

SUPPORTING YOUTH IN ACCESSING SUPPORT & SERVICES

Safe Harbor responses for commercially sexually exploited minors have historically originated from and been provided through child serving systems, resulting in an increased overburdening of systems, ineffective budget expenditures, and, most importantly, less-than-promising outcomes for impacted young people. Alternatively, utilizing voluntarily-provided, community-based services to meet the needs of child and youth survivors leads to better outcomes for the young person, cost-savings for systems and communities, and a mitigation of further harm, including re-victimization.

MYTH

VERSUS

FACT

MYTH 1

“Systems (e.g., juvenile justice and child welfare) are the only entities positioned to ensure safety & provide services to CSEC survivors.”

FACT 1

In reality, a systems-based approach adopts a narrow view of “safety” for purposes of mitigating or removing a child/youth from harm. Systems often utilize traumatizing mechanisms (e.g., arrest, detention, removals) to “ensure” a child’s safety which neither guarantees their physical safety nor contemplates their emotional or psychological safety. Such approaches commonly band-aid the risk and compromise permanent safety for the young person. Additionally, the delivery of services within systems relies on a carrot-and-stick approach, which is commonly incompatible with a CSEC survivor’s trauma and resulting trauma behaviors.

Alternatively, developing and utilizing survivor-centered and developmentally-appropriate tools to connect kids/youth with services decreases harm and increases long-term wellbeing.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

Trauma, Coercion, and the Tools of Trafficking Exploitation: Examining the Consequences for Children and Youth in the Justice System

<https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/trauma-coercion-and-the-tools-of-trafficking-exploitation-examining-the-consequences-for-children-an.pdf>

MYTH 2

“Community-based organizations are unable to meet the complex needs of CSEC survivors.”

FACT 2

Community-based organizations are in the best position to, alongside funders, design and provide services that are accessible, culturally-relevant, and without concern for unnecessary system involvement, dependency, and deepening entanglement. Community service providers are the providers that systems use and rely on (via contracts) to meet the needs of children/youth, families, and communities. Conversely, system-driven service responses commonly generate unnecessary expenses and involvement when operating as “middlemen” and directing youth to community service providers using court mandates or the threat of legal consequences for noncompliance.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

Community-Based Services White Paper

<https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Framework-Changes-White-Paper.pdf>



Community-Based Services Issue Brief

<https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Issue-Briefs-3.1.pdf>

MYTH 3

“CSEC survivors won’t leave traffickers or participate in services unless they are forced to.”

FACT 3

Jurisdictions that prioritize agency and empower child/youth to seek holistic—emotional, economic, spiritual, physical, and psychological—safety witness more long-lasting and positive outcomes compared to jurisdictions that require children/youth to participate in programs and services. A critical aspect of healing and recovery for survivors is regaining autonomy, control, and self-trust, which can only be developed when children/youth are provided the opportunity to exercise agency and decision-making power over their desired services and goals and the appropriate pathways to accessing and achieving both. In fact, responses that require participation, instead of supporting children/youth in choosing services, have significantly lower “success” rates, often leading to deepening system involvement and collateral legal consequences.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

Protective Response Model

https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/JRC_ResponseModel_Spreads_web.pdf

MYTH 4

“Utilizing status quo system responses may be harmful, but alternative approaches (e.g., Safe Harbor dockets) ensure delivery of trauma-informed and survivor-centered care.”

FACT 4

Unfortunately, many alternative system or legal approaches, including those identifying as “safe harbor,” result in similar, unfruitful outcomes as traditional responses (e.g., delinquency, dependency). The realities of trafficking victimization, its preceding and resulting trauma, and the complex needs of impacted children/youth are incompatible with the design and purpose of legal systems. Ultimately, systems operate on timelines that are incongruent with non-linear trauma healing and adolescent development, both of which dramatically impact a child/youth survivor’s ability to “comply” or “succeed” in programs. Trauma-informed and survivor-centered care operates on the young persons’ timeline, refraining from punishment for a lack of compliance, engagement, or “success.” As such, services that are provided without contingency are best positioned to support a young person in achieving life-long success and wellbeing.



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Community-Based Services Issue Brief

<https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Issue-Briefs-3.1.pdf>



MYTH 5

“The provision of community-based services is only viable in urban communities rich in funding and a plethora of available service providers and options.”

FACT 5

While urban communities are, by and large, better resourced both in terms of funding and breadth of services, rural and/or under-resourced communities are still positioned to collaboratively meet the needs of child/youth survivors. Intentional capacity building or, at a minimum, combining organizations’ individual capacity, allows existing service providers to meet the comprehensive needs of impacted youth, often in the most culturally-relevant and targeted way. Importantly, mobilizing existing resources in rural and/or under-resourced communities also decreases the risk of a child/youth being removed from the community for the purpose of receiving services in or out-of-state. When mobilizing existing providers and resources, it is advisable to think of the impacted young person as the whole child or youth, not only a child/youth with needs stemming from trafficking victimization. The very stakeholders that are tasked with caring for the community’s children are likely able to support the child/youth survivor, including professionals in the following spaces: public education (e.g., guidance counselor, McKinney-Vento liaison), community healthcare, public health, faith communities, mental and behavioral health, and private practitioners.