youth should receive services through the Child Welfare System, rather than the Juvenile Delinquency System if their crimes are directly related to their trafficking. In addition, it is important that youth are not arrested in order to give them access to services, since the impact of arrests and sustained convictions is long-term and detrimental, even in the juvenile justice system. Specialized courts in the child welfare system should be promoted as the model for providing services to sex and labor trafficked youth.
- States should consider enacting legislation to extend foster care benefits to trafficked youth past 18 or 21 (depending on the state) up to 26 given the long-term needs of this population, and their risk for continuing exploitation especially when exiting the foster care system.
- Training on sex and labor trafficking should be required in school health curriculum to prevent sex and labor trafficking among youth.

## TO SURVIVORS |

CAST would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the youth survivors who contributed their time, effort and dedication to this project. Youth survivors were invited to participate and were compensated for participating in the qualitative portion of this study. This project would not have been possible without them or their valuable contributions. CAST is inspired and encouraged daily by the many survivors of trafficking who show courage, resiliency, and strength in their journeys of healing. CAST dedicates this project to all survivors of trafficking, as we hope this project will continue to shape services and policies to better assist more survivors.

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Please note that this is the Executive Summary of the Full Report. If you wish to see the full report, you can access it at [www.castla.org](http://www.castla.org)

