

Safe Harbor

Phase 2 Evaluation Key Findings

The secretive nature of commercial sexual exploitation, which includes sex trafficking, makes it difficult to assess the extent of the problem in Minnesota, as well as elsewhere. Victims often go unidentified or misidentified. In addition, no centralized system exists for counting victims that are identified and assisted (Minnesota Office of Justice Programs & Minnesota Statistical Analysis Center, 2017).

Safe Harbor law

The Safe Harbor law was passed in Minnesota in 2011 and provided the legislative framework for legal protections and state services for sexually exploited youth and young adults. This legislation shifted legal definitions of “sexually exploited youth” and “delinquent child” to acknowledge that exploited minors are not delinquent, but are victims and should be treated as such. To date, more than 8 million dollars have been invested in Safe Harbor per biennium. This funds state agencies to implement Safe Harbor, including protocol development and implementation, specialized services, housing and shelter, outreach, training, and evaluation.

The No Wrong Door model

In 2013, the state of Minnesota made the largest state investment in services for sexually exploited youth nationwide, funding a portion of the No Wrong Door framework. “No Wrong Door is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and multi-state agency approach. It ensures communities across Minnesota have the knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively identify sexually exploited and at-risk youth. Youth are provided with victim-centered trauma-informed services and safe housing” (Minnesota Department of Health).

Safe Harbor evaluation

In July 2014, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), with additional financial support from the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, contracted with Wilder Research to evaluate the implementation of the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door model in adherence to Minnesota Statute 145.4718. Wilder Research completed the evaluation of phase one in September 2015. The report highlighted key findings and recommendations that could guide improvements in Safe Harbor-related efforts to serve youth and young adult victims of sexual exploitation in Minnesota.

Wilder Research conducted a second evaluation of the implementation of the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door model from April 1, 2015 through June 30, 2017, including the impact of improvements based on recommendations from phase one of the study. This document summarizes key findings from the second biennial report required by the Minnesota legislature. Lessons learned from the latest report will inform grantee and evaluation activities in the future.

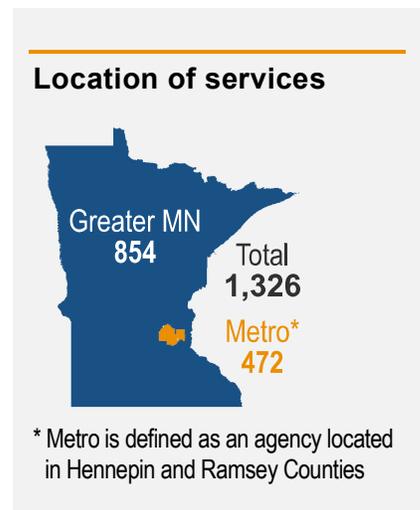
Data collected for this evaluation included:

- Key informant interviews (N=22) with experts in the fields of advocacy, child protection, corrections, education, health, justice, law enforcement, prosecution, and victim services.
- Safe Harbor participant surveys (N=175) and focus group (N=15)
- Grantee focus groups (N=25)
- Stakeholder survey (N=244)
- Apricot database (N=1360)

Youth and young adults served by Safe Harbor grantees

Safe Harbor grantees – regional navigators, housing providers, and supportive service providers – described the youth and young adult victims of commercial sexual exploitation they served as resilient, resourceful, brave, and strong, as well as being concerned with their own survival, and the survival of their families and communities.

Number of participants served by grantees	
Regional navigator	348
Housing	274
Supportive service	801
Total	1,423



Positive impacts

Sexual exploitation awareness continues to increase. Eighty-six percent of stakeholder survey respondents said that since the implementation of the Safe Harbor law and No Wrong Door model, awareness about sexual exploitation and trafficking has increased. Community members were described as being more aware of what sexual exploitation is; that it occurs locally; and that it happens to youth, as well as adults. Professionals, including service providers, school staff, and law enforcement, were described as being more aware of what constitutes sexual exploitation, how to identify a victim, and what to do if a victim is identified.

Youth and young adult participants saw improvements after accessing Safe Harbor shelter and other services. Youth and young adult survey respondents reported learning about maintaining personal safety (98%), how to identify abusive relationships (96%), and healthy self-comfort (94%). Fewer youth said they learned how to find safe and affordable housing (64%).

Number of services and housing beds have increased. Some key informants, grantees, and stakeholder survey respondents reported an increase in the services available to sexually exploited youth and young adults. Many specifically noted the availability of more housing for youth, and the availability of 24-hour response, and an increase in outreach for prevention.

Sexually exploited youth are increasingly being seen as victims, rather than criminals. Key informants, grantees, and stakeholders described the importance of the Safe Harbor law decriminalizing youth who are sexually exploited and an increase in compassion for youth victims.

Response by law enforcement has improved. According to key informants and stakeholder survey respondents, improvements included more law enforcement officers being trained on sexual exploitation, advocates being included in interviews and stings to support victims, improved investigations of traffickers, and more sexually exploited youth being identified and treated as victims, rather than offenders.

Collaboration across agencies has improved. Some key informants, stakeholder survey respondents, and grantee focus group members mentioned specific organizations working better together. Others discussed collaboration improving in general among agencies in the same sector, as well as across sectors. In the stakeholder survey, 36 percent of respondents endorsed Safe Harbor multi-disciplinary teams as an improvement resulting from the model.

Youth and young adult participants are satisfied with Safe Harbor services. Nearly all youth and young adult respondents (96%) were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the services they received. They also consistently said they felt safe and respected while accessing shelter and other services. Eighty-three percent of respondents said that there were no services they wanted that were not offered in Safe Harbor grantee organizations.

Youth and young adult participants feel more hopeful and better prepared for their future. Respondents were asked about how prepared they felt to achieve specific goals. Of those who responded, all or almost all said they felt prepared to keep themselves safe, to reach their educational and career goals, and to get help from professionals or other adults when needed. In addition, all respondents agreed they were more hopeful about the future.

Challenges

Youth and young adult victims often don’t identify as having been sexually exploited. Safe Harbor grantees noted that youth and young adults who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation often do not see themselves as such. This makes identifying these youth and young adults, advertising services to them, and providing services which explicitly discuss sexual exploitation more difficult. A public perception that this crime is not an issue within the local community can contribute to sexually exploited victims’ rejection of this label.

Lack of communications and coordination of services across agencies is a barrier to success. Although improvements in collaboration have been made, challenges related to working across agencies, especially across sectors were noted. One key challenge included difficulties coordinating services across agencies due to lack of communication and confidentiality restrictions. Respondents described resistance to collaboration by local service providers, the county, and/or law enforcement, as well as misunderstandings about the limits of confidentiality and a lack of confidentiality agreements across agencies.

Training quality and coordination need improvements. Some grantee focus group members and stakeholder survey respondents discussed frustration with what they perceived as inaccurate information delivered by some trainers, the state not sufficiently monitoring the quality of training by grantees, and the unwillingness of some trainers to coordinate their efforts with other trainers in the same region.

The type and quality of services provided by grantees varies. Key informants and stakeholder survey respondents said they were unclear about services available because they varied by region, making it difficult to know who to contact and what help they can expect. Grantee turnover was noted to exacerbate these problems, compromising the

ability to provide consistent services and develop trust within local communities, and contributing to victims being unintentionally left unserved.

Implementation and support of Safe Harbor is inconsistent. Respondents noted attitudes and skills related to the implementation of Safe Harbor varied across region, counties, and agencies. According to respondents within law enforcement and outside of it, law enforcement varied in their support of the Safe Harbor model, the extent to which they complied with it, their willingness to collaborate across sectors, and the extent of the training they have received related to sexual exploitation. Concerns were also expressed about some child protection staff's willingness and ability to support sexually exploited victims, especially adolescents. Another challenge discussed was organizations not consistently collecting, using, and sharing data to inform their case planning and coordination, making it difficult to track youth and young adult victims, to ensure sufficient and appropriate services, and to provide seamless cross-agency support.

Services and housing are insufficient to meet the need, especially in greater Minnesota. Although the number of resources available to sexually exploited youth and young adults has increased, many respondents discussed a continued shortage of housing, including long-term and emergency housing. About half of stakeholder survey respondents said that a lack of resources presented a challenge to implementing Safe Harbor. Several respondents noted that the lack of resources will likely be a growing problem as identification of youth and young adult victims continues to improve.

Youth and young adult victim respondents described a need for longer service hours, larger service areas, and increased availability of workers. Perhaps relatedly, 23 percent of youth and young adult victims who responded to the Safe Harbor client survey said they received no information on how to find safe and affordable housing.

Implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model within specific cultures and sub-populations needs to be improved. A general lack of culturally specific and culturally competent services was noted, including specific providers, services, and housing available for people of color, tribal community members, LGBTQ individuals, youth who are parenting, males, and individuals with developmental and other disabilities.

More funding is needed to fully implement the Safe Harbor model. Respondents most often said more money is needed to increase services, housing, training, and outreach, both in general and for specific cultural communities. In the stakeholder survey, 37 percent of respondents identified lack of funding as a challenge to Safe Harbor's implementation.

Recommendations

Since the Safe Harbor law was passed in 2011 and the No Wrong Door framework was implemented in 2013, progress has been made in providing coordinated services and resources to sexually exploited youth and young adults in Minnesota. But, more work needs to be done. The following recommendations were made based on findings in the current evaluation.

Fund and conduct research to identify the prevalence of trafficking in Minnesota.

Research is needed to understand the prevalence of trafficking in Minnesota and the needs of those impacted by this public health issue (Chon, 2015). In this evaluation, a need for more services was a key theme, as it was in phase one of the evaluation. However, we do not know the actual number of people who would benefit from services and the services required to support them.

Seek options for additional funding for Safe Harbor and obtain input on how funding is spent.

Additional funding was a recommendation in phase one of the evaluation and more funding was subsequently appropriated to Safe Harbor. However, the age limit was raised and the need for services has increased, as Safe Harbor efforts are successful at identifying and serving a growing number of sexually exploited youth and young adults. Thus, sufficient funding to serve sexually exploited people in Minnesota remains a challenge. Input is also needed in determining how future funding is spent.

Ensure effective service and housing options are available for specific cultural groups and sub-populations.

Adding more services was one of the most common suggestions by respondents for improving impact within specific cultural communities. Respondents emphasized addressing gaps in resources that meet the unique needs of communities of color, tribal community members, LGBTQ communities, youth who are parenting, males, individuals with low IQs, and people with disabilities.

Continue to expand training opportunities, including providing culturally customized options.

Expanded training occurred in recent years, yet increased training opportunities are still needed for professionals, especially law enforcement, school staff, health providers, and child protection workers. This was also a frequent suggestion for improving the effectiveness of the model with specific cultural groups, including training focused on building the understanding of and ability to serve the unique needs of African Americans, American Indians, LGBTQ individuals, and people with disabilities. Increased training could have the additional benefits of increasing the identification of sexually exploited individuals and improving the quality of services available to them.

Remove the age limit to provide Safe Harbor for all under the law. While the age of eligibility for Safe Harbor services was increased in recent years, an age limit still exists. Decriminalization only exists for youth under the age of 18. Lawmakers should consider expanding the age limit of Safe Harbor so more adult victims are eligible for services and are not held criminally responsible for being victimized.

Improve collaboration across organizations by increasing use of cross-agency agreements. Safe Harbor efforts have increased and improved collaboration within and across sectors, according to the evaluation. Nonetheless, respondents agree more work needs to be done, and that confidentiality and a lack of clarity around roles are key stumbling blocks. Consider creating cross-organization agreements that permit confidential information to be shared in a way that is safe for participants and that detail each organization's role and responsibilities in the collaboration. Also, continue to build investment in Safe Harbor across all sectors and among direct service providers, leadership, and systems professionals, such as law enforcement and child protection, to promote engagement in collaborative efforts.

Promote consistency in the implementation of Safe Harbor. Confusion over the role of grantees and a desire for more consistency in the services they provide has been a noted challenge since the initial implementation. Consider which, if any, services should be standard across grantee types (i.e., navigators, housing, and service providers) and how to better communicate available services to stakeholders. When differences are warranted, such as in response to specific geographic or cultural considerations, explaining the reason to stakeholders is important. A feedback mechanism or evaluation component that assesses other agencies' satisfaction with grantees may be useful in identifying any problems and solutions. If needed, communicating clear expectations to grantees and professional stakeholders about turnaround time for calls and emails may be helpful.

Increase prosecution of sex traffickers and penalties for trafficking. Increasing the number of prosecutions and the severity of penalties was also a common suggestion for improving the Safe Harbor model. Respondent ideas for improving investigations of sex traffickers included increasing law enforcement's use of social media for identifying perpetrators and allowing departments to hire additional investigators with grant funds, even if doing so requires that the number of law enforcement staff exceeds local, legal limits.

References

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451 Lexington Parkway North
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651-280-2700
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For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Safe Harbor Evaluation Report, OCTOBER 2017*. For more information about this report, contact Laura Schauben at Wilder Research, 651-280-2655.

Authors Laura Schauben, Julie Atella and Wendy Huckaby

November 2017