

**From “The Life” to My Life:
Sexually Exploited Children
Reclaiming Their Futures**

**Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to
Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

**Suzanne Piening, LICSW, PhD
Theodore Cross, PhD**

May 2012

Supported by a grant to the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County from the
Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
Executive Summary	6
Chapter 1: The Problem of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	15
The Nature of the Problem	15
Sasha’s Story	17
The Scope of the Problem	18
Figure 1. Number of Clients Served by SEEN by Year	19
Figure 2. Race-Ethnicity of SEEN Clients	20
Figure 3. Exploitation Status of SEEN Clients	20
The Need to Change the Understanding of CSEC	20
The Importance and Limitations of a Criminal Justice Focus	21
The Need for a Comprehensive Strategy	22
Chapter 2: Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN):	
A Promising Model in Suffolk County, Massachusetts	24
Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN)	24
My Life My Choice	29
Gaining Independence For Tomorrow (GIFT)	30
Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office	31
MA Department of Children and Families-Boston Region	31
Boston Police Human Trafficking Unit	32
MA Department of Youth Services	32
Youth Advocacy Department	32
Acknowledge Transform Commit (ACT) Group Home	33
Kim’s Project	33
Sasha’s Story, Continued	34
Challenges to Providing an Effective Response to CSEC	34
Preventing and Intervening CSEC Through Legislation	35
Chapter 3: Needs and Gaps	37
Direct Services	37
System Capacity	39
Chapter 4: Promising Programs from Around the Country	40
Housing/Shelter	40
Community-Based Programs	40
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations	44

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

Appendix A	48
Profile of SEEN Clients as of January 2012	
Appendix B	50
List of Interviewees	
Appendix C	51
SEEN Partners	
Appendix D	52
SEEN Multidisciplinary Team Protocol	
Appendix E	
CSEC Fact Sheet from Legislative Hearings	53

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the cooperation of the entire Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Steering Committee. The multi-disciplinary collaboration they have nurtured and developed was evident in their interest in and assistance with the entire project. They made themselves available for interviews and follow-up, clarified issues, and welcomed us at trainings and other SEEN-related events. Their openness made it possible for us to capture an in-depth picture of their work, the lives of exploited girls, and the dedication of service providers across the region to build bridges that will advance their common goal of offering viable alternatives to “the life” of sexual exploitation. The participation of girls from a local service program in a focus group on CSEC was invaluable. We would especially like to thank Susan Goldfarb, Lisa Goldblatt Grace, Nikki Valila and Rebecca Dufur for their openness, encouragement, and guidance with the project and their extra effort in providing information. Rebecca Dufur also provided special data analysis for this report. Thank you also to Elizabeth Cross for assistance with the preparation of this text.

Our special appreciation to the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation for their commitment to youth. This report would not have been possible without their support.



CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER
of suffolk county

The Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization providing coordinated, multidisciplinary support and services to child victims of abuse & exploitation and their families.

989 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
cac@suf.state.ma.us
617.779.2146

www.suffolkcac.org

INTRODUCTION

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a crime of systemized brutality and sexual assault that is deliberately waged on children with prior histories of neglect, abuse, isolation and vulnerability. In recent years, hundreds of girls in the Boston area have been drawn into “the life” of commercial sexual exploitation; countless others remain at risk. These child victims are typically groomed by their exploiters with initial promises of the love and protection that they so deeply crave. Over time, through an incremental process of isolation and abuse, this child becomes the dehumanized possession of her exploiter; repeatedly assaulted physically, sexually and emotionally for her exploiter’s economic gain.

In the pages to follow, the reader will learn of one young survivor’s story. Like so many children who are vulnerable to CSEC, Sasha (not her real name) suffered abuse and neglect in her home that was so severe that she was left wounded, deeply distrustful of adults, profoundly lonely, and starved for stability, love and nurturance. This drove Sasha out of her home, into the streets. As is often the case, Sasha’s difficulty trusting caregivers and oppositional response to structure were viewed as behavioral problems rather than a response to trauma. What follows thereafter is nothing short of devastating: a childhood of neglect and instability that gives way to an adolescence punctuated by rape and violence at the hands of pimps and johns. Thankfully, the story does not end here. After four years of this brutal existence, when Sasha was just 16, a network of professionals, connected through the Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Coalition, came together to intervene in a coordinated fashion on her behalf. This intervention, and her participation in its many elements, would serve to re-set the trajectory of Sasha’s young life. It is this coordinated and sensitive response to Sasha and to children facing similar difficulties that defines the work of the SEEN Coalition.

This report describes efforts in Suffolk County to identify high risk and sexually exploited children and to provide a path to safety and recovery. Based on interviews and focus groups with professionals from the Boston area’s 35+ agency Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Coalition, this report profiles the problem of CSEC in Suffolk County and describes service models and legislation that are having a positive impact. In addition, it outlines recommendations for continued development, expansion and coordination of these efforts, and the undeniable fiscal constraints that must be surmounted in order for these improvements to be realized.

Executive Summary

Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSEC)

Obtaining credible estimates of the number of children involved or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation is challenging because of the hidden nature of the crime¹. Since 2005, in Massachusetts at least 480 children from Suffolk County have received services related to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). The vast majority of these victims (98%) have been girls; a majority (65%) girls of color. Most girls have been runaways and most have a history of child abuse. Ten percent of these girls have been arrested for prostitution, and over 4 in 10 have confirmed or suspected involvement in out-of-state trafficking. The median age of a child victim is 15. The youngest victim was age 11; 70 (15%) were age 13 and under. Hundreds of other young people in Massachusetts are likely to be involved in CSEC; and are likely to have little access to services. Boys and transgendered youth are also involved in CSEC but less visible.

Common risk factors among girls who have been exploited include poor attachments with primary caregivers, inadequate supervision or care at home, sexual abuse, poverty, homelessness, witnessing domestic violence, frequent running away, early substance abuse, and family or community history of exploitation². These girls have historically been treated as delinquents and dealt with primarily by the juvenile justice system, but there is increasing recognition that children and teens are manipulated or seduced by exploitive adults³.

A lack of parental love and attention in their lives leads girls to be vulnerable to the attentions of pimps. Men interested in making money through pimping will frequent neighborhood hang-outs and transportation centers where young girls on the run are often found, or seek out girls at schoolyards or malls who are not on the run but otherwise vulnerable. Girls will be won over by the “love” and attention these young men seem to offer. They can also be attracted to the perceived glamour associated with receiving gifts, going to parties and attracting the attention of an older man. Ultimately, the biggest lure for many girls is the promise of becoming part of a “family”, the acceptance they appear to receive, and idea that they are of value⁴. The men will then use their hold on the girls to involve them in commercial sex, often starting small and then escalating to regular work that is usually marketed on the Internet⁵. Eventually the men will exert rigid psychological and physical control over these girls; often beating them, starving them and depriving them of sleep; making it difficult for girls to leave “the life”. Effective intervention with CSEC requires substantial knowledge of the problem, non-judgmental empathy, persistence, and effective teamwork among the multiple agencies that have contact with these girls. Given their history and the strong pull of the exploitive relationships they are enmeshed in, the youths

¹ Finkelhor, D., & Stransky, M. (2008). *How many juveniles are involved in prostitution in the U.S.? Crimes Against Children Research Center*, University of New Hampshire. Durham, NH: UNH. Retrieved from http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/prostitution/Juvenile_Prostitution_factsheet.pdf

² Estes, R., & Weiner, N. (2002). *The commercial sexual exploitation of children in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania; Nandon, S.M., Koverola, C. & Schludermann, E.H. (1998). Antecedents of prostitution: Childhood victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 13, 206-221; Reid, J. (2011). An exploratory model of girl's vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation in prostitution, *Child Maltreatment*, 16, 146-157. doi: 10.1177/1077559511404700. Silbert, M..H.. & Pines, A.M. (1983). Early sexual exploitation as an influence in prostitution. *Social Work*, 28, 285-28.

³ Reid, J. (2010). Doors wide shut: Barriers to the successful delivery of victim services for domestically trafficked minors in a southern US metropolitan area. *Women & Criminal Justice* 20(1 & 2), 147—166. doi: 10.1080/08974451003641206; Shared Hope International. (2009). *The national report on domestic minor sex trafficking: Americas prostituted children*. Retrieved from http://www.sharedhope.org/dmst/documents/SHI%20National%20Report_without%20cover.pdf

⁴ Estes & Weiner, 2002, *ibid*; Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. NY: Basic Books; Reid, 2010, *ibid*.

⁵ SHI, 2009, *ibid*

often resist help and have ambivalent relationships with helping professionals. They need a coordinated response from the multiple agencies that are involved with them, and support and services that recognize their victimization and draw on their strengths to help them begin a new life.

The Need for a Comprehensive CSEC Response Strategy

Over the past several years professionals who work with commercially sexually exploited youth have recognized that law enforcement approaches are important for achieving justice and preventing individuals from exploiting girls, but that law enforcement alone is not effective in stopping CSEC. Very few girls are detained or arraigned on a prostitution charge, though law enforcement may charge them with a delinquent act to hold them in detention temporarily. Often, when identified as child victims of CSEC, girls are neither emotionally ready nor feeling safe enough to participate in a criminal prosecution of their exploiter. Aggressive law enforcement directed at pimps and johns holds exploiters accountable and can help to identify victims; however, relying on a child victim’s participation in a prosecution adds to their burden, and does not prevent girls from becoming attached to new pimps. Emotional support and services, in combination with efforts to address demand and offender accountability, are necessary to help girls leave “the life.”

A comprehensive CSEC response strategy includes 3 critical components:

- 1) Cross-System Collaboration:** Each commercially sexually exploited girl becomes involved with an estimated 3 to 4 agencies, including child welfare, juvenile justice, criminal justice, health care, family support and others⁶. No one agency has all the information or resources to completely address a girl’s circumstances and her needs. Exploited youth are at high risk to slip through the cracks that exist among agencies, jurisdictions, and service providers. There is a pressing need for consistency, communication and coordination across agencies and systems as well as a youth development approach that empowers youth in their recovery.

- 2) A Trauma-Informed Continuum of Care:** CSEC victims need an array of services to address needs in multiple domains of life (e.g., support, life management, education, housing, health and mental health, and more). Each of these services must be trauma-informed and responsive to the severity of trauma that CSEC victims have experienced.

- 3) Training:** Youth serving professionals including educators, police, child welfare, behavioral health and medical providers, juvenile courts, residential programs, emergency shelters and others need training about CSEC risk factors, screening and identification of CSEC, the effects of CSEC and other trauma, and effective interventions with commercially sexually exploited youth⁷. Continual staff turnover in agencies means that training must be repeated and integrated into ongoing training curricula.

⁶ Georgia Care Connection Office. (2011). *About GCCO*. Retrieved from <http://www.georgiacareconnection.com/AboutGCCO.html>

⁷ SHI, 2009

Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN): A Promising Model in Suffolk County, MA

A 2001 murder and a growing recognition of an invisible and underserved population spurred The Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) of Suffolk County and the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office to lead an effort resulting in the Support to End Exploitation Now or SEEN Coalition. SEEN is a network of over 35 public and private agencies organized to provide effective coordinated interventions for young people involved with CSEC and to enhance policy and programming to improve the system response to CSEC. The SEEN Coalition represents a major advance in the response to commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Metro Boston area, and much of this report focuses on it. However, the SEEN Coalition and its network are limited geographically; almost all of the specialized services for victims of commercial sexual exploitation are centered in and around Boston. An additional theme of this report therefore is the need to extend the system for responding to CSEC so it serves all children involved in or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation in the Commonwealth.

The SEEN Coalition’s core tenets are at the heart of its collaboration and have helped establish the common ground on which partners come together. These tenets include:

- the notion of shared responsibility: “These are our kids”;
- the conviction that sexual exploitation of youth is child abuse;
- the principle that exploited youth should be treated as victims with diverse needs rather than as offenders;
- the commitment to a coordinated multidisciplinary response for exploited youth;
- the belief that pimps and exploiters should be identified and prosecuted as child abusers;
- the perspective that an effective response needs to draw on knowledge of youth development and be informed by an understanding of the effects of trauma on young people’s lives.

The multidisciplinary intervention model developed by the SEEN Coalition has evolved over the last seven years and now operates with several components:

- **The SEEN Steering Committee** is chaired by the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County and comprised of a cross-section of multidisciplinary agency leaders. The Steering Committee is responsible for SEEN’s overall strategic direction and operations, including the implementation of SEEN’s multidisciplinary intervention guidelines⁸, oversight of the SEEN Multidisciplinary Team, and identification of changes in policy and practice that can better serve exploited youth. The SEEN Steering Committee played a key role in the drafting of Safe Harbor legislation for Massachusetts.
- **The SEEN Advisory Group** is a larger multidisciplinary group comprised of individuals and organizations addressing commercial sexual exploitation of children. In SEEN’s first years, Advisory Group members participated in training together and established task groups or subcommittees to inform the development of SEEN’s multidisciplinary response model. Currently, the SEEN Advisory Group meets quarterly to discuss topics that impact CSEC victims, to provide information regarding program initiatives and activities, and to offer an opportunity for networking and sharing resources

⁸ SEEN Coalition (2006) *Responding to Youth Exploited through Prostitution: Guidelines for a Multidisciplinary Intervention*. Boston: Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County.

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

- **Case-specific CSEC Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs)** are case conferences conducted on CSEC referrals to SEEN. Professionals working with exploited youth meet to share information and recommendations regarding individual exploited and high risk girls and to develop coordinated, multi-agency service plans. CSEC MDT plans typically include provisions for emotional support, shelter, medical and school services, education and/or employment, perpetrator management, as well as other needs.
- **The SEEN Case Coordinator** is the one professional in the Coalition with full-time responsibility for the day-to-day operation of SEEN and its response to CSEC victims. The coordinator receives referrals, coordinates the MDT response, records and disseminates the service plan, conducts follow-up to insure its implementation, and manages data about the cases.
- **The SEEN database**, established in 2005 and maintained at the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, facilitates case management and provides a statistical profile on the girls that have received SEEN services.

The SEEN model includes a network of governmental and non-governmental youth serving agencies, including partners with specialized CSEC services:

- **My Life My Choice**, a program of Justice Resource Institute, based in Boston, offers prevention groups for young teen girls at various sites; individual survivor mentors for girls who have been commercially sexually exploited or are at risk of it (aimed at helping girls find a path to safety and stability); and training on CSEC for various audiences.
- **Gaining Independence for Tomorrow (GIFT)** is a community-based program at Roxbury Youthworks that is funded by the Boston Region of the Department of Children and Families. Built upon an intensive case management model in which GIFT Life Coaches have daily contact with girls, it facilitates education and services, and provides the support girls need to remain out of “the life”. GIFT serves 48 girls at any one time.
- **MA Department of Children and Families (DCF) – Boston Region** has been vigorously addressing commercial sexual exploitation since 2001. Since that time, Boston DCF has funded mentoring by adult survivors, street outreach to engage exploited girls, My Life My Choice for training in CSEC for all the Boston Area Offices and the Roxbury Youthwork’s GIFT program. Each of the Boston Area DCF Offices has also taken additional steps to address CSEC. The Park Street Office has incorporated CSEC training into its Multidisciplinary Assessment Team the Harbor Office has developed a specialized unit to work with exploited youth, and the Hyde Park and Dimock Street Offices run My Life My Choice groups in their area offices for at risk young women.
- **Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office, Child Protection Unit** is a lead partner in the SEEN Coalition. Central to SEEN’s approach is the core belief that children exploited through prostitution are victims and should not be treated as delinquents. At the inception of SEEN’s development, Suffolk County District Attorney Daniel F. Conley

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

committed his office to not charging exploited youth, but instead working with the multidisciplinary team to support victims and hold adult exploiters accountable.⁹

- **Boston Police Human Trafficking Unit** is located within the Boston Police Department’s Family Justice Division. Established in 2005, it leads the Boston Human Trafficking Task Force (one of 42 task forces funded by the United States Justice Department). Staffed with specially-trained detectives and a victim advocate, the Human Trafficking Unit’s activities include rescuing and supporting victims, investigating and prosecuting human traffickers, and providing training to law enforcement and others regarding human trafficking.
- **MA Department of Youth Services** is the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth and has been a partner in the SEEN Coalition since 2005. DYS trains staff to identify and respond to CSEC victims and works in collaboration with the multidisciplinary team to move exploited girls out of detention into more appropriate settings and provide responsive services to youth committed to their care.
- **Youth Advocacy Department** of the Committee for Public Counsel Services provides legal representation to victims of CSEC who are charged with crimes, and has regularly collaborated with the SEEN coalition over a number of years. The Youth Advocacy Department takes a youth development approach, seeking to build on resources in young people’s lives and in the community to advocate for young people’s needs; it understands that achieving legal success depends in large part on promoting life success for its clients. The department has participated in numerous SEEN Multidisciplinary Team Meetings to represent youths’ interests (while maintaining attorney-client privilege).
- **The Acknowledge, Commit, Transform (ACT)** group home at the Germaine Lawrence School provides a home-like environment for girls affected by CSEC that also includes systematic methods and structures to promote change¹⁰. ACT links girls with staff and MLMC mentors, provides psychotherapy, teaches independent living skills, involves them in school and often part-time work, and fosters positive connections with girls’ communities. ACT uses Stages of Change and motivational interviewing methods that recognize that girls are at different levels of readiness to change. Research tracking 13 girls in the ACT program showed that most girls achieved their treatment goals.
- **Kim’s Project** is technically not a CSEC service, since it serves women 18 and older. However, it works in partnership with the SEEN Coalition and is very much an extension of services for commercially sexually exploited young women, whose exploitation and challenges overcoming it do not change magically when they turn 18. Serving more than 165 women since its inception, it provides support for harm reduction, intervention to shift courts to a service emphasis, recovery methods, and help for women to rebuild their lives.

⁹ Meisner, T.G. (2009). Shifting the Paradigm from Prosecution to Protection of Child Victims of Prostitution. *National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse Update*, 21 (8). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/update_vol_21_no_8.pdf

¹⁰ Thomson, S., Hirshberg, D., Corbett, A., Valila, N., & Howley, D. (2011). Residential treatment for sexually exploited adolescent girls: Acknowledge, Commit, Transform (ACT). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2290-2296.

Preventing and Intervening in CSEC Through Legislation

On November 21, 2011, Governor Deval Patrick signed An Act Relative to the Commercial Exploitation of People, human trafficking legislation that includes Safe Harbor language drafted by the SEEN Steering Committee and Suffolk County District Attorney Daniel F. Conley. Massachusetts is one of eight states to pass Safe Harbor legislation. The statute establishes as standard practice for commercially sexually exploited youth many of the principles and methods currently followed by the SEEN Coalition. The act defines CSEC as a form of child abuse that professionals are mandated to report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), which must for its part refer cases to law enforcement and the district attorney’s office. The law authorizes the court to treat a prostitution-related charge against a child as a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition, thereby treating exploited youth as child victims rather than delinquents. It also directs the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Mental Health, and other state agencies to provide for the service needs of commercially sexually exploited children. In addition, the law requires that a multidisciplinary team of professionals from agencies involved with the youth convene rapidly to develop an individualized service plan responsive to the youth’s needs. This legislation is a major step toward developing systems that are responsive to the needs of victims of CSEC, but needs to be followed by the development of effective policies, coalitions and service programs throughout the Commonwealth. The Attorney General’s Task Force convened in February 2012 provides an opportunity to advance these objectives.

Challenges to Providing an Effective Response to CSEC

Interviewees were asked to identify the major needs and gaps for supporting and protecting commercially sexually exploited youth in Suffolk County. A general theme was that resources for serving this population are in short supply, and budget constraints make it difficult to bridge the gap between need for and delivery of services. Yet demand for services is expanding because, with the growing awareness of CSEC as a form of victimization, more victims are being identified.

Needs and Gaps were identified in two domains: **Direct Services** (services delivered directly to exploited children), and **System Capacity** (systems that support a coordinated response model).

1. Needs and Gaps: Direct Services

Respondents most frequently identified the following areas of need for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation:

- a. **Nurturing Role Models:** While nurturing role models such as My Life My Choice mentors and GIFT life coaches help repair young people’s attachment difficulties, offer ongoing support, and promote healthy relationship as girls move away from “the life” these services are based primarily in Boston and demand for services exceeds program capacity;
- b. **CSEC Assessment Centers:** Rapid assessment and stabilization is key to supporting CSEC victims. Massachusetts does not yet have any CSEC assessment centers where youth can receive immediate crisis intervention, support, and medical and mental health care, as well as links to support groups and other services;

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

- c. Shelter & Housing:** Access to dedicated, CSEC-specific short-term (emergency) and long-term housing (group homes, foster homes and residential treatment programs) to meet the complex needs of exploited youth;
- d. Mental Health Care:** There is limited availability of trauma-informed, evidence-based mental health treatment provided by professionals who understand CSEC and trauma;
- e. Education and Employment Training:** Access to education and employment including tutoring, home schooling options, advocacy to enroll victims in schools rapidly when they change placements, and connections to employers;
- f. Youth Aging Out:** Increased services are needed for youth involved in CSEC who are aging out of the youth-serving system yet continue to have needs once they turn 18;
- g. Boys & Transgender Youth:** The needs of exploited boys and transgender youth have yet to be addressed. As of the writing of this report, Boston GLASS, a program of Justice Resource Institute, has recently been funded to developed Survivor Mentoring services for this population.

2. Needs and Gaps: System Capacity

To sustain a coordinated response model for CSEC victims, the following systemic gaps must be addressed:

- a. Funding for SEEN Case Coordination:** The SEEN Case Coordinator position is essential to the operation of the multidisciplinary CSEC response in Suffolk County. To date, the position has been grant-funded rather than part of any regular budget. Existing funding will be exhausted within a year. If the SEEN MDT model is to be sustained, a stable source of funding for the Case Coordinator position is needed to prevent disruptions in service delivery and data collection.
- b. Increased Training:** Training is a critical element in developing a service system that responds effectively to CSEC, and the need for training is ongoing and substantial given the number of professions involved and the continuing stream of new professionals who come into contact with current and potential victims of CSEC. There is a gap, however, between the number of professionals who need training and the number who receive it.
- c. A Statewide Service Delivery System:** At this time, Suffolk County is the only community in Massachusetts with an established multidisciplinary CSEC response model. Service systems for CSEC need to be developed in communities across the Commonwealth and connected to one another. The CSEC service system should be widespread and flexible so that geographic boundaries are not barriers to services. Statewide service availability is especially needed given the mobility of the CSEC population.

Conclusion

Commercial sexual exploitation has devastated the lives of hundreds of young people in Suffolk County and throughout Massachusetts. In the last several years, over 35 governmental and

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

non-governmental agencies in Suffolk County have come together to make dramatic progress to respond to the problem. The SEEN Coalition and its member agencies have trained hundreds of professionals to see CSEC as victimization and understand the needs of young women ensnared in “the life”. They have made great strides in developing a comprehensive, systemic response among the many agencies that interact with CSEC victims. They have served hundreds of victims through a coordinated intervention model tailored to the specific challenges and needs of young people. They have been in the forefront in developing new legislation that mandates a set of responses designed to move the state systematically away from a punitive response to CSEC victims and toward a compassionate, comprehensive service response to the problem. Without these efforts, young people involved in CSEC could continue to be treated as criminals and would be unlikely to receive the support and services they need to overcome their victimization. But the service system for these girls (and boys and transgendered youth) still needs development and the need far outstrips current service capacity.

Recommendations

The SEEN response to CSEC needs continued support and increased resources. Greater investment in the work of the SEEN Coalition would enable it to develop a complete continuum of care and enable it to make a major impact in preventing CSEC and repairing its impact on young people’s lives.

Our analysis suggests the following recommendations:

1. Establish stable funding of the SEEN Case Coordinator role in Suffolk County.
2. Maintain and improve SEEN data collection and analysis to better track cases and assess outcomes.
3. Address the gaps in the CSEC continuum of care including
 - a. Expansion of mentoring and intensive case management services.
 - b. Establishment of an emergency assessment center with CSEC-trained staff to provide immediate stabilization and comprehensive initial assessment.
 - c. Expansion of evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health services for exploited youth.
4. Expand CSEC training and integrate a core CSEC curriculum into in-service training of agencies (public and private) that come into contact with exploited youth.
5. Address underserved CSEC victims:
 - a. Conduct a needs assessment of commercially sexually exploited boys and transgendered youth to inform development of effective services.
 - b. Expand resources and services for victims age 18 – 25 who continue to be victimized and face the same challenges as younger victims.
6. Utilize lessons learned from the SEEN Coalition and other promising programs to implement the Safe Harbor provisions in Massachusetts’ recently-passed anti-human trafficking legislation and to establish a statewide CSEC response model in the Commonwealth.

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

SEEN partners have considerable hard-won expertise that could be shared with other Massachusetts communities through trainings and technical assistance.

7. Develop and implement a funding strategy to adequately support the development of CSEC service systems in Suffolk County and throughout the state. The strategy should include public and private funding for services and coalition building, and support at the state level for the networking needed to develop statewide, interagency relationships and service mechanisms.

Chapter 1

The Problem of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a devastating crime, made worse by the longstanding criminalization of its victims. Hundreds of vulnerable young people in Massachusetts have been coerced into a life of commercial sexual exploitation. Over the past several years there has been increasing recognition that these girls are not delinquents; they are victims. This report focuses on girls involved in CSEC, who are the vast majority of the youths who have been identified and about whom we know the most. Boys and transgendered youth are victims of CSEC as well, but less is known about their involvement and current services for CSEC focus on girls. Most practitioners at the state and community level have come to recognize that exploited girls need a coordinated response among the multiple agencies with which they are involved. This response needs to provide services that recognize their victimization and draw on their strengths to help them begin a new life with support from nurturing adults.

This report profiles the problem of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Suffolk County, Massachusetts. It discusses Boston’s Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Coalition, made up of over 35 partner agencies, developed to address these children’s multiple needs, support them in leaving “the life” and pursuing healthy alternatives, and hold accountable the adults that exploit them. The report describes service models that have had a positive impact against commercial sexual exploitation of children in Suffolk County. It presents new Massachusetts legislation designed to change sexually exploited girls’ status from perpetrators to victims and to provide an entitlement to services they need. The report also highlights how the needs of girls in or at risk of CSEC outstrip the capacity of the current service network. It further describes gaps in services that remain and makes recommendations to improve the response of Suffolk County and Massachusetts.

Interviews with SEEN Coalition members explored the role of the coalition; the range of services available to these girls; the contribution of each interviewee/agency to intervention and prevention; the services each offered and the service gaps or needs they encountered; lessons learned thus far; and promising practices for serving commercially sexually exploited girls. Several professionals in other areas of the country were also interviewed about their service programs to understand the national context in which Massachusetts services are developing. The interviews were supplemented by a focus group with girls being treated following CSEC and by analysis of SEEN’s client data base.

The Nature of the Problem

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is an insidious problem that takes advantage of exceptionally vulnerable youths. Victims of commercial sexual exploitation have typically experienced a range of early traumas and/or stresses, including poor attachments with primary caregivers; inadequate supervision or care at home; sexual abuse; poverty; homelessness; witnessing domestic violence; and family or community history of exploitation¹¹. Often they have early experiences with running away or substance abuse. Many of the professionals we interviewed emphasized the deficits in parental love and attention these children have experienced and their desperate seeking for love and support. The girls are

¹¹ Estes & Weiner, 2001; Reid, 2011; Nandon et al., 1998; Silbert & Pines, 1983, *ibid*.

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

usually disconnected from school and faith community and other opportunities to receive support and develop a positive self-image.

CSEC develops in the shadows of society and most often is an unseen tragedy¹². Commercially sexually exploited girls develop bonds with their pimps that are fueled by both early and recent trauma experiences¹³. Predators looking to recruit young girls for commercial sexual exploitation can often find them in local neighborhood hang-outs, malls, bus stops or T stations. The exploiter is typically, though not exclusively, an adult male, commonly referred to as a “pimp.” These men identify which young girls appear to be most vulnerable. They establish a relationship and “groom” the girls by giving them gifts, showering them with attention and affection, and professing their love for them. Girls will be won over both by the love these young men seem to offer and the glamour associated with receiving gifts, going to parties and attracting the attention of an older man. Ultimately, the biggest lure for many girls is the promise of becoming part of a “family”, the acceptance they appear to receive, and idea that they are of value¹⁴. One focus group participant said “In the beginning I felt big, I felt like his girlfriend, and he treated me like the love of his life.”

Men will then use their hold on the girls to involve them in commercial sex. An exploitive man will start out small by asking her to sleep with his friends so he can pay his rent or bills, and then escalate, eventually advertising her on the Internet and setting a quota she must meet for the number of johns she services. These youth rarely walk the “strolls” and “tracks” that earlier generations did. Now they are marketed on the Internet, by cell phone and pager, and through social media, making the crime much less visible and more insidious as it avoids detection.

Girls may enter into relationship with their pimps believing in true love but soon enough they experience the pain and suffering associated with exploitation. As one young victim we interviewed said, “One day you wake up and it’s not pretty anymore”. Yet it is not easy to escape from “the life”. Desperate for love and affection, young people involved in commercial sexual exploitation develop a bond with their pimps that is fueled by prior traumatic experiences. Their early trauma leads them to expect, feel comfortable with and feel attached in relationships in which they are neglected, abused and in many ways abandoned – although they suffer, many have trouble detaching from these relationships because it recreates the only kind of intimate attachment to others that they have ever known.

Moreover, pimps typically use various forms of coercion to rigidly control girls, making it more difficult to escape exploitation. Most girls are beaten and deprived of food and sleep. Fear of violence is often a significant factor in a girl’s relationship with an exploiter. Another focus group participant said that her “boys” (in the gang she hung out with) wanted to do something about her pimp, but “he had weapons and I didn’t want anyone to get hurt over me so I told them to leave him alone. I was doing what I had to do”. The following case vignette provides a glimpse of some of the pain girls experience and the challenges of dealing with the problem.

¹² Clawson, H. J., Dutch, N. M., Salamon, A., & Goldblatt Grace, L. (2009). *Study of HHS programs serving human trafficking victims: Final report*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Finkelhor & Stransky, *ibid.*; Reid, 2010, *ibid*

¹³ Reid, 2010 *ibid*; SHI, 2009, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Estes & Weiner, 2002, *ibid*; Herman, 1992, *ibid*; Reid, 2010, *ibid*.

Sasha’s Story

Sasha (not her real name) was five years old when her father, an alcoholic, abusive man, left the family. After he left, Sasha’s mother saddled her with parenting responsibilities for her younger brother, often leaving Sasha alone to feed and care for her brother late into the night. Her mother was often depressed and frequently brought home different men who stayed for a night or a week, but who were almost always abusive to the family. Her mother frequently criticized Sasha and told her “No man will ever want a loser like you.” In Sasha’s words “I learned to depend only on myself and to take care of myself. I didn’t trust anyone.” She began running away when she was 12 and was removed from her home at age 13. She was placed in foster care, but was moved frequently between foster homes because of her running behavior and mood instability. At first she lived on the streets with other runaways when she ran away. At age 14 she met “the man of my dreams” in a corner store near where she hung out. He was 10 years older than she was, but he was handsome and seemed really “nice and friendly”. They began spending a lot of time together and he let her stay at his place, gave her food, and even bought her some new clothes. He made her feel safe and loved. She was thrilled when he wanted to have sex with her, seeing it as an expression of his love, and she began to feel like she had found a home. He told her he loved her and would always be there for her. Shortly after this she was picked up as a runaway and placed in a new foster home.

About a month later she ran again, met up with her boyfriend and returned to his apartment to live. He told her he was having trouble making the next rent payment and wondered if she would help him out. She said she would do anything to help. He suggested she could in one night earn the money they needed by having sex with a couple of guys. She was uneasy about it, but smoked some pot he gave her to relax, and did what he asked. He asked her to do it again several more times over the next two weeks. Then he began to suggest she could do this to earn regular money and help pay the bills. When she objected he began insulting her and threatened to hit her if she would not go out that night and earn money by having sex with strangers. She was scared, and really hurt by his insults and anger, but she convinced herself that he still loved her and complied. He continued to insist she use sex to earn money. Eventually, he posted a fake picture of her on the Internet and set her up in a hotel room to service johns several days a week. Again she was picked up by the police while shopping and was placed in another foster home.

She hated foster care and felt confined by the rules and strict schedules. She began to admit to herself that she also hated sleeping with all those strangers, but desperately wanted to return to the “comfort” and freedom of life with her boyfriend. She ran one last time to the one place she felt loved – her boyfriend’s apartment. He put her back to work almost immediately and she felt stuck between two unbearable ways of life. She still felt a strong pull to her boyfriend and convinced herself that he still loved her even though he was spending more time with other girls. She told herself that at least he wouldn’t do anything to really hurt her. One night a customer severely beat her, and her “boyfriend” barely noticed. After that she was raped and robbed several times, and then was beaten again by a john. Her boyfriend blamed her and was furious that she had lost his money. He insisted she work longer hours to make up for the lost income. She was terrified and decided that she needed a break from this life. She was confused because she still loved her boyfriend, but her life with him was nothing like she imagined it would be. She was 15 ½ years old. One night she was hanging out in a bar and managed to get herself arrested for disorderly conduct and assaulting a police officer and was thrown in jail. As unpleasant as being in jail was, it was the first night she had felt safe in nearly a year. (continued below)

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Unfortunately Sasha’s story is the norm rather than the exception for many girls lured and coerced into “the life” of prostitution across the country. Many girls are stuck in “the life” for much longer than Sasha; some are murdered before they can leave. Often the problem can be hidden even when a girl has contact with a child-serving agency, in part because these young people learn not to trust adults or talk to law enforcement. One girl we interviewed said, “I was in ‘the life’ from the time I was 12 [she is now 16]. In 2009 I was gang raped and I had a feeling something really bad was going to happen to me. This year I finally told my DCF [Department of Children and Families - child protective services] worker what was going on. She had no idea that I was being exploited”.

Given the danger and manipulation these girls experience and the strong pull of the exploitive relationships they are enmeshed in, effective intervention with CSEC requires substantial knowledge of the problem, non-judgmental empathy, persistence, and effective teamwork among the multiple agencies that have contact with these girls. Young people need considerable support and services to help them escape CSEC and begin a healthier life. The service response must deal both with the stress and trauma of CSEC and also the prior emotional and family problems that predisposed these youths for involvement in CSEC in the first place. Both because of their earlier care environment and their involvement with CSEC, their emotional development usually lags seriously behind their physical development so that they may appear to be more mature than they are, and their “street smarts” may be mistaken for maturity they do not have. They often resist help and have ambivalent relationships with helping professionals. They may react to stressors with emotionality at some times and stoicism at other times. They need substantial emotional support and guidance to deal with the fear and shame they feel, to cope with the challenges of breaking away from their pimp and starting a new life, and to learn to develop healthier relationships. Some are escaping from living with their pimp and need housing. Often they need help dealing with dependence on the drugs they are encouraged to use in “the life”. In some cases they need medical care to deal with sexually transmitted infections or other conditions. They need support and skill-building to manage returning to school or starting employment. Many are involved with the Department of Children and Families and need foster care, and need to adapt to relationships with foster parents and/or make progress on an independent living plan.

The Scope of the Problem

CSEC has received increased attention by law enforcement, human services and the justice system over the past 10-15 years, but it has been difficult to obtain credible estimates of the number of children involved in or at risk of exploitation because of the hidden nature of the crime¹⁵. There has not been good research on the prevalence of the problem nationally. The data that are available come from studies in cities and states addressing the problem. Researchers interviewing children in “the life” in New York City in 2005-2006 estimated that over 3900 children in the city were victims of CSEC¹⁶. A 2008 Seattle report estimated that 300-500 girls were involved in CSEC in that city¹⁷. A recent study in Georgia estimated that 200-500 girls are identified as commercially sexually exploited each month in the state of Georgia¹⁸.

In Massachusetts, at least 480 girls from Suffolk County have received services related to CSEC over the past seven years. Given that many other youths in Suffolk County have not

¹⁵ Finkelhor & Stransky, 2008, *ibid*

¹⁶ Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski & Kahn, 2008, *ibid*

¹⁷ Boyer, 2008, *ibid*

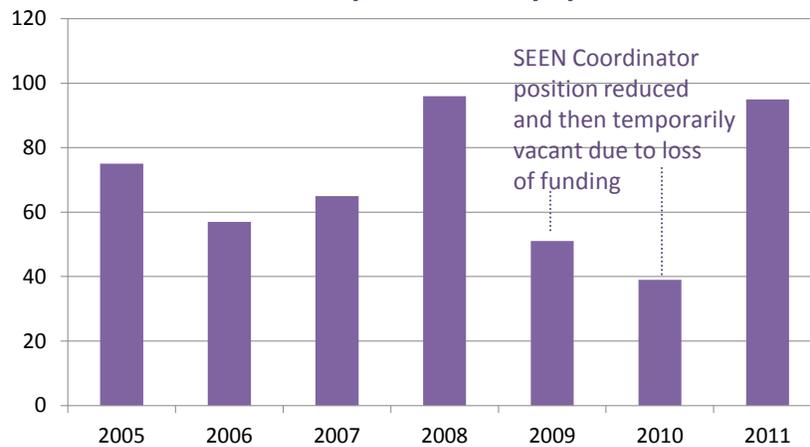
¹⁸ Schapiro Group, 2010, *ibid*

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

been served, that youths in the rest of the state have little access to services, and that boys and transgender youths are also involved in CSEC but less visible, hundreds of other young people in Massachusetts are likely to be involved in CSEC. A database including data on more than 480 youths served by the SEEN Coalition from 2005 to December 2011 (see below) provides a profile of these victims of CSEC in Suffolk County.

Figure 1 shows the enrollment in SEEN over time.

Figure 1
Number of clients
served by SEEN by year



There was an increasing trend in the number of youths referred to SEEN from 2005 to 2008, but the numbers dropped precipitously in 2009 and 2010 when the SEEN Case Coordinator position (see below) was reduced and then temporarily eliminated because of lack of funding. The number of youths seen returned to the 2008 level when the funding for the SEEN Case Coordinator was restored in 2011. The vast majority of SEEN clients (98%) have been girls and the median age is 15. As Figure 2 shows, a majority are girls of color. Figure 3 shows that about half were involved with SEEN because of confirmed exploitation, and many more because of suspected exploitation. Appendix A provides more detailed statistics from the SEEN database, and shows that most girls have been runaways and most are involved with the Department of Children and Families, often because a maltreatment report was filed about CSEC. The database also shows that over 1 in 10 girls have been arrested for prostitution and over 4 in 10 have confirmed or suspected involvement in out-of-state trafficking. In addition to the 450 cases shown in Table 1, SEEN has also worked with 17 youth referred from outside of Suffolk County and 16 victims between the ages of 19 and 26 years old. Massachusetts does not at this time maintain a statewide centralized database on CSEC, so the number of youths outside of Suffolk County receiving CSEC services is unknown.

Figure 2
Race-Ethnicity of SEEN Clients

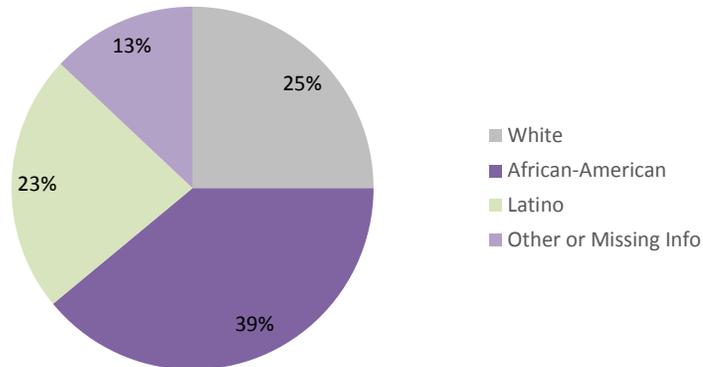
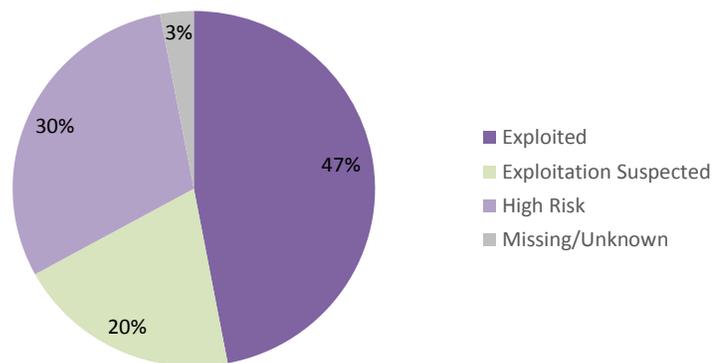


Figure 3
Exploitation Status of SEEN Clients



The Need to Change the Understanding of CSEC

Increasingly in Massachusetts and across the country, there is a recognition that the first task in developing an effective response to CSEC is to stop blaming the victim and start understanding the victimization. Just as in the past victims of child sexual abuse and of partner violence were often seen as responsible for their assaults, victims of CSEC have been held solely responsible for their engagement in “the life”. They have been seen as juvenile delinquents who need

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

restraint and detention because they have chosen to engage in delinquent behavior. A number of troublesome behaviors such as truancy, breaking rules, sneaking out to attend late night parties, experimenting with alcohol and drugs, and having unknown Facebook friends that can be seen as signs of delinquency are all red flags for commercial sexual exploitation. Labeling these girls as juvenile delinquents attaches a stigma that interferes with a compassionate response and may preclude access to more appropriate services. Schools may have an early opportunity to detect signs of CSEC, but may also have trouble recognizing these girls as victims. Some child welfare agencies who are involved with these girls through the foster care system may see them as runaways or behavior problems rather than youths in an early stage of exploitive relationships. Law enforcement agencies too may view these girls as making the choice to commit the crime of prostitution. All committed professionals who are involved in addressing the problem agree that it is critical to increase the visibility of at-risk children and to bring the systems involved with them to a common understanding of ways to identify and intervene with these children¹⁹.

The Importance and Limitations of a Criminal Justice Focus

Law enforcement plays an important role in the response to CSEC. Aggressive law enforcement directed at pimps and johns holds exploiters accountable. Most pimps are men in their 20’s to 40’s. They often have a long history of exploiting young women, use physical assault to control them, and involve them in harmful behaviors like truancy and substance abuse. Prosecution of these perpetrators is necessary to achieve justice and prevent further exploitation. Effective law enforcement has the potential to deter consumers of commercial sex and thereby reduce demand for CSEC. Law enforcement efforts targeted towards the girls can help to identify victims and get girls “off of the street.” Law enforcement agencies have been major partners in SEEN and contributed substantially to the Coalition’s efforts.

Yet law enforcement’s investment in SEEN is based partly on increasing recognition that law enforcement approaches, alone, are not effective in keeping girls from their exploiters. Indeed, prosecution of pimps can have unintended consequences for the young women themselves that may accompany its positive effects. Prosecution of pimps may place a burden on the victim to cooperate with authorities, adding to the pressure that the young women experience. In addition, prosecution of pimps may not solve the problem if girls then become attached to new pimps who take the place of the old ones. Clearly, more than prosecution of pimps is needed to help victims leave “the life.”

It should be noted that very few girls are actually detained or arraigned on a prostitution charge, though exploited girls may be held on other charges such as trespassing or assault. Girls may be charged with a delinquent act so that they can be held safely in a detention setting. However, detention is only temporary in nature, and once a child leaves detention, there must be a comprehensive plan in place to support the child’s long term safety.

¹⁹ Finkelhor & Stransky, 2008, *ibid*; Fong, R. & Cardoso, J. (2010). Child human trafficking victims: Challenges for the child welfare system. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 33, 311–316. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2009.06.018; Rand, A. (2009). It can't happen in my backyard: The commercial sexual exploitation of girls in the United States, *Child & Youth Services*, 31(3), 138–156. doi: 10.1080/0145935X.2009.524480; Reid, 2010, *ibid*; SHI, 2009, *ibid*; Williams, L. M., & Frederick, M. E. (2009). *Pathways into and out of commercial sexual victimization of children: Understanding and responding to sexually exploited teens*. Lowell, MA: University of Massachusetts Lowell.

The Need for a Comprehensive Strategy

Given the multiple, often uncoordinated agencies involved, the lack of understanding of CSEC as victimization among many professionals, and the extensive service needs of these young people, a comprehensive strategy is needed. This strategy must include effective cross-system collaboration, ongoing training, and a service continuum to address a range of children’s needs.

Cross-System Collaboration: A crucial component of victim assessment and intervention is cross-system collaboration²⁰. Nationally, it has been estimated that each commercially sexually exploited girl is involved with 3-4 agencies simultaneously, including child welfare, juvenile justice, health care, family support and other agencies²¹. There is a pressing need for consistency and coordination across agencies and systems if the youth’s involvement in commercial sexual exploitation and trauma are to be identified and adequately addressed. Otherwise, these young victims will not receive the holistic, comprehensive interventions they need.

Each agency has some information on the youth and her family, but no single agency has all the information that will give a complete picture of her situation and her needs. These needs can be complex and unpredictable. One day these youth may respond to outreach and another day withdraw and refuse contact. There is a high risk that youth will slip through the cracks that exist between agencies, jurisdictions, and service providers. For example, a young girl may be evaluated by the Child Protection Team (CPT) at the local hospital because of repeated chlamydia infections, but once her caregivers are deemed non-abusive, nothing further is explored. There may be no attempt to contact collateral agencies to provide a full picture of this girl’s life and experiences. They may not learn of her history of school absences and running away, her gang-involvement, or her recent wardrobe upgrade and the multiple cell phones she carries with her. Without a deliberate, concerted effort to collaborate on a plan for this youth, each agency involved with her will proceed from its limited perspective based on one or two areas of the girl’s life.

A Trauma-Informed Continuum of Care: Young people involved with CSEC need an array of different services, both because most girls need help in multiple domains of life (e.g., daily life management, education, housing, mental health, health, family support), and because victims of CSEC vary in their strengths, developmental capabilities and family situation. Some victims need help reconciling with their family, some need help finding a foster family to care for them, and, for some, preparation for independent living is the only reasonable option. Services need to vary in intensity and restrictiveness, as some girls are ready to leave “the life” behind while living in the community while some girls’ needs are so extensive and their family resources so limited that they need a residential intervention. Specialized services are needed to serve boys and transgender youth involved in CSEC; the current girl-oriented programs would not necessarily provide staff that understands their special circumstances and the program models developed for girls would not necessarily transfer without adaptation to boys and transgender youth. The continuum of services should be available and, ideally, coordinated across different geographical regions of the state, so that youths involved in CSEC throughout the Commonwealth have access to a range of services.

Training: One problem with coordinating systems to respond to CSEC is that important service systems—schools, public child welfare, behavioral health and medical providers, law

²⁰ Fong & Cardoso, 2010, *ibid*;

²¹ Georgia Care Connection Office, 2011

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

enforcement, juvenile courts, residential programs, and emergency shelters—need repeated training about CSEC risk factors, the effects of CSEC and other trauma, and effective interventions to use with commercially sexually exploited youth²². Training increases capacity and awareness so that at-risk or involved girls are more easily identified, reported and directed toward appropriate services. Continual staff turnover in these organizations means that there are always new staff that lack understanding of CSEC and need training. According to interviewees, training efforts must deal further with conflicting professional views on the nature and extent of the problem of CSEC; and fluctuating agency or administration buy-in for training. Several interviewees cautioned that training in child sexual abuse was no substitute, as some professional who are skilled in assessing child sexual abuse are not as savvy when it comes to recognizing the signs of CSEC. Without ongoing training and support of awareness, the broad service system that interacts with victims will continue to misinterpret or not know the CSEC risk indicators and will not know how to intervene effectively²³. Training efforts need to expand as CSEC interventions are extended to more neighborhoods and communities and need to be ongoing given the inevitable turnover in young professionals.

²² SHI, 2009, *ibid*

²³ Clawson et al., 2009, *ibid*, Reid, 2010, *ibid*; SHI, 2009, *ibid*.

Chapter 2

Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN): A Promising Model in Suffolk County, Massachusetts

With the growing awareness in the last decade that commercial sexual exploitation is a form of victimization, the human services community has developed innovative multidisciplinary and private sector interventions to assist girls involved with commercial sexual exploitation, and to prevent CSEC among girls at risk. Below we profile current intervention models, which are all relatively new but have already shown considerable promise.

Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN)

The Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) coalition is a network of over 35 public and private agencies in Suffolk County organized to provide effective coordinated interventions for young people involved with CSEC and to enhance policy and programming to improve the system response to CSEC. Originally called the Teen Prostitution Prevention Project, it first developed following the 2001 murder of a child who had been commercially sexually exploited in Boston²⁴. Conversations among child-serving agencies at that time suggested that there was a significant but under-recognized problem of CSEC in Suffolk County. Child protection, juvenile justice, children’s services and many other agencies knew of girls like the young victim, and had reached out to these girls, but with little effect. One problem was the lack of specialized professionals focusing on these youth and developing service models for them. Another problem was a lack of communication among the many professional organizations that came into contact with these girls. A third problem was a lack of recognition and reporting of exploited youth. Without this, agencies could not understand entirely the scope of the problem nor develop a comprehensive response that dealt with the many needs of girls trapped by commercial sexual exploitation.

The Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County (CAC) and the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office spearheaded an effort to bring together representatives of public and community-based youth-serving organizations to discuss CSEC and plan for a coordinated response. The coalition that emerged was entitled the Teen Prostitution Prevention Project (TPPP), later renamed the Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Coalition. Overseeing the coalition is the Children’s Advocacy Center, a multidisciplinary program that is designed to provide a comprehensive, coordinated investigative and service response to children exposed to violence and abuse. In 2006 the SEEN Coalition formalized its groundbreaking partnership with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the participating agencies that embraces the notion that victims of commercial sexual exploitation are not criminals and that genuine collaboration and a multi-disciplinary response can yield positive outcomes for exploited youth. Among those agencies in the partnership were the Office of Suffolk County District Attorney Daniel F. Conley, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Youth Services, the Massachusetts Department of Probation, the Boston Police, public schools, the FBI, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Youth Advocacy Project (of the Committee for Public Counsel Services) and a range of law enforcement and health and human service agencies. (See Appendix B for a list of SEEN Coalition partners). All agencies pledged to participate,

²⁴ Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County. (2011). Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN). Retrieved from <http://www.suffolkcac.org/programs/seen/>

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

accept the principles of SEEN and do their part to support the Coalition’s mission. In addition, a number of agencies committed to participating in SEEN’s CSEC Multidisciplinary Teams (see below) and to providing services to SEEN clients. The Coalition’s core tenets are at the heart of the collaboration and have helped establish the common ground on which partners come together. These include:

- the notion of shared responsibility: “These are our kids”;
- the conviction that sexual exploitation of youth is child abuse;
- the principle that exploited youth should be treated as victims with diverse needs rather than as offenders;
- the commitment to a coordinated multidisciplinary response for exploited youth;
- the belief that pimps and exploiters should be identified and prosecuted as child abusers;
- the perspective that a response needs to draw on knowledge of youth development and be informed by an understanding of the effects of trauma on young people’s lives.

The intervention model developed by the SEEN Coalition has evolved over the last seven years and now has several components. Several interviewees noted that prior to the formation of SEEN and the institution of the MDT model, CSEC victims were largely invisible. All interviewees agreed that interagency collaboration, services, and relationships among providers have improved and strengthened since SEEN was established in 2005. SEEN has been twice recognized as one of the top 50 initiatives selected by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation for its novelty, creativity, effectiveness at addressing significant issues, and its potential to be replicated by other jurisdictions.²⁵ The SEEN components are described in the below paragraphs.

SEEN Advisory Group: The SEEN Advisory Group was formed in 2005 and played an essential role in designing and implementing Suffolk County’s CSEC response plan. Prior to the creation of the Advisory Group, no venue existed that allowed prosecutors and defense attorneys, social workers and police officers, probation officers and outreach workers to come together and discuss issues regarding exploited youth. The Advisory Group not only provided an opportunity to dispel misperceptions between disciplines, but also allowed participants to train together, establish common goals and objectives, and develop strong interagency relationships.

Using subcommittees or task groups, the Advisory Group developed the elements of a comprehensive, cross-system CSEC response, including: offender accountability; interagency communication/confidentiality; interview/intervention guidelines; service provision; data/evaluation; housing/placement; and training/public awareness. These task groups

²⁵ See, Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office (April, 2007). *Teen Prostitution Prevention Project Named Among Top 50 Innovative Government Programs* Retrieved from <http://www.mass.gov/dasuffolk/docs/4.4.07C.html>.

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

informed the development of a coordinated CSEC response, which was formalized in SEEN’s protocol, *“Responding to Youth Exploited through Prostitution: Guidelines for a Multidisciplinary Intervention”*. In 2006, over 200 multidisciplinary professionals (including Advisory Group members and others) participated in the first two-day multidisciplinary training for professionals on an MDT response to CSEC victims. The work of the Advisory Group would not have been possible without the oversight and work of the SEEN Project Coordinator, a position that was funded from September 2004 to June 2009.

The Advisory Group has evolved into a forum that now meets quarterly to discuss topics that impact CSEC victims, to provide information regarding program initiatives and activities, and to offer an opportunity for professionals to network and share resources. Membership/attendance is open to professionals and any other individuals interested in and working with child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. In 2011, discussion topics at Advisory Group meetings included service provision and resources in Massachusetts, pending Massachusetts legislation, and human trafficking/CSEC laws in other states. On average, 20-25 people attend each meeting—including service providers, law enforcement, agency representatives, students, and activists. Though an agenda is developed to focus discussion on specific topics, the meeting is conducted as an open forum at which attendees ask questions, provide input or suggestions, and share relevant information.

SEEN Steering Committee: While the SEEN Coalition and the SEEN Advisory Group have a large membership, the SEEN Steering Committee was established as a smaller, multidisciplinary leadership group that would take responsibility for implementing the Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) Guidelines, set priorities for the Coalition and make decisions regarding SEEN’s work on behalf of exploited youth. Members of the Steering Committee represent a number of disciplines from the Advisory Group: law enforcement, probation, government agencies, public schools and providers of community-based and residential services for youth. Chaired by the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, the Committee first convened in 2006, and has continued to meet once a month to discuss SEEN’s strategic direction and policy and practice issues that impact exploited youth. The Steering Committee finalized the Multi-Disciplinary Team guidelines in 2006 and guided their implementation that same year. An important contribution of the Steering Committee in 2010—2011 has been education and advocacy work on behalf of the Safe Harbor Legislation (see below).

Nearly all of the interviewees agreed that the monthly Steering Committee meetings have moved practice out of agency-bound silos to build the strong cross-discipline foundation that is critical to the success of the MDT model. Participating in Steering Committee meetings has forged mutually beneficial working relationships among professionals in many of the agencies that encounter commercially sexually exploited girls. Preconceived notions about the approach and attitude of other agencies toward these girls have been adjusted because of the conversations that members have had at Committee meetings. Steering Committee members understand better each agency’s role and purpose, and have been able to expedite services for commercially sexually exploited girls through contact with other Steering Committee members. The cooperative relationships developed by the Steering Committee have also promoted the effectiveness of the broader Multidisciplinary Team responding to the needs of individual girls (see below).

SEEN CSEC Multi-Disciplinary Teams: In 2006, SEEN’s Guidelines *“Responding to Youth Exploited through Prostitution: Guidelines for a Multidisciplinary Intervention”* established a CSEC Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) model that includes comprehensive, individualized service plans for hundreds of girls referred to SEEN. The multi-disciplinary team model has been identified as

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

one of three promising practices by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention²⁶. The MDT model is a joint effort of multiple SEEN partner agencies who intervene with and provide services to girls involved with CSEC, including but not limited to the Department of Children and Families (DCF; child protective services), the Department of Youth Services (DYS; juvenile justice), the Youth Advocacy Department (Committee for Public Counsel Services), the Roxbury Youthworks’ GIFT program, My Life My Choice, other service programs, the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, the Boston Police and other police departments, and the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office. An MDT for a particular young person’s case is formed from the specific professionals working with an individual. This team includes professionals from the above agencies, but also any other salient person from the young person’s life, such as a school nurse or a church outreach worker. Thus the model remains consistent while the specific individuals involved depend on who is working with the young person. MDTs meet regularly via conference call or in person to share information and ideas about individual girls and to determine the best way for each agency to respond effectively to girls’ needs.

SEEN’s step-by-step protocol directs the team response from the point of contact with a girl until a comprehensive service plan is developed (see Appendix C). Under Massachusetts’ child protection statutes, a youth’s involvement with commercial sexual exploitation should be reported to DCF. DCF reviews the allegation and screens it in or out for investigation. (By regulation, DCF only investigates cases in which the alleged maltreatment is perpetrated by a caretaker). DCF may also then refer the case to the office of the Suffolk County District Attorney and, when appropriate, it is then directed to the SEEN Coalition and managed by the SEEN Case Coordinator (see below). Sometimes a case comes directly to SEEN via a telephone call from an agency or individual professional. The SEEN Case Coordinator logs the referral and arranges a case conference that includes all involved parties, usually within 48 hours. Through the initial case conference, team members share information on the girl’s current status and her relevant history and background. A typical case conference includes discussion of the following:

- **Child/Victim:** Is the victim open to engaging in services? What is her relevant history?
- **Placement/Shelter:** Does she have a safe place to be? Does she need a new placement?
- **Interpersonal Support:** Who does the victim trust? Does she need additional supports?
- **Investigation/Investigative Interview:** Is the victim willing to talk about her exploitation? Is she emotionally/physically stable enough for an interview?
- **Threats/Dangerousness of Pimp:** How dangerous is the offender? Does he have access to the child? Does anyone have more information on the offender?
- **Psychological Treatment:** Is the victim currently receiving treatment? Are there any concerns about suicidality or other mental health issues?

²⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (1995). *Child Sexual Exploitation: Improving investigations and protecting victims: A blueprint for action*, Washington, D.C: Office of Justice Programs.

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

- **Medical Evaluation/Health Care:** Are there any medical concerns? Is it a priority to get her to a medical provider?

During the call, participants identify what resources are available and what agencies and/or individuals could most effectively address the youth’s needs. Service planning is not a simple process. Developing a service plan means knitting together a patchwork of often scarce resources based on what is available at a given time for a child’s age, geographic location, funding source and constellation of service needs. Nevertheless, the team comes up with the best possible plan to address the girl’s immediate needs, and, by the end of the case conference, each team member is clear about who will take charge of what part of the plan. Seventy percent of the girls referred to SEEN are known to DCF, and in those cases the DCF worker has primary responsibility for making service referrals. When a girl is not in the care of DCF, another team member or involved agency takes responsibility for contacting the parent or guardian to facilitate referrals for services.

A follow-up case conference is scheduled if needed. Follow-up conferences are a way for the team to stay current on the status of a girl and to review and revise the plan for her care. Soon after the case conference, the SEEN Case Coordinator shares with the participants a list of next steps developed during the meeting. In the following weeks to months, the coordinator keeps all team members updated on the girl’s status. The Case Coordinator also follows up at a later point with individual team members who have been assigned tasks during the case conference regarding the girl’s service plan. For example, if the team has agreed that a DCF-involved girl will be referred to the GIFT program (see below), the case coordinator will follow up with GIFT and DCF until the referral has been complete.

SEEN Case Coordinator: The Case Coordinator position was created to manage and coordinate the MDT response to CSEC... The SEEN Case Coordinator is the one professional in the Coalition with full-time responsibility for the day-to-day operation of SEEN and SEEN’s multidisciplinary response to CSEC victims. Interviewees described the SEEN Case Coordinator as the epicenter of the collaborative efforts to address CSEC in Suffolk County. This role is critical for ensuring that the system responds quickly and comprehensively to girls involved in CSEC.

The Coordinator serves as the referral point for anyone concerned about a girl who may be commercially sexually exploited or at high risk of exploitation. The Coordinator is the one to receive and manage reports sent by the Department of Children and Families to the District Attorney that concern exploitation, and takes referrals from service providers, parents, schools and law enforcement—anyone who is concerned about an at-risk or commercially sexually exploited girl. The SEEN Case Coordinator facilitates the MDT response to referrals in Suffolk County and responds to requests for information from across the Commonwealth. As noted above, the Coordinator is the point person for rapidly organizing and conducting a case conference on a newly referred girl in Suffolk County, and continuously updates the team on a girl’s status whenever it changes. S/he also maintains the contact information of the involved parties, arranges any follow-up case conferences, keeps team members updated on any status changes for girls referred to SEEN.

The Coordinator also manages data regarding referrals, maintains records of the case conferences, tracks status changes and updates for each referral, and maintains updated information on team members. S/he directs runaway reports to law enforcement and ensures that any useful information regarding a girl’s whereabouts is immediately funneled to the

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

appropriate place. The Coordinator is also responsible for organizing and scheduling the periodic multi-disciplinary team trainings.

Although the SEEN Case Coordinator plays a pivotal role in providing coordinated services to CSEC victims, funds to support the Coordinator have not always been available, and the position has been filled sporadically since its inception in 2008 (1.0 FTE March 2008-January 2009; 0.5 FTE July 2009– June 2010; no Case Coordinator July 2010-January 2011; 1.0 FTE since January 2011). Respondents reported that during the periods when there was no Case Coordinator, case conferences were infrequent, updated information was not consistently shared among team members, data were not maintained, and it was more common for girls to fall through the cracks of the system.

SEEN Database: One issue that has contributed to the invisibility of CSEC has been lack of data. In the past, children’s service agencies and other agencies in Suffolk County involved with CSEC did not code it as a distinct problem in record-keeping, making it impossible to gather information about girls involved with CSEC. Police reports of CSEC were not tallied or tracked, DCF data summaries did not include information on exploited or at risk youth, and Juvenile Court records did not allow for tracking of exploitation. Thus it was impossible to establish the scope of the problem with anything but anecdotes. Any single agency’s data system only included those girls it was involved with and the interactions it was aware of, whereas girls involved with CSEC have contacts with multiple agencies, simultaneously or at different times. All of this made it difficult both to assess the extent of CSEC and to track data individual girls over time.

SEEN has worked to address the data gap by creating a database on girls served by the Coalition. The SEEN database contains records for every girl who is referred to the Case Coordinator along with information on demographics, selected background events, and the services that the child is or will be receiving. The database has given the county a grasp of the magnitude of the problem that it never had before, even though any numbers it yields are an underestimate because many girls involved with CSEC never come to the attention of the SEEN Coalition and because data entry fell short during the gaps in time in which there was no SEEN Case Coordinator. The database was the source of statistics presented in Chapter 1 (see also Appendix A). Statistics from the database were also reported in 2011 legislative hearings that led to landmark legislation on CSEC (see below; see also Appendix D for a factsheet that presented statistics from the database and was distributed at the hearings).

My Life My Choice (MLMC)

Founded in 2002, My Life My Choice (MLMC), a program of the Justice Resource Institute, provides a continuum of prevention, training and intervention services for girls who have been exploited or who are at high risk for sexual exploitation. Nearly all interviewees had some direct experience with one or more aspects of the MLMC program and all gave it high marks for its positive impact. MLMC also provides training across the state and in different areas of the nation on CSEC and prevention curriculum.

Prevention: MLMC has developed a group curriculum for use with adolescent girls. The group curriculum is designed to educate girls about the realities of sexual exploitation, build their awareness of recruitment techniques used by pimps, raise their awareness about resources and paths out of “the life”, and improve their self-esteem. All MLMC groups are co-facilitated by a clinician and a trained adult survivor of commercial sexual exploitation. In Fiscal Year 2011, MLMC ran 15 groups with a total of 156 participants. The 10-week prevention groups were run

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

in local schools, DCF offices, specialized residential and community-based service sites, group homes and Teen Living Programs (group homes for teen parents). They were held in Boston and surrounding towns in eastern Massachusetts.

Training: MLMC also conducts trainings about CSEC across Massachusetts and the nation. During the last fiscal year MLMC trained 1353 individuals on characteristics of CSEC; risk factors; available resources for youth and appropriate responses to CSEC. Audiences for these trainings have included: DCF caseworkers and administrators, group home and residential providers, DYS workers, law enforcement, medical providers, school-based providers, court clinicians, probation officers, Assistant District Attorneys, defense attorneys, and community-based providers such as those at rape crisis centers and youth violence prevention programs.

MLMC has trained numerous group facilitators from Massachusetts and other states in its curriculum. Throughout Connecticut and Rhode Island, MLMC groups are run by trained facilitators in group homes. MLMC groups are also run in several states around the country, including but not limited to those in California, Chicago, Texas, Illinois, and Minnesota.

MLMC Survivor Mentors: The MLMC program has included mentoring since 2004. The adult survivor mentors served 45 girls in FY 2011, but could serve many more if greater funds were available to pay for more mentors. MLMC mentors are women who were once in “the life” themselves and have since developed a life that is free of sexual exploitation. Mentors typically make contact with a young woman within 72 hours of her referral to MLMC. The survivor mentors’ intervention has two objectives. The first is to initiate contact quickly in order to help stabilize a girl and reduce the likelihood that she will run. The second is to provide the young woman with ongoing support and motivation over time in an effort to increase the likelihood that she will engage in services and leave her pimp and “the life”.

During the initial visit the mentor begins by telling her own story—how she got into “the life”, the horrors and trauma she experienced, her attempts to leave “the life”, how she succeeded in leaving, and how her life has improved since she left. Contact with mentors is completely voluntary. If the victim agrees to meet again she is likely to tell her story to the mentor on the second visit. Mentors are available to their mentees 24/7 by phone and arrange to meet with the young women on a regular basis. Mentors maintain the relationship with girls as long as they are needed, sometimes over a period of years, and provide the girls coaching and support in their efforts to return to school or get their GEDs and to forge new, healthy relationships. Sometimes the girls will maintain contact with their mentors into adulthood, receiving the older women’s support through the years as the girls complete their education, obtain work, seek fulfilling relationships and perhaps have children of their own.

The mentors’ interventions are particularly powerful because of their knowledge of the life and the hope they represent to the mentees. A number of interviewees talked about the need for more mentors to serve the number of girls across the Commonwealth who need them and would benefit from their services. Any young woman in Eastern Massachusetts who has been or is at risk of being sexually exploited is eligible for a survivor mentor, except those who are actively followed by the Boston Regional Office of DCF. Those girls are referred to GIFT (see below).

Gaining Independence for Tomorrow (GIFT)

Roxbury Youthworks (RYI) is a community based nonprofit organization that has developed a unique program specifically geared to provide services for youth ages 12 through 22 who have

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

been identified as victims of or as at “high risk” for commercial sexual exploitation. The program, called GIFT (Gaining Independence for Tomorrow), is designed to develop and implement services that prevent or reduce a youth’s risk for exposure to and exploitation by members of the sex trade industry.

RYI’s GIFT Program employs Life Coaches who provide prevention, intervention, support, stabilization, education, advocacy, and therapeutic services for females in the Boston area who have open cases with the Boston Region of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). It is the expectation that the Life Coaches will be available to work with a youth throughout the length of her involvement with DCF, as long as it is deemed necessary by the treatment team and as long as the service is desired by the youth.

Life Coaches provide 24/7 support to these youth and are charged with the responsibility of knowing as much as possible where their clients are at all times. They are expected to visit with the youth a minimum of two times weekly and maintain daily contact over the phone to check in. Each Life Coach carries a caseload of up to eight youth and will follow the youth wherever she is placed throughout the state.

Life Coaches work with youth on normal” adolescent issues they may be facing such as stabilizing in school, strengthening family relationships and communication, finding employment, building community connections (i.e., after school programs, extracurricular activities, etc.), establishing positive peer relationships, and gaining the life skills necessary for living independently, while all the while working on the underlying issues that surround the reason for referral to GIFT (i.e., making safer and healthier decisions in the community, in relationships, and in regards to their bodies). GIFT aims to increase hope in the lives of the youth it serves and instill a belief that a better life is possible.

The Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office

The Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office (SCDAO) serves the cities and towns of Boston, Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop, Massachusetts. Under the leadership of District Attorney Daniel F. Conley, the office handles approximately 50,000 criminal cases each year. In addition to prosecuting cases, the SCDAO offers services and programs to help victims and witnesses of crime, and to educate the public about important crime prevention and safety issues. The SCDAO’s Child Protection Unit (CPU) receives over 1200 cases each year involving child victims of physical abuse and sexual abuse and exploitation. The CPU staff includes specially-trained assistant district attorney’s, victim witness advocates and forensic interviewers. Together with the Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, the SCDAO CPU implements a multidisciplinary approach to investigating and supporting child victims.

As a key member of the SEEN Coalition, the SCDAO receives CSEC referrals from both the Department of Children and Families and area police departments. The SCDAO immediately refers these cases to the SEEN Case Coordinator to launch a CSEC MDT response and, together with law enforcement, initiates an investigation regarding the alleged exploiter(s). It is the policy of the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office to view exploited youth as victims rather than defendants.

MA Department of Children and Families (DCF) – Boston Region

The Boston Region of the Department of Children and Families has been vigorously addressing commercial sexual exploitation since it convened a regional conference on CSEC called "Children of the Streets" in 2001. Since that time, Boston DCF has a) funded a small community

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

agency (the Bandeli Project) to provide mentoring by adult survivors; b) funded, "A Way Back", an outreach program in which staff provided street outreach to engage exploited girls; c) contracted with My Life My Choice for training in CSEC for all the Boston Area Offices; and d) brought a didactic play entitled "Body and Sold" to Roxbury Community College to teach both young people and the wider community about the suffering of exploited youth. Roxbury Youthwork's GIFT program is also supported with DCF funding.

Each of the Boston Area DCF Offices has taken additional steps to address CSEC. The Park Street Office has incorporated CSEC training into its Multidisciplinary Assessment Team; any child identified with CSEC now has more extensive screening and service planning. The Harbor Office developed a specialized professional unit to work with exploited youth. The Hyde Park and Dimock Street Offices had staff undergo the MLMC facilitator training so that they could run My Life My Choice groups in their area offices for at risk young women, which thus far have served approximately 200 youth.

The Boston Police Human Trafficking Unit

The Boston Police Department's Family Justice Division includes a specialized Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) with Detectives and an advocate highly trained in sexual assault and domestic violence as well child sexual exploitation investigations. These detectives have also trained under ICAC (Internet Crimes against Children) and are ICAC members. The primary mission of the HTU is the rescue of international and domestic victims of trafficking. In addition to investigating commercial sexual exploitation cases and working closely with SEEN Coalition partners, the Unit has developed a screening tool for identifying Boston's high risk youth through repeat missing person reports and child in need of services (CHINs) reports. The Unit also focuses on the demand for commercial sex by targeting "johns" and buyers of sex.

MA Department of Youth Services

The MA Department of Youth Services is the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth and has been a partner in the SEEN Coalition since 2005. DYS trains staff to identify and respond to CSEC victims and works in collaboration with the multidisciplinary team to move exploited girls out of detention into more appropriate settings and provide responsive services to youth committed to their care.

Youth Advocacy Department

This department of the Committee for Public Counsel Services provides legal representation to victims of CSEC who are charged with crimes, and has regularly collaborated with the SEEN coalition over a number of years. The Youth Advocacy Department takes a Youth Development Approach, seeking to build on resources in young people's lives and in the community to advocate for young people's needs; it understands that achieving legal success depends in large part on promoting life success for its clients. The department has participated in numerous SEEN Multidisciplinary Team Meetings to represent youths' interests, although it cannot share information as other SEEN partners do, because of its role as youths' advocates and the attorney-client privilege inherent to that. Another important role for the Youth Advocacy Department has been to communicate information about CSEC, SEEN and related services to attorneys representing youth throughout the state, and in that role has participated in a number of SEEN trainings over the years.

Acknowledge, Commit, Transform (ACT) Group Home

Germaine Lawrence, Inc. is a therapeutic school in Arlington, Massachusetts that offers nationally recognized treatment for girls 12-18 with complex behavioral, psychological, and learning challenges. They have offered My Life My Choice prevention groups for since 2003 and have referred many girls to MLMC mentors or GIFT coaches.

Germaine Lawrence runs the Acknowledge, Commit, Transform (ACT) group home, a specialized service for girls ages 13 to 18 who have been victims of CSEC²⁷. ACT uses a comprehensive array of interventions in a home-like environment that also includes systematic methods and structures to promote change. The ACT group environment provides support and opportunities for positive behavior to promote self-esteem and a sense of identity. Girls are linked with both ACT staff and My Life My Choice mentors (who they continue with post-ACT), receive weekly psychotherapy, learn independent living skills, re- connect in positive ways with their communities, and go to school in the community and often work part-time jobs. Girls are usually in the program for 6 months to a year.

ACT uses the Stages of Change model that describes how people gradually approach and then embrace change²⁸. The stages range from Pre-contemplation—no admitted awareness of a problem—through Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Relapse—where a foreshortened cycle begins again—and finally, Maintenance. Different intervention methods are used for different stages. Motivational interviewing—a technique of questioning designed to help bolster youths’ motivation to change—is used to help the girls move forward by guiding them to weigh the pros and cons of change in light of their life goals. The staff is trained in trauma-informed care to help girls manage trauma symptoms and develop coping and self-soothing skills to reduce the incidence of running away.

A peer-reviewed professional journal article on ACT reported on outcomes from its first year of operation²⁹. Of 13 girls admitted to the program, 8 completed treatment goals and had planned discharges (2 ran away and 3 were withdrawn by parents). At a three month follow-up, all 8 were living in safe environments and all were enrolled in school, had earned a GED, or were working. Five were still in close contact with a My Life My Choice mentor.

Kim’s Project

Although technically not a CSEC service, since it serves women 18 and older who are involved in commercial sex, Kim’s Project works in partnership with the SEEN Coalition and is very much an extension of services for commercially sexually exploited young women. Neither girls’ realities as exploited victims, nor their trauma history and lack of resources, nor the risks and negative outcomes of “the life” change magically when girls turn 18. Started in 2006, Kim’s Project is a mentoring project designed to help young women develop the skills and gain the support they need to leave “the life”. The project was founded and is run by a woman who is both a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation and an activist and professional who has been working in the area of partner violence and women’s services for many years. At the time the director was interviewed for this study, Kim’s Project since its inception had helped 165 women, who are primarily between the ages of 18 and 24. The project has four components: 1) *Harm*

²⁷ Thompson et al.2011, *ibid*.

²⁸ Prochaska, JO; Norcross, JC; DiClemente, CC. (1994). *Changing for good: The revolutionary program that explains the six stages of change and teaches you how to free yourself from bad habits*. New York: W. Morrow.

²⁹ Thomson, et al., 2011, *ibid*

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

reduction— helping women currently working as prostitutes increase their safety and health; 2) *Intervention*— working with the courts to shift their response to emphasize service delivery, 3) *Recovery*—providing referral to a range of services to deal with the trauma and social ills associated with “the life” and 4) *Transition and Reintegration*—providing open-ended support and services to help women rebuild their lives. A major part of that last component is an emphasis on job skills and education to provide the tools to leave “the life”. This is another program that could serve many more people if fully staffed; it is limited by the fact that its founder and director is the only ongoing staff member. Nevertheless it is the only resource of its kind in the Boston area for these women; it continually draws new women involved in commercial sex and continues to provide support for women who have given up “the life”.

Sasha’s Story, Continued

Each time Sasha ran from her foster homes, a 51A was filed with Department of Children and Families and sent to the District Attorney’s office because of the suspicion of sexual exploitation. When the SEEN Case Coordinator received a copy of the report filed when Sasha ran the last time, she immediately contacted Sasha’s DCF worker to arrange a phone case conference with all involved team members. The team consisted of the DCF worker, the program director from the GIFT program Sasha attended, her life coach from GIFT, her probation officer, the CSEC Advocate from the Human Trafficking Unit of the Boston Police Department and the SEEN Case Coordinator. The call began with each team member briefly summarizing information and history that s/he had on Sasha. Although the team members had different perspectives on Sasha and her situation, together they formulated a plan to be implemented when she was found. The plan included: immediate shelter arrangements, return to school, maintaining her life coach, medical clearance and any needed health care, an assessment of dangerousness of her pimp (who was gang-involved), and evaluation of her mental health needs, including her need for increased interpersonal support. The possibility of residential placement was also discussed. The Case Coordinator wrote up the results of the conference, and when Sasha was found on the street, the team was able to implement the plan including a transfer to an appropriate residential facility with an on-campus school. The Coordinator checked in with the team after a week or two to ensure that the services included in the plan were in place. Sasha’s Life Coach from GIFT reported that she was attending classes at the on-campus school.

Challenges to Providing an Effective Response to CSEC

Mutual understanding and trust among the SEEN partners have helped the Coalition deal with a number of challenges. Interviewees commented that the diversity of SEEN partners is a double-edged sword in terms of creating a coordinated, community-wide response. The interviewees acknowledged that the inherent tension and conflict in cross-system work has sometimes presented obstacles in developing and maintaining the MDT model. The mandates and organizational style of member agencies and groups, the communication styles of individuals, and personal styles regarding conflict management can differ enough to interfere with collaboration and cooperation. The SEEN Coalition included conflict resolution guidelines in its manual on child exploitation multidisciplinary interventions³⁰ These conflict resolution guidelines have been used to address the challenges discussed here and to improve group cohesiveness. The relationships and understanding that members have developed through the Steering

³⁰ SEEN Coalition. (2011). *Responding to the commercial sexual exploitation of children: Guidelines for a multi-disciplinary intervention*. Unpublished manuscript. Boston, MA: Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County.

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Committee and MDT help to insure that collaboration remains possible in spite of seemingly conflicting positions or mandates.

Interviewees also reported that it can be a challenge to successfully develop consensus on how to move forward when each partner offers different protections to the girls. For example, a girl’s attorney may advise her not to talk to anyone until it is clear how her statements will be used and whether she will incriminate herself. This can make it difficult for law enforcement to pursue a pimp or john and for service providers to make a plan with the girl. Discussions among public defenders, law enforcement and service agency personnel about their disparate perspectives and how they can work together have helped with this challenge. Several respondents noted that the relationships and mutual understanding that have grown out of the monthly Steering Committee meetings have been particularly important in resolving these differences and choosing a forward path.

Another challenge mentioned by many of the interviewees has been for key providers to stay current on practice concerning mandated reporting to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on behalf of commercially sexually exploited youth. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is a reportable condition but many professionals are unaware of this or do not file 51A reports with the Department of Children and Families on behalf of CSEC victims. An additional challenge is to deal with the lack of knowledge about CSEC among new employees entering the system. Interviewees reported the need to organize annual and semiannual training for their staff in order to maintain an informed service system and consistency in the processes that identify exploited girls and funnel them to appropriate services.

A further challenge is the need for clarity and consistency in how each partner will use information gleaned from other team members and the case conferences. Communication in SEEN’s multidisciplinary response operates within statutory and regulatory information sharing boundaries. Each partner is bound by its own agency’s confidentiality policies. Partners need to be able to trust that their confidentiality procedures will be respected as they work together to address a youth’s needs. Again, the effort to build understanding and trust among team members, and a pattern of open communication has helped the team successfully balance the need to share information and the need to maintain confidentiality.

A final challenge to SEEN is that the successful maintenance of a coordinated response depends on the sustained availability of funds to support the SEEN Case Coordinator. SEEN has had to rely primarily on grant funding for this support, and it has not been consistent.

Preventing and Intervening in CSEC Through Legislation

On November 21, 2011, Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation entitled An Act Relative to the Commercial Exploitation of People. The bill makes it a crime to traffic persons for sexual servitude, increases the penalties for pimps and johns who exploit underage victims, and makes funds forfeited from commercial sexual exploitation available to victims as restitution.

The bill includes Safe Harbor provisions that were drafted by the SEEN Steering Committee and Suffolk County District Attorney Daniel F. Conley. Massachusetts is one of only eight states that have passed Safe Harbor legislation, which entitles these youth to an appropriate service response that does not involve criminalization. The statute establishes as standard practice for commercially sexually exploited youth many of the principles and methods currently followed by the SEEN Coalition. The legislation does the following:

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

- Defines commercial sexual exploitation of children as a form of child abuse;
- Requires the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Mental Health and other state agencies to provide for the service needs for victims of CSEC;
- Authorizes the court to treat a child brought before the court due to prostitution-related charges as a child as a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition, thereby treating the child as a victim, not a criminal;
- Requires mandated reporters to file reports of suspected abuse and neglect on behalf of victims of CSEC with the Department of Children and Families (DCF);
- Requires that DCF report all such cases to the local district attorney and law enforcement to expedite prosecution of pimps and johns;
- Requires that a team of professionals including members of the police department, social service providers, DCF, the local DA and others involved with the youth convene rapidly to collaboratively assess the needs of each identified youth and to recommend a service plan.

The combined legislation addresses many of the issues raised by Friedman and Rand³¹ as essential to effective CSEC intervention: identification of girls as victims rather than as criminals; more aggressive pursuit of pimps and johns; and provision of a range of services that respect the dignity and worth of the youth, while building on their inherent strengths. While some states have human trafficking legislation on the books, Safe Harbor legislation has been difficult to pass in a number of states. This legislation is a major step toward developing systems that are responsive to the needs of victims of CSEC, but needs to be followed by the development of effective policies, coalitions and service programs throughout the Commonwealth. The Attorney General’s Task Force, convened in February 2012 provides an opportunity to advance these objectives.

³¹ Friedman, S. (2005). *Who is there to help us: How the system fails sexually exploited girls in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://ecpatusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Who-Is-There-to-Help-Us.3.pdf>; Rand, 2009, *ibid*.

Chapter 3

Needs and Gaps

Interviewees were asked to identify the major service needs and gaps that they perceive exist for youth in Suffolk County who are commercially sexually exploited. A general theme was that resources for serving this population are in short supply, and budget constraints make it difficult to bridge the gap between need for and delivery of services. The demand is expanding because, with the growing awareness of CSEC as a form of victimization, more victims are being identified in more communities. Interviewees identified two general domains of needs and gaps—direct services (services delivered directly to exploited children) and system capacity (strengthening service systems that work with exploited children).

Needs & Gaps: Direct Services

All interviewees referenced specific direct services that were needed in greater supply to serve children impacted by CSEC more effectively. The most frequent services mentioned were nurturing role models, drop-in centers, housing and shelter, and education and employment training.

Nurturing Role Models: A number of respondents commented on the fragile attachments CSE young women have experienced, their trauma bonding, and their need to build trust in others if they are to succeed in leaving “the life”. Most girls have missed out on the secure relationships with adults that are the bedrock of resilience and independence. The mentors and life coaches available through *My Life My Choice* and the *GIFT* program have had notable success in engaging young women in relationships that are not time-limited and that build self-esteem and provide the nurturing role models young women need. But the demand far outpaces the supply.

CSEC Assessment Centers: Several interviewees mentioned the value of drop-in centers for girls affected by commercial sexual exploitation. These would provide informal places to “hang out”, offer support and short-term services for youths not ready to commit to longer-term change, and link girls who are ready to more substantial interventions and services. Drop-in centers in other states have been funded by private donations and foundations that allow them to be CSEC-specific and not tied to other eligibility criteria.

Shelter and Housing: Exploited youth on the run often exchange sex for food and shelter. They often do not have access to safe and secure housing where they are inaccessible to pimps or other exploiters. They may not have access to adequate and healthy food or a place to cook and store it. Nearly all interviewees stated that there is a pressing need for emergency, short-term and long-term safe and secure housing for girls. Without secure housing, other services will have little impact. Presently there is no dedicated place to take girls who want to escape “the life” and who need immediate emergency housing. Respondents emphasized that the housing has to be secure, safe, and staffed by people who are familiar with the emotions and behavior characteristics of girls victimized by commercial sexual exploitation. Placement that is not secure, or that is easily accessible to a girl’s community, increases the chances that she will act on an impulse to run and return to the familiarity of her pimp before her trauma bonding can be addressed. It also increases the likelihood that a girl will be contacted or found by her pimp, which puts her at risk for physical assault and for being coerced back into the life. Several interviewees mentioned that one major barrier to meeting this need has been the lack of funding that is available to all young women who need it and want it. At present funding for

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

shelter—emergency or otherwise—is tied to an agency, usually DCF. If a girl is not in the DCF system, she does not qualify for DCF available housing options, no matter what her need is. Interviewees pointed out that young women trying to leave “the life” also have a need for permanent housing, especially as they age out of the youth-serving system. They suggested independent living programs and Section 8 certificates might help meet this need.

Mental Health Care: Respondents emphasized the need for the entire service system responding to these girls to be *trauma-informed*. This means that all professionals would understand the emotional, cognitive and social effects of trauma these girls experience and how to respond without re-traumatizing them. For instance, girls may yell and use harsh language, strike out physically or withdraw completely for no apparent reason. Professionals need to understand that these are probably unconscious trauma reactions triggered by specific sensory or interpersonal experiences—loud noises, smells, tone of voices, threats. Many professionals lack a trauma-informed perspective and need training. A particular need is for more mental health specialists who are trained in trauma-informed care to work with girls who are commercially exploited. These specialists know how to help girls minimize re-traumatizing effects and learn self-soothing and other techniques to minimize the effects of trauma symptoms. One respondent pointed out the need to provide trauma-informed mental health care sooner to prevent girls from running away from foster care and other placements and allow greater time for other interventions to work.

Education and Employment Training: Many interviewees highlighted the nearly universal need for adequate education and vocational training to ensure employment opportunities for young women leaving “the life”. Most of these girls are not attending school. Without education or training that will open opportunities for them to earn a decent living, the pull of the fast money they can make in “the life” can derail even the most committed young woman. Several interviewees noted that too often girls are moved to a new placement and spend a month or more waiting to be enrolled in school. These respondents stressed the pressing need for these girls to have tutors or home schooling so that they remain engaged in their studies and catch up academically while they are awaiting placement in a school system.

Youth Aging Out: Several respondents noted the need for and importance of ongoing services for girls aging out of the youth-serving system. These youth fall into a grey zone that is arbitrarily defined by their chronological age rather than their needs. One respondent noted the lack of difference between a 17 year old commercially sexually exploited girl and one who is 18. Their needs and vulnerabilities are the same, even though the system sees one as a child and one as an adult.

This is a serious problem that is acknowledged across youth and adult serving systems, but there is no solid plan for how to address it. The Department of Children and Families has a voluntary program for youth aging out of its care, but it is restricted to youth who are DCF clients and some young people involved in CSEC are resistant to continuing contact with the child protection system. Kim’s Project is limited geographically and does not provide every service that is needed.

Boys & Transgendered Victims: The current service system for CSEC is geared exclusively to girls who have been commercially sexually exploited. Males and transgendered youth involved in CSEC are likely to have experiences and concerns that are distinctly different from girls’. Moreover, they may need different types of mentors and life coaches. Unfortunately, too little is known about the prevalence with which males and transgendered youths are victimized and how they are being exploited. As of October 2011, Boston GLASS is beginning to address this

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

need by replicating the My Life My Choice Survivor Mentoring model on a smaller scale with boys and transgender youth.

Needs & Gaps: System Capacity

To sustain a coordinated response model for CSEC victims, the following systemic gaps must be address.

Funding: Most interviewees stressed that increasing capacity requires increased funding for coordination, training and services. Two different methods can be used: 1) increasing funding directly to specialized programs, and 2) augmenting existing funding streams of youth-serving agencies, which could then cost-share on CSEC programming. Selective funding streams that are not available to all youths affected by CSEC or do not cover the range of services a particular girl might need are a real problem. An essential piece of any service plan for a girl is that it provides the stability that has been so lacking in her life. As mentioned above, statewide funding streams would make it easier for services to remain consistent no matter where a girl lives or moves to. Because girls vary greatly in their needs and in what interventions are likely to be effective, funding needs to be flexible to support individualized service planning. Funding for coordination of services is essential.

Increased Training: Training is a critical element in developing a service system that responds effectively to CSEC, and the need for training is ongoing and substantial given the number of professions involved and the continuing stream of new professionals who come into contact with current and potential victims of CSEC. There is a gap, however, between the number of professionals who need training and the number who receive it. As of now, only a handful of 10 professionals are providing training, all centered in Suffolk County. This small group is insufficient even to meet the needs of the county. Training outside of the Boston area is particularly sparse.

A Statewide Service Delivery System: Communities outside of Suffolk County have begun to organize task forces and networks to craft a coordinated service system response to CSEC, but coalitions like SEEN have not developed outside of Suffolk County and service models like My Life My Choice and GIFT are not available in most of the Commonwealth. SEEN partners receive requests that they cannot meet for services for girls outside of Suffolk County. Services such as mentoring, intensive case management, trauma-focused mental health care, residential placement, and specialized foster care should be available on a regional basis. The CSEC service system should be widespread and flexible so that geographic boundaries are not barriers to services. Statewide service availability is especially needed given the mobility of the CSEC population.

Chapter 4

Promising Programs from Around the Country

Professionals across the country are grappling with the same needs and service gaps as they develop services and systems to address CSEC. A number of innovative programs have emerged in other communities around the country, some of which have influenced the development of the SEEN Coalition. Describing these programs helps illustrate the range of intervention models that are being developed and helps place work in Massachusetts in a larger national context. Below are descriptions of a sample of these programs.

Housing/Shelter

Victory Program, Georgia: The Victory Program is a residential program that arose from a collaborative initiative of the Wellspring Living child sexual abuse services program and the Georgia Baptist Children’s Home. Girls are referred to the program by the Georgia Care Connection Office (GCCO)—a statewide independent care coordination service funded by the Governor’s Office of Children and Families and by private donations. The program is available to all girls in the state who need it. If a girl does not have funding from child protective services or juvenile justice, GCCO will pay for the service. Wellspring provides a therapeutic program in two safe house residences that exclusively serve CSEC girls, with the residences in cottages provided by the Georgia Baptist Children’s Home on their grounds. The program uses a Maximum Watchful Oversight model in which girls gradually earn privileges and freedom to leave the residences. Length of stay can last up to nine months. The program provides medical care, home schooling for high school credits, life skills training and recreational activities. Trauma-focused mental health treatment using Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) or Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) is also provided. The approach is strength-based, with the aim of creating a home-like atmosphere for girls.

The Hope House: A faith-based project of a ministry in North Carolina, the Hope House is a long-term residential program for CSEC girls under the age of 18 from anywhere in the U.S. The program is voluntary and free of charge, with private foundations, donations, and church partnerships covering the costs of the program. Girls have the opportunity to participate in Christian faith practices, but are not required to do so. Like Massachusetts’ ACT program described above, the counseling services at Hope House employ the Stages of Change model and recognize that each resident will go through the stages at her own pace. Residents can participate in the production of handmade products that are sold to the public and all of the product sales are returned to the girls for their savings. The Hope House is opening two additional houses for women ages 18-25 in the autumn of 2011.

Community-Based Programs

Girls Education and Mentoring Services (GEMS): GEMS was founded in 1998 by Rachel Lloyd, a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation, and has served as a model for many other programs around the country³². Based in New York City, it serves girls and young women ages 12 to 24. GEMS’ multi-faceted, holistic approach is designed to provide specialized direct

³² Girls Education and Mentoring Services. (2011). *GEMS*. New York City: GEMS. Retrieved from <http://www.gems-girls.org>

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

services for girls who have been or who are at risk of being commercially sexually exploited, and prevention education and outreach to young women at risk for commercial sexual exploitation.

Direct services consist of case management that is holistic, therapy that is trauma-focused, and clinical support for survivors who are navigating the healing and recovery processes. In addition, the Educational Initiative emphasizes the importance of educational achievement in building a future. It supports young women as they work to complete schooling or training programs. The Strengths-Based Youth Development Program is highly individualized and aims to uncover and develop each girl’s unique goals and talents. The Youth Leadership Program supports youth-led change by preparing young women to be peer mentors, community educators and advocates.

GEMS also recognizes the role of secure housing in a young woman’s recovery and has two distinct housing programs. The Transitional Independent Living Program offers a supportive environment for runaway and homeless youth ages 16-21 who are not able to immediately reunite with their families. Imani House provides supportive housing to women ages 18-23 who are fleeing sexual assault and violence. Finally, GEMS has Court Advocacy services that support young women charged with prostitution and help to educate judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys on the complex issues that surround victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

Georgia Care Connection Office: GCCO is the single point of contact for initiating services and care coordination for girls age 11 to 17 involved in commercial sexual exploitation in Georgia. The care coordination services are available to all girls in the state who need it, regardless of a source of payment. In addition, it provides statewide care coordination so that within-state geographical boundaries are not barriers to coordinated care. GCCO is mandated to take a lead role in the multi-disciplinary team meetings designed to develop comprehensive and individualized plans for addressing each child’s CSE. The Office has two CSEC service coordinators (both with mental health backgrounds) who screen girls for services and manage a system of care response for the girls, as well as a family support specialist to work with families when indicated. GCCO also offers information, technical assistance and training for general and professional audiences throughout the state.

Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE): This program was founded in San Francisco by a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation. Since its founding in 1992 it has become a leader in effecting change for individuals and communities around the issue of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Its direct service programs address the complex needs of survivors through an extensive array of services aimed at reducing harm, healing trauma, and enabling successful transition into new lives for the women and youth SAGE serves. SAGE’s advocacy efforts challenge communities to change attitudes that foster ignorance and acceptance of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

SAGE offers a comprehensive array of programs, direct services, and peer education. The programs include: the SAGE Trauma and Addiction Recovery Program (STAR); the First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP); and the Early Intervention Prostitution Program (EIPP). Direct services consist of intensive case management, mental health counseling, mentoring, support groups, life skills training, and vocational guidance and job preparation. SAGE serves a free lunch five days a week, and offers classes in yoga, exercise and dance. Alternative healing options are also available, such as therapeutic massage, acupuncture and Chinese medicine. Nurse practitioners address many of the health concerns common to sexually exploited women.

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Weekly health education is also offered to clients so they can learn how to maximize their well-being through good nutrition and self-care.

Youth Services at SAGE provides targeted services for young women ages 13-17 that are engaging in risky and delinquent behavior. It offers counseling—individual, group and family; addresses basic safety, health, education and housing needs; and provides health and mental health services along with mentoring. In addition, through the Domestic Minor Youth Trafficking Program, Youth Services provides education to other service providers, first responders and the general public on the trafficking of minors and is uniquely focused on young males. SAGE also has a Training Institute using a range of training and technical assistance methods for individual or group instruction. These include: webinars, in-depth manuals, program study groups and online TA to stakeholder groups who are launching a program.

Minnesota Runaway Intervention Program: The Minnesota Runaway Intervention Program is a nurse-led initiative to help runaway girls who have been sexually assaulted or exploited to reconnect with family, school and health care resources. The program employs nurse practitioners as life coaches/intensive case managers/health care providers with the belief that the most complex children require the most experienced professionals. The program serves girls between the ages of 12-15 who have been sexually abused/exploited by more than one person outside of the family. The girls are not actively involved with child protective services as Minnesota reserves protective services for those children abused by an identified caregiver. Most of the girls are living at home and parental permission is required for participation in the program.

The nurses visit with the girls at home or at school at least weekly for the first month and then slowly taper visits over ensuing months. Contact may last for up to a year. The program includes a weekly therapeutic empowerment group, with free transportation to the group. The program is designed to strengthen supports and connectedness for the girls, since runaway youth with higher levels of support are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors. The focus of intervention is on providing immediate access to reproductive and sexual health care, reconnecting girls to school, building strengths and self-esteem, and helping girls set and achieve personal goals. The evidence indicates that program participants have fewer sexually transmitted diseases, engage in less risky behaviors, are more likely to discuss problems with their mothers and have better grades³³. Funding for the program has come from government and foundation grants.

Project GOLD: This comprehensive CSEC program is run by Kristi House, the Children’s Advocacy Center in Miami, Florida. GOLD stands for Girls Owning their Lives and Dreams. Funding for this service comes from government grants, a child welfare services contract, and private grants and donations, as well as a recent significant grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Project GOLD has a drop-in center and a four-person case management team that includes a mental health specialist and serves the CSEC population exclusively. Case management follows girls as long as needed and focuses on safety, medical and mental health, legal issues, education, employment and immigration. Case managers have access to the multi-disciplinary team from the Children’s Advocacy Center for those girls who may need or request it.

³³ Edinburgh, L. & Saewyc, E. (2009). A novel, intensive home-visiting intervention for runaway, sexually exploited girls. *Journal of Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, 14 (1), 41-48.

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

In 2012 Project GOLD will open a 6-bed emergency shelter for commercially sexually exploited girls. They will be able to stay at the shelter for up to 30 days while they await other residential services. A local faith-based program, His House Children’s Home, is planning to offer mid- to long-range residential services to commercially sexually exploited youth with emergency assessment and stabilization from Project GOLD.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

Commercial sexual exploitation has devastated the lives of hundreds of young people in Massachusetts. In the last ten years, over 35 child service and criminal justice agencies in Suffolk County have come together to make dramatic progress to respond to the problem. The SEEN Coalition and its member agencies have trained hundreds of professionals to see CSEC as victimization and understand the needs of young women ensnared in “the life”. They have made great strides in developing a comprehensive, systemic response among the many agencies that interact with CSEC victims. They have served hundreds of victims through a coordinated intervention model tailored to the specific challenges and needs of young people. They have been in the forefront in developing new legislation that mandates a set of responses designed to move the state systematically away from a punitive response to CSEC victims and toward a compassionate, comprehensive service response to the problem. Without these efforts, young people involved in CSEC could continue to be treated as criminals and would be unlikely to receive the support and services they need to overcome their victimization. But the service system for these girls (and boys and transgender youth) still needs development and the need far outstrips current service capacity. Our analysis of the data suggest the below recommendations:

1. Establish stable funding for the SEEN Case Coordinator role in Suffolk County

Nearly all interviewees noted that the SEEN Case Coordinator is essential to the functioning of the Multidisciplinary Team in Suffolk County. The SEEN Case Coordinator is necessary to put together the appropriate multidisciplinary team for each case, to organize and manage all MDT meetings, to communicate with all relevant Coalition members throughout the course of a case, to oversee the implementation of the follow-up plan, and to track outcomes. The position has been grant-funded rather than a regular part of any system budget. If the MDT is going to continue to provide care coordination, a stable source of funding for the Case Coordinator position is needed to prevent disruptions due to lack of funds.

2. Maintain and improve data collection regarding child victims of commercial sexual exploitation

The SEEN database has collected systematic data about CSEC in the Boston area, contributed to the coalition’s advocacy efforts and helped track valuable data on individual girls, which is particularly useful for the many girls who are seen more than once by SEEN. Much more could be done to increase its utility. More data could be collected on youths’ living situation, history and needs, and referral to and receipt of services. To enhance completeness and reliability of data, a brief protocol could be developed in which a few minutes of each case conference is specifically devoted to gathering a standard set of data on each case. A brief manual defining variables and specifying how to code them should be developed.

SEEN data could be analyzed and reported in a standard format quarterly. Follow-up data to track cases and assess outcomes could be collected in later contacts with a case. A specialized database file could be developed for the SEEN database to facilitate entry, management, retrieval and analysis of data. With a modest investment in programming, SEEN could develop a database accessible through the Internet that all relevant partners in

the SEEN coalition could access.

Currently SEEN has limited data on what happens to girls following its intervention. There is limited information about whether they give up commercial sex, engage in more appropriate relationships (including therapy), move to more appropriate housing, connect with family, return to school or get jobs. Gathering and analyzing such data could help the SEEN Coalition assess its effectiveness and identify what interventions might be effective and ineffective in what domains and what additional services might be needed. Ideally case tracking should follow girls over the course of several years given the amount of time needed to address girls’ often severe problems, the difficulty of keeping girls engaged, and the reality that relapse is often part of the path to recovery. A mechanism for tracking outcomes could be built on the existing structure of the multidisciplinary team, Case Coordinator and SEEN database, but it would require additional resources devoted to development of an outcomes measurement tool and data collection and analysis.

3. Address existing gaps in the CSEC continuum of care

While Suffolk County has the most established system of care for CSEC girls in Massachusetts, nearly all the interviewees agreed that there is a need for additional services that would fill in the gaps that exist in the continuum of care. The needs of exploited girls are many and complex, and their participation in services depends a lot on the nature of those services. Not every service is appropriate for every girl.

a. Expansion of CSEC mentoring and intensive case management services

The key for many girls in leaving the life is the establishment of a safe, secure, caring relationship with an adult woman who is always there for her. Mentors and case managers are one constant throughout a girl’s recovery. They serve as role model, teacher, guide, confidant, and sponsor. Mentors who are survivors help provide a vision of what girls can become despite their involvement with exploitation. Intensive case managers bring the additional case management skills of a human service professional. These services should be expanded so that every young person involved with CSEC has an opportunity for a relationship with a mentor or intensive case manager. Because the number of youths any one of these professionals can support is limited, more mentors and intensive case managers need to be hired and trained. In the process of expanding these services, steps should be taken to insure the cultural competence of the mentors for the girls that they serve, so girls with CSEC of all racial groups and ethnicities can receive effective help.

b. Establishment of an emergency assessment center with CSEC-trained staff to provide immediate stabilization and comprehensive initial assessment

Emergency shelter options or “receiving centers” with CSEC-trained staff are needed to provide a safe and secure place for girls for 24-48 hours while longer-term plans are being made. These would be especially useful at night or on the weekends when girls might be picked up by law enforcement. Longer-term independent living programs and access to Section 8 housing are needed as well. Drop-in centers that are available to any girl who is involved in “the life” or who is at risk of CSEC are important. Girls need informal places to “hang out”, receive short-term services, and connect to CSEC-specific services and longer term services if they are ready. More treatment services specifically geared to adolescents dealing with trauma and substance abuse are needed. Specialized evidence-based treatments for trauma such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) should be available for all girls who need them. Youth involved in CSEC need greater support

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

in returning to school, including tutoring and home schooling if necessary—a special need is help for rapid enrollment of youths in new schools when they are moved to a new placement. Connections also need to be developed with employers who might offer internships or work experience for girls who are ready to reenter the workforce. Open-ended rather than time-limited services are a better match for how CSEC girls engage and participate in services/programs.

c. Expansion of evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health services for exploited youth

There is a significant need for mental health specialists who are trained in evidence-based, trauma-informed care and knowledgeable about the experiences of exploited youth. In addition to helping girls minimize re-traumatizing effects and learn techniques to minimize the effects of trauma symptoms, mental health services should also address needs related to drug and alcohol abuse, and multi-systems involvement.

4. Expand CSEC training and integrate a core CSEC curriculum into in-service training of agencies (public and private) which come into contact with exploited youth

Additional funds need to be devoted to increasing staff time devoted to training. Modules on CSEC could be added to training curricula for all professionals involved with victims (e.g., child protection, law enforcement, juvenile justice, education, Children’s Advocacy Centers). The yearly conference of the Massachusetts Children’s Alliance, the state chapter supporting Children’s Advocacy Centers throughout the Commonwealth, should continue to offer sessions on CSEC. Internet-based training methods such as webinars should be explored in an effort to expand the reach of training sessions. A component of training should be instruction on trauma-informed care, so that professionals understand the sometimes puzzling impact of trauma on victims’ behavior.

5. Address underserved CSEC victims

a. Conduct a needs assessment of commercially sexually exploited boys and transgender youth to inform development of effective services

The lack of information on the characteristics of boys’ and transgender youths’ exploitation and their needs makes it difficult to design effective interventions for them. A first step would be to conduct a needs assessment to gather information about the extent and nature of their exploitation. Resources should be found to conduct a brief survey of professionals who work with boys in child welfare agencies, schools, detention facilities and probation and other settings to provide a rough estimate of the number of boys and transgender youth affected, the circumstances that lead to exploitation, the effects on them, and their current life situation. Interim guidelines could be developed from this initial assessment to begin to specify the types of interventions and mentors and life coaches these youths need.

b. Expand resources for victims age 18-25 who continue to be victimized and face the same challenges as younger victims

Youth aging out of eligibility for social services still struggle with many of the same issues as younger girls and may not yet have the maturity and support they need to escape commercial sexual exploitation. These youth could be better served if agencies addressing CSEC could increase the upper age limit for services. An alternative is to create new service programs like Kim’s Project that specifically

**From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

address the needs of young adult victims of commercial sexual exploitation and expand any existing ones.

6. Utilize lessons learned from the SEEN Coalition and other promising programs to implement the Safe Harbor provisions in Massachusetts’ recently-passed anti-human trafficking legislation and to establish a statewide CSEC response model in Massachusetts.

Drawing on Suffolk County’s experience, the new legislation requires communities throughout Massachusetts to provide services for victims of CSEC and to convene multidisciplinary team meetings to develop individualized service plans for them. However, areas outside of Suffolk County have only begun to develop the necessary relationships and coalitions. SEEN partners have considerable hard-won expertise that could be shared with other Massachusetts communities through trainings and technical assistance.

7. Develop and implement a funding strategy to adequately support the development of CSEC service systems in Suffolk County and throughout the state

A funding strategy should include public and private funding for services and coalition building, and support at the state level for the networking needed to develop statewide, interagency relationships and service mechanisms.

The temporary nature of grants does not lend itself to building lasting programs and services. Creative funding streams are needed to meet the need of the youth in Suffolk County and in Massachusetts. Multiple agencies should develop and expand cost-sharing agreements to provide flexible funds for CSEC services. It would be particularly helpful if agencies could provide funding for CSEC services that is not tied to being an open case in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, as the Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families has done. Establishing a fund for private donations for flexible services and seed funding of innovative responses to CSEC would be extremely valuable. The flexibility that private funds allow is a critical resource for effectively meeting the needs of the CSEC population. Fund-raising takes time, effort and resources that are already in short supply. Ideally the CSEC service community should engage a group of interested citizens to become passionate about the issue and support services through fundraising.

Final Words

The SEEN response to CSEC has evolved and expanded over the last nine years into an excellent network of services and collaborations in Suffolk County. It needs continued support and increased resources given that the need far exceeds current capacity. Greater investment in the work of the SEEN Coalition would enable it to develop a complete continuum of care and enable it to make a major impact in preventing CSEC and repairing its impact on young people’s lives. Greater investment in training could make accurate knowledge about CSEC standard in all relevant professions. Resources will be needed to develop a statewide model and coalitions like SEEN in multiple Massachusetts communities. SEEN is an extraordinarily valuable model to build on.

Appendix A

Profile of SEEN Clients from the SEEN Database as of January 6, 2012
 (N=482 Cases)

Variable	Count	%
Year Reported to SEEN		
2005	75	16%
2006	57	12%
2007	65	13%
2008	96	20%
2009	51	11%
2010	39	8%
2011	95	20%
Missing/Unknown	4	1%
Gender		
Female	471	98%
Male	7	1%
Transgender	0	0%
Missing/Unknown	4	<1%
Age		
11	1	<1%
12	12	2%
13	57	12%
14	83	17%
15	128	27%
16	112	23%
17	73	15%
18	16	3%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	121	25%
Black/African American	186	39%
Hispanic/Latino	109	23%
Asian	10	2%
Middle Eastern	1	<1%
Other/Mixed	8	2%
Missing/Unknown	47	10%

From “The Life” to My Life: Sexually Exploited Children Reclaiming Their Futures
 Suffolk County Massachusetts’ Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Variable	Count	%
Year Reported to SEEN		
Exploitation Status		
Exploited	225	47%
Exploitation suspected	98	20%
High risk	144	30%
Missing/Unknown	15	3%
Arrested for Prostitution		
Yes	40	8%
No	354	73%
Missing/Unknown	88	18%
Trafficked Out-of-State		
Yes	55	11%
Suspected	139	29%
No	213	44%
Missing/Unknown	75	16%
Runaway		
Yes	301	62%
No	127	27%
Missing/Unknown	53	11%
Maltreatment Report Regarding Exploitation Filed with Child Protective Services		
Yes	261	54%
No	124	26%
Missing/Unknown	97	20%
Child Protective Services Current or Prior Involvement		
Yes	336	70%
No	113	23%
Missing/Unknown	33	7%

Appendix B
List of Interviewees

Agency/Affiliation	Name
Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County	Susan Goldfarb Rebecca Dufur
Massachusetts Department of Children and Families	Valerie Lovelace-Graham John Renzi Marcia Donovan
Massachusetts Department of Youth Services	John Hughes
Suffolk County Assistant District Attorney’s Office	Leora Joseph Jacqueline Lamont
Massachusetts Department of Probation (Juvenile)	Steve Siciliano
Boston Police Department Human Trafficking Unit	Sgt. Det. Donna Gavin
My Life My Choice	Lisa Goldblatt Grace Audrey Porter Ann Wilkinson Tanee Hobson Latiana Appleberry
Boston Public Schools	Maureen Starck
Massachusetts Committee for Public Counsel Services, Youth Advocacy Department	Cecely Reardon Laura Alfring
Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate	Elizabeth Armstrong
Children’s Hospital Boston, Child Protection Team	Allison Scobie-Carroll
Roxbury Youthworks	Mia Alvarado Katie Carlson
Germaine Lawrence	Beth Everts Amy Corbett Nikki Valila
Kim’s Project	Cherie Jimenez
Georgia Care Connection Office, Decatur, GA	Dale Alton
Project Gold, Kristi House, Miami, FL	Trudy Novicki
Midwest Children’s Resource Center, St. Paul, MN	Laurel Edinburgh
Victory Program, Georgia Baptist Home, GA	Tracey Busse

Appendix C

SEEN Partners (2006 Signers of SEEN Memorandum of Understanding)

Arts Incentive Program
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
Boston Medical Center, Department of Pediatrics
Boston Juvenile Court
Boston Police Department
Boston Public Schools
Boston Ten Point Coalition
Bridge Over Troubled Waters
Chelsea Police Department
Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County
Children’s Hospital Boston
City of Boston
Dimock Community Health Center
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Germaine Lawrence, Inc.
Girls’ Coalition of Greater Boston
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Police
Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services
Massachusetts Department of Education
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
Massachusetts Department of Probation
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Massachusetts Department of Social Services (now Department of Children and Families)
Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance
Massachusetts Department of Youth Services
Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance
Massachusetts Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program
Massachusetts State Police
Office of Refugees and Immigrants
Revere Police Department
Roca, Inc.
Roxbury Youthworks
Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office
My Life My Choice
United States Attorney’s Office
Winthrop Police Department

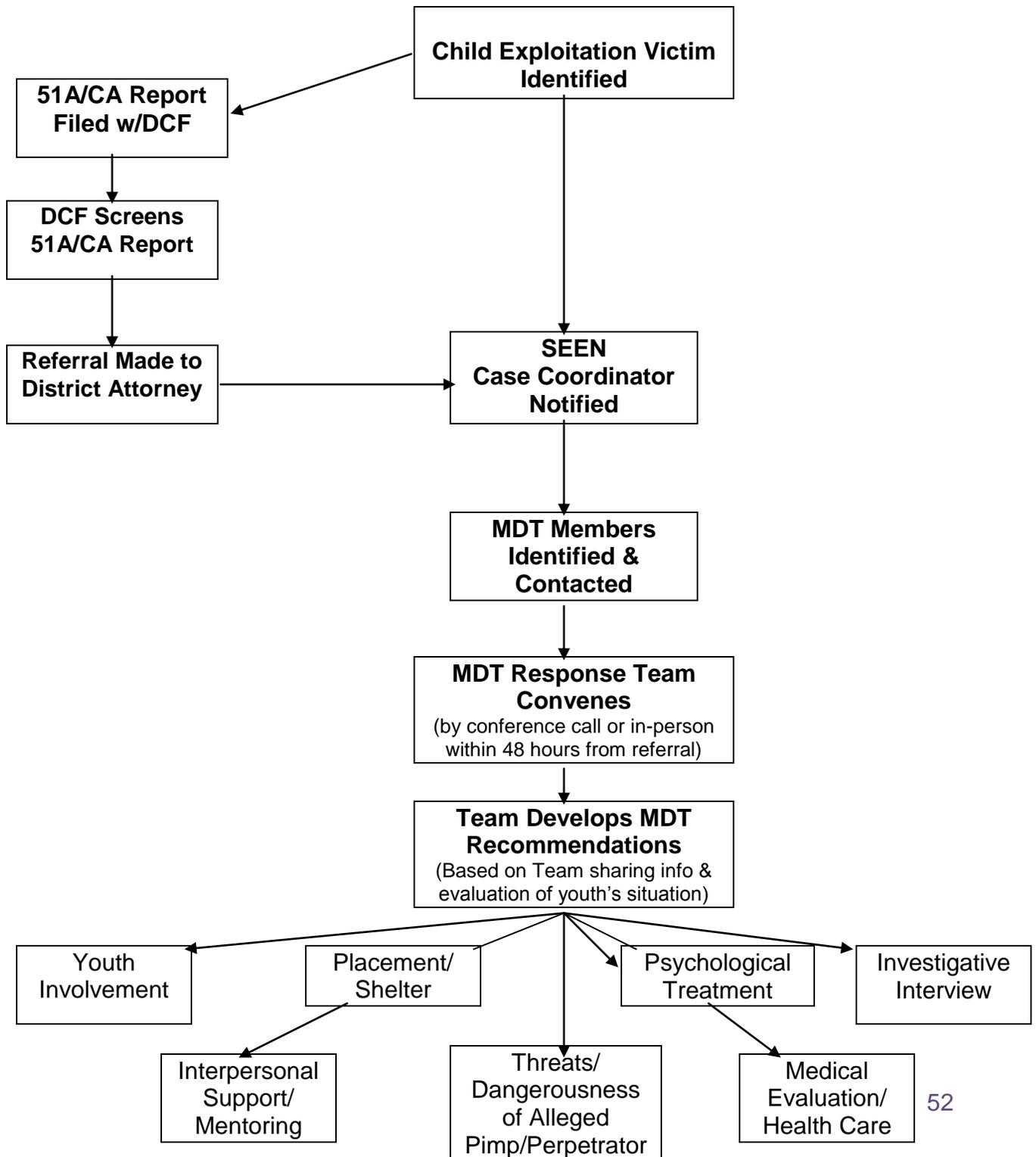
Letter of Support

Youth Advocacy Department, Committee for Public Counsel Services (statement of support only)

Appendix D

SEEN Multidisciplinary Team Protocol

SUPPORT TO END EXPLOITATION NOW (SEEN) Child Exploitation – Multi Disciplinary Response Model



Appendix E

Fact Sheet on CSEC Used in Legislative Hearings (Spring 2011)

THE COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (CSEC)

- The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is sexual abuse of a minor for economic gain (U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. December 2007). CSEC is child abuse and a form of violence against children.
- It is estimated that more than 100,000 children are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation each year in the United States (Estes & Weiner, 2001).
- 70–90% of commercially sexually exploited children have a history of child sexual abuse (Murphy, 1993).
- The most frequent age of entry into the commercial sex industry is 12-15 years old.
- The vast majority of girls who enter the commercial sex industry are recruited by a pimp. Pimps prey on the vulnerabilities of marginalized girls.
- Child victims of commercial sexual exploitation experience violence and degradation as a day to day reality.

The Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Coalition is a Suffolk County partnership among more than 35 public and private agencies dedicated to a multidisciplinary response to commercial sexual exploitation of youth. SEEN strives to increase awareness and identification of CSEC victims, to increase access to safety and needed services, and to hold accountable the adults who exploit youth.

Since its establishment in 2005, SEEN has received over 450 referrals of exploited and high risk youth (18 years and younger)*:

- 98% of the children referred were female
- 52% were 15-16 years of age at the time of referral
- 26% were white; 40% black; 23% Hispanic/Latino
- 47% were known to be victims of CSEC; 50% were at high risk of exploitation
- 62% had a history of running away from home
- In only 54% of these cases, had a mandated reporter filed a report of suspected child abuse (51A) on the youth’s behalf.

***Exploited youth have been identified throughout the Commonwealth. To date, there has been no comprehensive effort to identify these youth and document the scope of this victimization. SEEN supports *legislation* to ensure that child victims of commercial sexual exploitation throughout Massachusetts are identified and afforded the services and safety that they deserve. Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County www.suffolkcac.org**