

DOMESTIC MINOR SEX TRAFFICKING RAPID ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET

VIRGINIA

BACKGROUND

Shared Hope International conducted an assessment in Virginia to examine the practices and procedures used in identifying and delivering services to victims of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) – U.S. children who are exploited through commercial sex. The Virginia Assessment can serve as a springboard for the existing working groups, activists, and community members to prioritize the identification and protection of children in sexual slavery in Virginia.

KEY FINDINGS

Dedicated professionals are engaging in progressive efforts to respond to the many prostituted children who pass through the system on a yearly basis. Unfortunately, progress in Virginia has been stifled by the following factors:

- Training and awareness on the issue of domestic minor sex trafficking in Virginia is strikingly low. A majority of first responders reported sporadic and inconsistent levels of training.
- The law intended to address sex trafficking of minors fails to protect 16 and 17 year old youth and children exploited through pornography and sexual performance. Law enforcement and prosecutors are charging perpetrators with related but inaccurate crimes such as rape, carnal knowledge or contributing to the delinquency of a minor.
- There are less than 100 beds in the nation that offer safe and secure shelter that is critical for victims of trafficking. In the absence of a statewide shelter mandate, Virginia hosts only a small fraction of these beds through independent establishments around the state. Several additional shelter facilities are currently in progress.
- From 2005-2009, the Virginia Crime Commission reported seven juvenile arrests for prostitution and four arrests for assisting or promoting. These numbers do not represent the number of youth exploited in the commercial sex industry as law enforcement reported aversion to arresting juveniles for prostitution related offenses due to insufficient protection.
- A majority of organizations that come into contact with victims identified Child Protective Services (CPS) as the primary source to report DMST; however, CPS staff reported never receiving training on the issue, lacking access to a system code that would track DMST, and were generally unaware of appropriate shelter or services for this specific victim population.

In the face of these challenges, state and federal legislators and law enforcement are leading a proactive response to the crackdowns in Maryland and D.C. that have reportedly pushed more trafficking into Virginia by establishing a Northern Virginia Task Force led by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Additionally, non-governmental organizations established a statewide effort to combat human trafficking in the formation of the Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking.



STUDY PARTICIPANTS

A representative from each of the following organizations participated in an interview for the Rapid Assessment on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in Virginia.

- Alexandria Child Protective Services
- Alexandria Community Services Board
- Alexandria Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court
- Bon Secours Richmond Health System
- Bridge to Freedom Foundation
- Child Protective Services, Virginia Department of Social Services
- City of Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office
- Common Ground Christian Church
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities
- Courtney's House
- Fairfax County Police Department
- Fairfax County Women's Shelter
- Fairfax Less Secure Shelter
- Foundations, Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court
- Hampton Division of Social Services
- Henrico Child Protective Services
- Henrico County Police Department
- Norfolk Juvenile Detention Center
- Norfolk Police Department
- Not for Sale
- Office of the Attorney General
- Providence Presbyterian Church
- Richmond Child Advocacy Center
- Richmond Justice Initiative
- Richmond Police Department
- Roanoke County Police Department
- Suffolk Police Department
- The Gray Haven Project
- The Lake of the Woods Church
- Tidewater Youth Services Commission
- Youth for Tomorrow

RESEARCH LOCATIONS

Four strategic research locations were selected due to varying geographic locations, population, culture, climate, and infrastructure. Research was conducted in the following locations: northern Virginia, including Fairfax County, Arlington County, and Alexandria city; the greater Richmond area, including Henrico County, City of Richmond and Chesterfield County; Hampton Roads, including Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, and Suffolk; and the greater Roanoke area.

ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL

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

