

Strategies to
**End
Commercial
Sexual Exploitation
of Youth**

A toolkit for
collaborative action.

Authored by
National Center
for Youth Law

Funding provided by
Novo Foundation

Authored by

Kate Walker Brown
Mae Ackerman-Brimberg
Allison Newcombe
National Center for Youth Law

Suggested Citation

Walker Brown, K., Ackerman-Brimberg, M, & Newcombe, A. (2021). Strategies to End Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth: A Toolkit for Collaborative Action. National Center for Youth Law.

Designed by

SuperDeep Studio & Mado
© 2020

Special thanks to our current ()
and former team members
and colleagues:*

Allison Newcombe *
Elizabeth Laferriere
Erin French *
Fiza Quraishi
Jasmine Amons
Jessica Valadez *
Kate Walker Brown*
Mae Ackerman-Brimberg*
Maria Contreras *
Neha Desai
Sarah Godoy
Valerie Esquivel

*We seek to eliminate
the commercial sexual
exploitation of children
and youth by bringing
people together, changing
perceptions, building trust,
transforming systems,
and empowering youth
and survivors to thrive.*

Join us.

Welcome

Over the last decade we, at the National Center for Youth Law, and our partners have undertaken significant efforts to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth (CSEC/Y) in California. Throughout those ten years, we have realized tremendous gains in the way children are viewed and treated, encountered our fair share of stumbling blocks, and learned many lessons along the way. We want to share our best learning with you.

This toolkit is a collection of advocacy strategies, case studies, resources, on-the-go tools, and lessons learned. You can use it to get ideas, build upon what has been done before, avoid reinventing the wheel, and learn from the successes and challenges others doing this work have faced.

What we share here is what has been our approach to reform. There are many other ways to approach this issue. We hope sharing what we've learned will inspire you and help guide reform in your community. And we hope you'll share with us and others what you learn. By working together, we can leverage our strengths and make a broader impact on children and youth nationwide.

- **Collaborative Responses to Commercial Sexual Exploitation Initiative,**
National Center for Youth Law

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- 11** **About Us**
An introduction to the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) and the Collaborative Responses to Commercial Sexual Exploitation Initiative (CRCSE)
- 13** **How We Began**
- 15** **Our Approach**
An outline of the CRCSE approach and key considerations as you begin your journey
- 19** **Youth Trajectories**
Exploitation in the Lives of Three Youth
- 23** **Our Reform Journey**
An illustrated journey sharing a snapshot of the CRCSE approach in action

The Principles

- 27** **The CRCSE Principles**
- 29** **Grow Awareness**
Build a shared level of understanding about the impact of commercial sexual exploitation
- 41** **Elevate Voices**
Empower those impacted by exploitation and those working directly with youth to be the strongest voices for change
- 51** **Connect & Collaborate**
Work with others across a wide spectrum of disciplines to make an impact

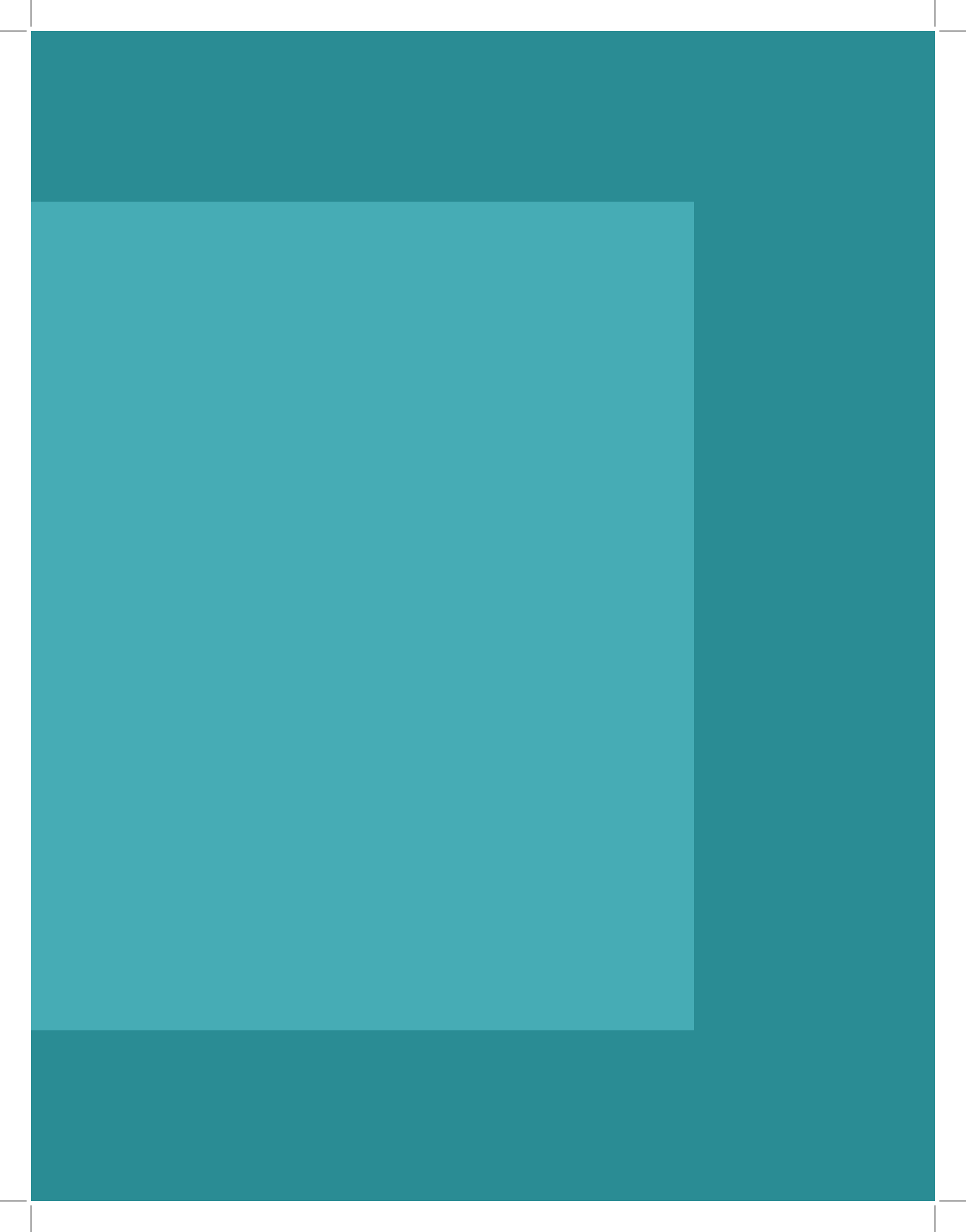
The Action Tools

- 57** | **The Action Tools**
How to use the Tools and Activities
- 67** | **Coalitions**
How to establish or form formal and informal workgroups centered around collective action
- 87** | **Survivor Leadership**
How to center and amplify the expertise of survivors to guide advocacy efforts
- 103** | **Laws & Policy**
How to drive policy change at the state and local level
- 121** | **Multidisciplinary Protocols**
How to build innovative collaborative processes to achieve common goals

Appendix

- 145** | **Closing Words**
- 147** | **What's Next**
A snapshot of our work in progress in 2021
- 149** | **Templates**
Blank worksheets to print and share

Let us introduce
ourselves...



The National Center for Youth Law

Our Organization

The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) advances justice by amplifying youth power, dismantling structural inequities, and building the policies, practices and cultures foundational to a world in which all youth thrive.

Our work weaves together research, public awareness, policy development, technical assistance and impact litigation to ensure governmental systems adequately and appropriately support children and youth.



NCYL's Collaborative Responses to Commercial Sexual Exploitation Initiative

Our Team

As a campaign of NCYL, the CRCSE Initiative is a team of passionate attorneys and advocates who seek to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children and youth, and create collaborative, youth-centered, trauma-informed responses for youth impacted by CSE. Informed by and in collaboration with survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, our objective is to support children, youth, families, and caregivers who have been affected by CSE to be safe, to heal, and to achieve their goals.

What We Do

- Advocate for legal and policy changes at the federal, state, and local level
- Develop innovative practices on the ground
- Identify and share promising practices
- Expand the knowledge base through original research
- Build coalitions
- Support survivor leadership
- Center youth and survivors in the work
- Serve as a backbone organization supporting individual partners to achieve collective system change

Visit us at youthlaw.org to learn more.

"When we saw kids being locked up for their own exploitation, we had to step in. This type of injustice cuts to the core of why we do this work, and we had to stop it."

Kate Walker Brown
*Director, Collaborative Responses to
Commercial Sexual Exploitation Initiative,
National Center for Youth Law*

How We Began This Work

In 2010, one of our attorneys, Fiza Quraishi began working with a young woman through a collaborative court in Alameda County, California, designed to serve youth in the juvenile justice system who have unmet mental health needs. This young woman opened our eyes — she shared that nearly all of the girls she was in juvenile hall with were locked up on prostitution-related charges. The system was treating her and her peers, who were disproportionately girls of color, like criminals for their own sexual exploitation. This realization cut to the core of NCYL’s mission — dismantling structural violence and inequities that harm youth and prevent them from thriving. We decided to take the issue head on.

Realizing early on that ending commercial sexual exploitation requires a comprehensive approach tackling deep-seated oppression, systemic inequalities, racism, biases, poverty, and long-held beliefs about exploitation; we identified our lane — building collaborative responses to address this issue. We are committed to taking on our ambitious goal by partnering with agencies, advocates, community partners, survivors and youth to make this broader vision a reality. Throughout, we’ve kept that young woman’s message at the forefront of our efforts and have continued to center youth and survivors in our work. While we’ve made a lot of progress, much work remains.

Our Team Approach

Compassion

We bring our full selves to the work, even when it is hard. Create space for other perspectives, especially when you aren't sure you agree. Lead with empathy, thoughtfulness and love.

Creativity

We did it one way, but there is no one way to get there. Every jurisdiction will start in a different place and have different needs and strengths. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and innovate.

Flexibility

You probably won't get it right the first time. Observe how things are working, and evolve and adapt if they aren't. Trip, dust your knees off, and try a different path.

Patience

The process of changing long-held beliefs, building trusting and lasting relationships, and transforming systems can be long and complex. You may not see the fruits of your labor right away. Focus on planting the seeds.

Tenacity

You might get resistance from others who don't believe this is happening in your community, or that they don't have a role to play in change. Keep showing up. Keep pushing.

"NCYL approaches this work earnestly, and with integrity and urgency. They have been a driving force in building a movement across California. Their work has made a profound impact on young people here."

Honorable Stacy Boulware Eurie
*Superior Court of Sacramento County,
CSEC Action Team Co-Chair*

Be Compassionate.

Be Creative.

Be Flexible.

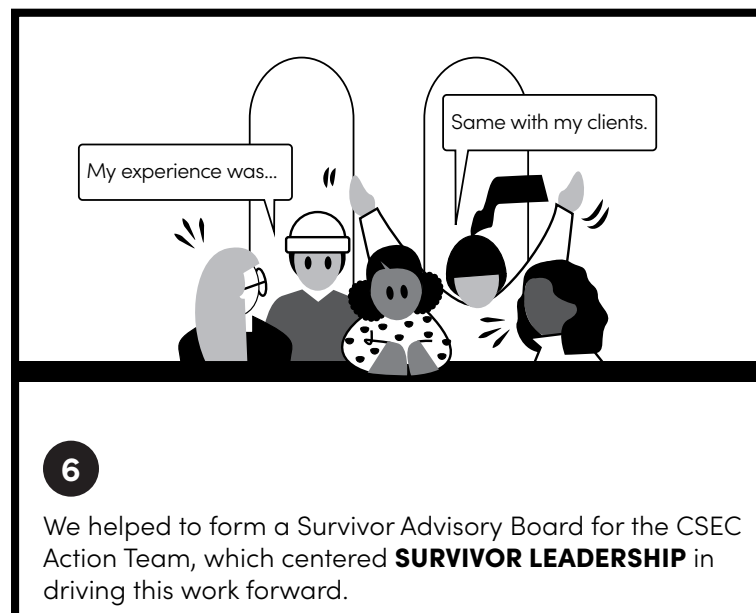
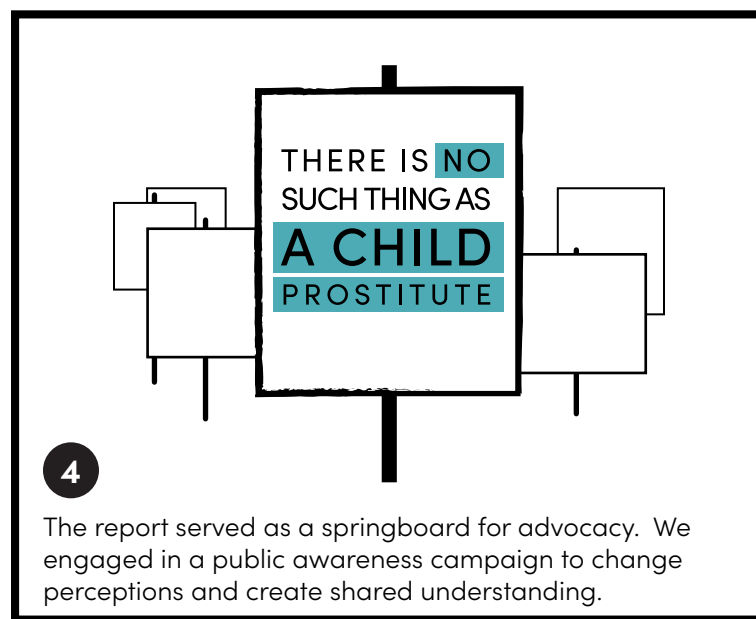
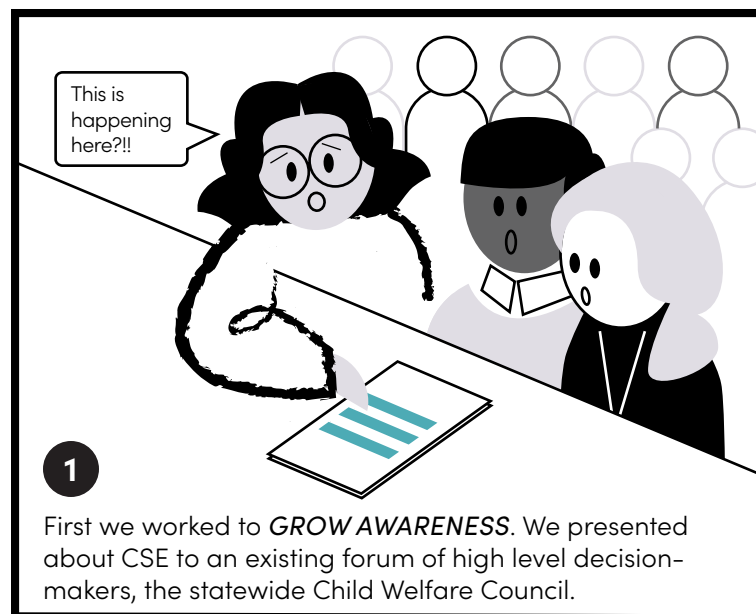
Be Patient.

Be Tenacious.

A Snapshot of Our Reform Journey

Our reform journey in California was multifaceted and leveraged the strengths and expertise of many partners. We started small - capturing the attention of a few key individuals and forming a small workgroup to conduct research and build awareness. We then increased our efforts bringing together a wider range of stakeholders including survivors, and have since made enormous strides to change the laws, systems, and practices in California to identify, support and serve youth impacted by CSE.

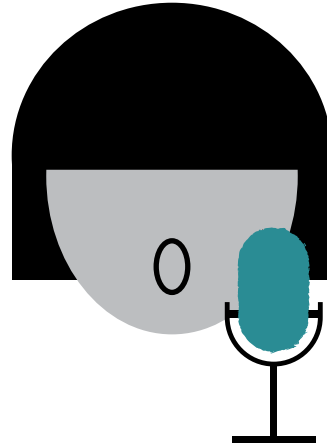
➤ [Learn more about our Reform Journey and the partners involved at youthlaw.org.](https://youthlaw.org)





2

We worked to **CONNECT & COLLABORATE** with a diverse group of stakeholders, researched the main challenges, and drafted a report to highlight the need for collaboration.



3

We worked alongside survivors and direct service providers to **ELEVATE VOICES** and ensure our proposals were grounded in lived experience.

We centered our work on **Our Principles** and created conditions for action!



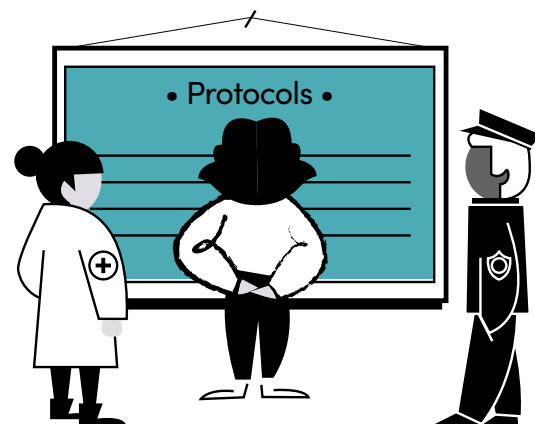
5

We built **COALITIONS** and commitment to the issue through presentations and ultimately the creation of the statewide CSEC Action Team.



7

We advocated for changes to **LAWS & POLICY** to prohibit the arrest of youth for prostitution and ensure access to services.



8

We built **MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROTOCOLS** to develop innovative, collaborative solutions for serving youth, and we continue to make sure what we're doing is working.

What are you
going to do to
celebrate *each*
youth as an
individual?

Youth Trajectories

Exploitation in the Lives of Three Youth

We've learned from youth that CSE can take many forms, looks different for everyone, and often flies under the radar. We share three examples here. There is no single path into exploitation or out of it, nor is any young person's path linear.

Exploitation is also just one piece of a longer journey. Each youth has their own identity, history, relationships, goals, strengths and needs. Each point along the trajectory is an opportunity for those in the youth's lives to support the youth in getting their needs met, while also celebrating and cultivating their individuality and working toward their dreams.

MONICA has big dreams for her future, and she's excited to have a boyfriend like her friends do. She doesn't like to be with the other guys, but her boyfriend says it's normal, and he takes care of her like no one else ever has. Even though Monica didn't like her advocate at first, she is always there when she needs her. She even takes her to dance classes, something Monica loved doing as a kid, and helps her feel in control of her body and her life.

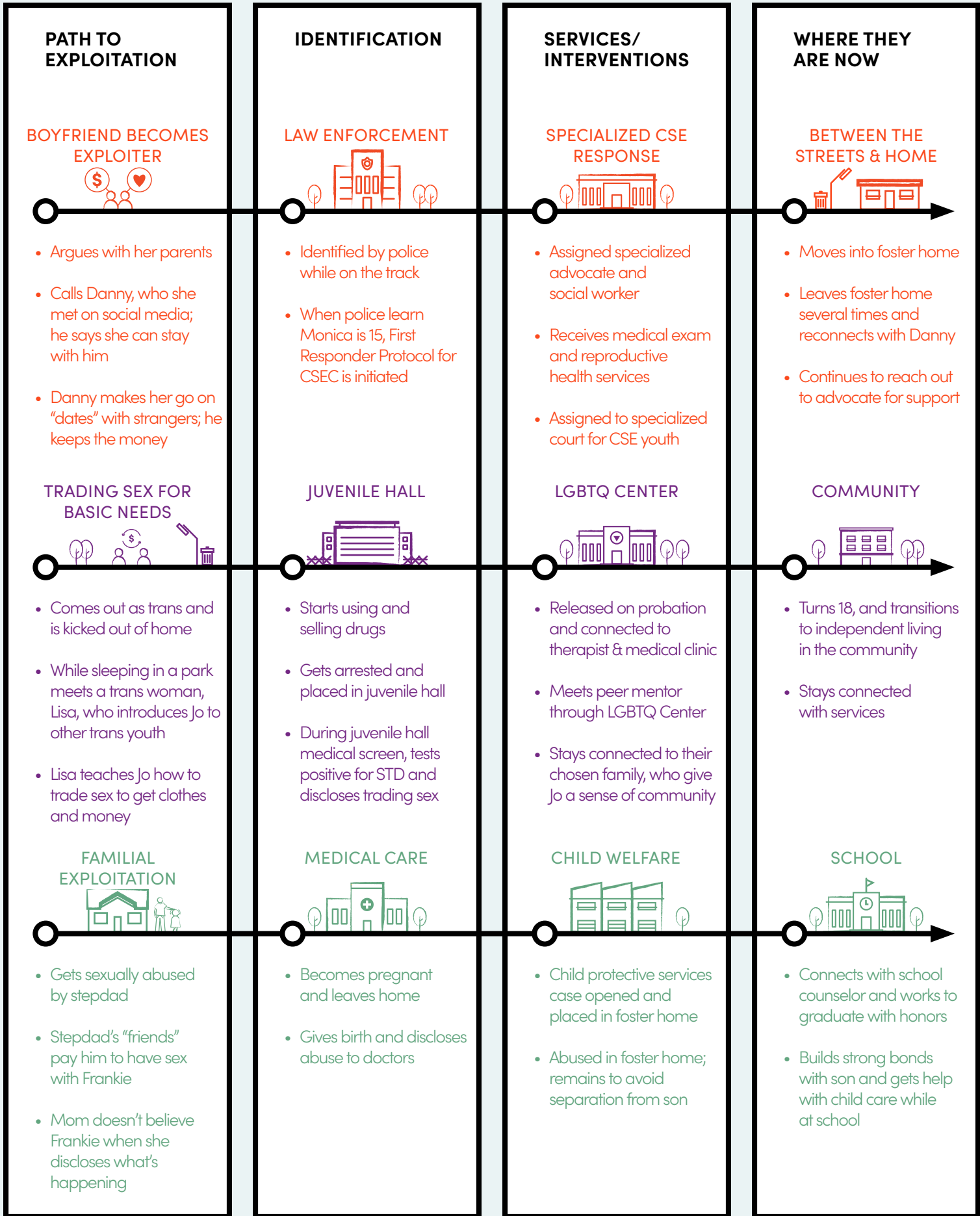


JO tried their best to appease their parents by ignoring their feelings that they were in the wrong body, but it didn't work. They love their self selected family, and says if they hadn't found them, they might be dead somewhere. They feel good when the men tell them that they're beautiful. But it's all tough to deal with, and drugs help. Meeting their mentor at the LGBTQ Center makes them feel part of something important, and they hope to become a peer mentor to other trans youth going through the same things.



FRANKIE always loved school, but it became hard to focus when the abuse and exploitation started. She never imagined being a mom and having so many responsibilities as a teenager, but she is juggling it all for herself and her son's future. Even though her family won't speak to her because they don't believe what happened, she's getting services to help with child care, and is excited to be back in school. She hasn't felt this safe and stable in a long time.





Great principles
don't just guide
us, *they inspire
us to act.*

The CRCSE *Principles*

Our core beliefs drive our core strategies. In all of our reform efforts, these principles are where we start, and they are where we return to time after time. From planning how to move the effort forward, to reflecting on what we've done and generating ideas on how to do better for kids, we are always striving to incorporate these three principles. Return to them as you move through the toolkit, and throughout your advocacy in your community.



Grow Awareness

Build a shared level of understanding about the impact of commercial sexual exploitation



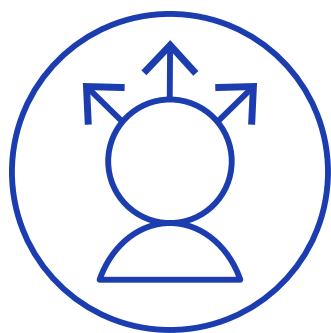
Elevate Voices

Empower those impacted by exploitation and those working directly with youth to be the strongest voices for change



Connect

Work with others across a wide spectrum of disciplines to make an impact




Grow Awareness

Cultivating a knowledge base about commercial sexual exploitation is a foundational step in any reform effort. This is two-fold: First, it's about ensuring broad recognition that "it's happening here," which builds the public support you need to inspire outrage and action. Then, it's about deepening the knowledge among key partners, which allows for more thoughtful change through new policies and practices.

Growing awareness about the issue is an ongoing process. Our job is to constantly sharpen our lens to know what exploitation looks like in our communities, be aware of how the landscape is shifting, devise new strategies to best serve our youth, and evaluate how those strategies are working.

—→ ***Growing Awareness
is critical because it:***

- Mobilizes potential partners, reformers, advocates, and champions around a common cause
- Shifts long-held beliefs, attitudes, and culture that perpetuate exploitation, the hypersexualization of children, and criminalization of exploited youth
- Equips youth with knowledge and tools to understand exploitation, make safe choices, support their peers, and be strong self-advocates
- Enables individuals to better identify youth who are at risk or experiencing exploitation and effectively intervene
- Expands the use of practices proven effective through evaluation and research
- Creates a common language



"When children are sold for sex or forced to sell sex to survive, it is clearly child abuse. Shining light on the decades long but misguided response of our society to these children was our first major victory and a springboard for all of our future advocacy."

Leslie Heimov
*Executive Director, Children's Law
Center of California, CSEC Action
Team Co-Chair*

Grow Awareness

Case Study

 Inspiring Action in
 California's Child
 Welfare Council

"Wait, is this happening here?"

A decade ago, commercial sexual exploitation of children was underrecognized and misunderstood. People believed children were choosing to engage in prostitution. They thought that punishing them through the juvenile justice system was a way to stop it, or at least to keep them safe or off the streets. But locking kids up was a bandaid and only made things worse. We knew that to change how our communities treated these children, we had to raise the alarm bell that this was exploitation and human trafficking happening right in our back yards. CSE had to be recognized as the child abuse that it was.

We started our search for a forum to elevate this issue in our state. NCYL is a member of the California Child Welfare Council, a legislatively created body charged with improving outcomes for youth who are in or at risk of entering the foster care system. For months, we worked to get on the meeting agenda, and eventually were given five minutes to speak. When NCYL attorney Kate Walker Brown presented to the group, the members were shocked, hands

clapped over their mouths – wait, this is happening here?

Over the next few months, NCYL collaborated with partners, including West Coast Children's Clinic, MISSEY, and public agency partners, judges, and other nonprofits to gather more information about the issue. After researching and gathering information from survivors, youth-serving organizations, and public agencies from across the country, NCYL published the groundbreaking report, *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California*, to shed light on the issue and to call for multidisciplinary action.

Once people had information about what was really going on, the stage was set for action to address it.



Learn More [Ending Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California](#)

“ Prostitution
isn't the oldest
profession,
it is the oldest
oppression. ”

Audrey Morrissey
*Associate Director & National
Survivor Leadership Director,
My Life My Choice*

The -Isms of Exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation disproportionately impacts people and groups that are already marginalized. Many types of trauma and systemic oppression intersect to create heightened vulnerability:

- Historical and institutional racism
- Gender- and sexual orientation-based discrimination and violence including homophobia and transphobia
- Poverty, economic inequality and housing instability
- Family instability and separation
- Immigration status, including undocumented or mixed status
- Intergenerational trauma
- Patriarchy and misogyny
- Colonialism and capitalism

Practices that police and surveil low income communities, certain communities of color, and immigrant communities more than others contribute to higher levels of system involvement and overcriminalization of certain youth

and families, while pushing others who are being victimized into the shadows.

- African American, Native American, and LGBTQ youth are over-represented among those impacted by exploitation
- Youth with histories of abuse, and involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems are also disproportionately impacted
- Familial exploitation is difficult to identify because it is more actively hidden, youth may not recognize the abuse as exploitation, or may be conflicted about disclosing due to feelings of familial loyalty or love

What we still don't know

Exploitation is hard to track and data is inconsistent. We're trying to improve data collection so we can truly understand the scope and prevalence of exploitation.

IMPACT OF SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

60 to 90%

of youth who have experienced CSE have histories of abuse or neglect.

➤ **Learn More** Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline

➤ **Learn More** Equality Model US

98%

Many youth impacted by CSE have histories in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In LA County, 98% of Probation-involved youth impacted by CSE have histories in the child welfare system.

ADULTIFICATION

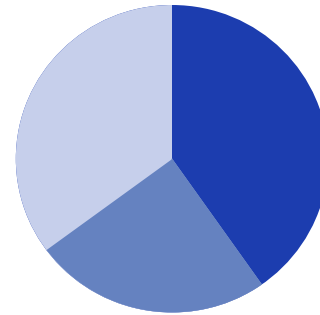
Studies show that black and brown girls are perceived as older than their white peers. This misperception contributes to over-sexualization, over-criminalization, and misguided beliefs that they exercise more choice about engaging in commercial sex, and therefore are to blame for their own exploitation.

➤ **Learn More** End Adultification Bias

➤ **Learn More** Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood

➤ **Learn More** Blind Discretion: Girls of Color & Delinquency in the Juvenile Justice System

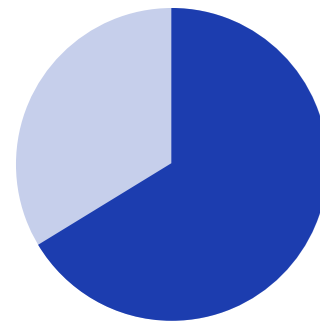
RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY



Survivors of CSE are disproportionately girls and women of color:

Across the country, 40% of suspected human trafficking victims are African American, and 24% are Latinx; Native women and girls are also over-represented.

➤ **Learn More** Racial & Gender Disparities in the Sex Trade



In LA County, 2/3 of youth impacted by CSE are African American; only 7.4% of the child population in LA is African American.

➤ **Learn More** CSE in LA County - An Exploration and Evaluation of Placement Experiences and Services Received

Language matters

Language and terminology matter – they symbolize and communicate attitudes, beliefs and judgments, both good and bad; they directly impact who people believe are deserving of help; and they shape how others view us and how we view ourselves. The effort to change policies and practices related to youth impacted by CSE has been, and must continue to be, accompanied by a campaign to change hearts and minds. Language is one of our greatest tools in this work.

No Such Thing as a Child Prostitute

Until recently in California, and still in about half of the states in the U.S., children under 18 could be arrested for prostitution. The terms “child prostitute,” “underage prostitute,” and “child sex worker” were and are still routinely used in the media, by criminal justice system stakeholders, and the public more generally. But there is no such thing as a

child prostitute. The term “child prostitute” implies consent and blame, and trivializes the egregious abuse experienced by the most vulnerable members of our communities. It suggests that what would be sexual abuse or assault in any other context becomes consensual sexual contact as soon as money is left on the bedside table.

The No Such Thing Campaign, led by Rights4Girls, seeks to erase the very notion of “child prostitute” in language and in law. Partnering with the No Such Thing campaign in 2015 was a critical part of our strategy in California leading up to legislative and policy changes to improve and create more humane and youth-friendly responses to CSE in our state recognizing these children as deserving of help and not punishment.

What Do We Call
A Girl Who Is Raped?

Victim Criminal

All victims and survivors of child rape deserve health care, mental health services and the resources to heal.

**NO SUCH THING
AS A CHILD PROSTITUTE**

Rights4Girls.org

health happens aqui
Rights4Girls

HUMAN RIGHTS
PROJECT FOR GIRLS

Rights4Girls **No Such Thing** campaign directly challenged existing language to recognize CSEC as exploitation and abuse of children.

Train, Train, and Train Some More

Widespread training – of the public, law enforcement, child welfare staff, probation officers, medical providers, caregivers, community members, and many others – has been a critical part of growing awareness about CSE across the state and the country. This awareness-building resulted in more people recognizing the warning signs of exploitation among the youth they care for, and intervening when they identified that a youth was being exploited or was at high risk. Training not only shifts mindsets, but also hearts, supporting people working with youth to be more understanding, compassionate, and non-judgmental – attitude shifts that are felt directly by youth and can transform relationships and lives.

Spotlight on LA County training

LA County recognized early on the need to prioritize training. They started by training people working directly with youth, and then realized that everyone played a role in spotting and stopping exploitation. Now every county worker in LA County, from Children's Services to Public Works, receives training on CSE.

Spotlight on law enforcement training

In addition to general awareness training to the masses, more in-depth training is needed for individuals interacting directly with youth. For example, when the law changed in 2016 to no longer criminalize exploited youth under 18 by arresting them, officers needed new strategies and tools to effectively engage with the population – a significant shift from the long standing approach of arrest and detention. In 2018, we advocated for the passage of AB 2992, a new law to create training for law enforcement on CSE. This added layer of training beyond basic understanding of exploitation helps to provide law enforcement officers with the tools necessary to make early and significant impact on youth by developing rapport and connecting them to supportive services instead of arresting or turning a blind eye to exploitation. Training was an important part of making decriminalization of youth a reality.

 [Learn More](#) Board of Supervisors motions requiring training

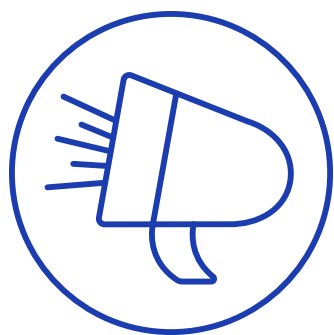
 [Learn More](#) AB2992 Law Enforcement Training

"It was a day that changed my life. It was when I first learned that this exploitation wasn't something happening thousands of miles away in a foreign country. In fact, it was happening right here, in our community, to the very girls I was charged to protect."

Michelle Guymon
*Director, Child Trafficking Unit,
LA County Probation Department*

Over the years, the CRCSE team has attended and developed a wide range of trainings. To learn more these trainings and think through what your community might need, please contact our team. www.youthlaw.org

 **Learn More**
LA County CSEC Online Training



Elevate Voices

Every movement needs leaders. And every youth is an individual – in how their exploitation began, how they experienced it; how they find support, healing, and happiness; and how and whether they identify as a survivor. By empowering youth and survivors to share their experiences and expertise, and people on the front lines to share theirs, change is driven by the people who know best and who will be most impacted. It matters in everyday interactions with youth regarding decisions that affect their lives, and in broader reform efforts. Ensure everyone has an equal seat at the table. Listen. Make changes based on what is shared.

→ ***We Elevate Voices
because it:***

- Shifts agency, power, and choice back to those who have been exploited
- Ensures reforms are driven by real life goals, needs, and priorities of those most impacted
- Dismantles structural inequities and oppression that led to exploitation in the first place
- Enables use of firsthand knowledge — both from survivors and direct service providers — to ideastorm innovative approaches and to assess successes and failures
- Encourages sharing of multiple perspectives which reduces the risk of using one person's story to represent everyone (tokenizing)
- Builds community and camaraderie among people with shared experiences
- Ensures proposed reforms are realistic and feasible

More Than a Seat at the Table

Early on in our education and advocacy efforts with the CSEC Action Team, there were one or two individuals who had experienced commercial sexual exploitation involved and at the table ideating approaches and making decisions. Soon, however, we realized that there had to be more space at the table for survivors to lead these efforts, both because the few survivor participants were sometimes tokenized, and because the need to center survivor input and leadership in reform efforts at the state and county levels far exceeded the capacity of one or two people.

To identify the most effective and appropriate ways of centering the perspectives of individuals who had been affected by CSE in policy work, we reached out to organizations around the country and sought input from survivors and survivor-led organizations on their ideas. Ultimately, we decided on a board of ten members, which increased to 12 in the second cohort. This structure would ensure that multiple perspectives would be represented. We also recognized the importance of not

just seeking information and consultation from the board, but facilitating space for members to drive their own policy agendas, grow as professionals, and create and deepen personal connections with each other and other professionals working on reform efforts.

Survivors are leading reform in both formal and informal ways. The Advisory Board is a more formal structure, as are focus groups and surveys. Survivors also contribute unique perspectives and expertise in their professional roles side-by-side with allies, and as community members - whether or not they publicly identify as survivors.

better @ the
table photo
here

"Being part of the board has allowed me to view firsthand how policies are created through the process of our government system and the end result of how things really function in real life dealing with our youth."

Kristina Fitz
Former Advisory Board Member



"I could talk more I
guess now. I was able to
voice my opinions and
how I felt more without
getting into trouble."

Youth
*describing her relationship
with specialized probation officer*

Elevate Voices

Case Study

 Centering Youth Voice in
 Research in Los Angeles
 County

Breathing life into research

In 2018, NCYL partnered with Los Angeles County's Probation Department, Department of Children and Family Services, and Cal State Los Angeles to produce a first-of-its-kind research report analyzing the impact of Los Angeles County's specialized services for youth impacted by CSE, and exploring how different housing options affected stability and well-being of youth who had experienced CSE.

The stories, experience, and feedback of youth and survivors breathed life into the research, recommendations, and ultimate action. They provided a rich and complex picture of who the impacted young people are: their goals, interests, and hobbies; their friends and families, both birth and chosen; the challenges they have faced - through exploitation and beyond; and the resilience and strength that have helped them to endure and thrive. It highlighted the ways in which our quantitative data can fall short of representing the wholeness of the individuals impacted by exploitation, and the opportunities

for system and community partners to support them to regain agency over their own lives and achieve their goals.

It was critical to the research team that the voices, perspectives, and expertise of young people were centered in this research, in combination with the quantitative data collected from child welfare and probation. To do this, we surveyed over 120 youth, and conducted in-depth interviews and case file reviews of six youth. Youth and survivors participated in our follow-up Research to Action Summit, where we came together with a broad range of stakeholders to ideastorm actionable steps to turn the research recommendations into a reality. CSEC Survivor Advisory Board members provided feedback on our final recommendations and action plan.

We thank these young people for their generosity and courage in sharing with us, and encourage you to read more in the full report.

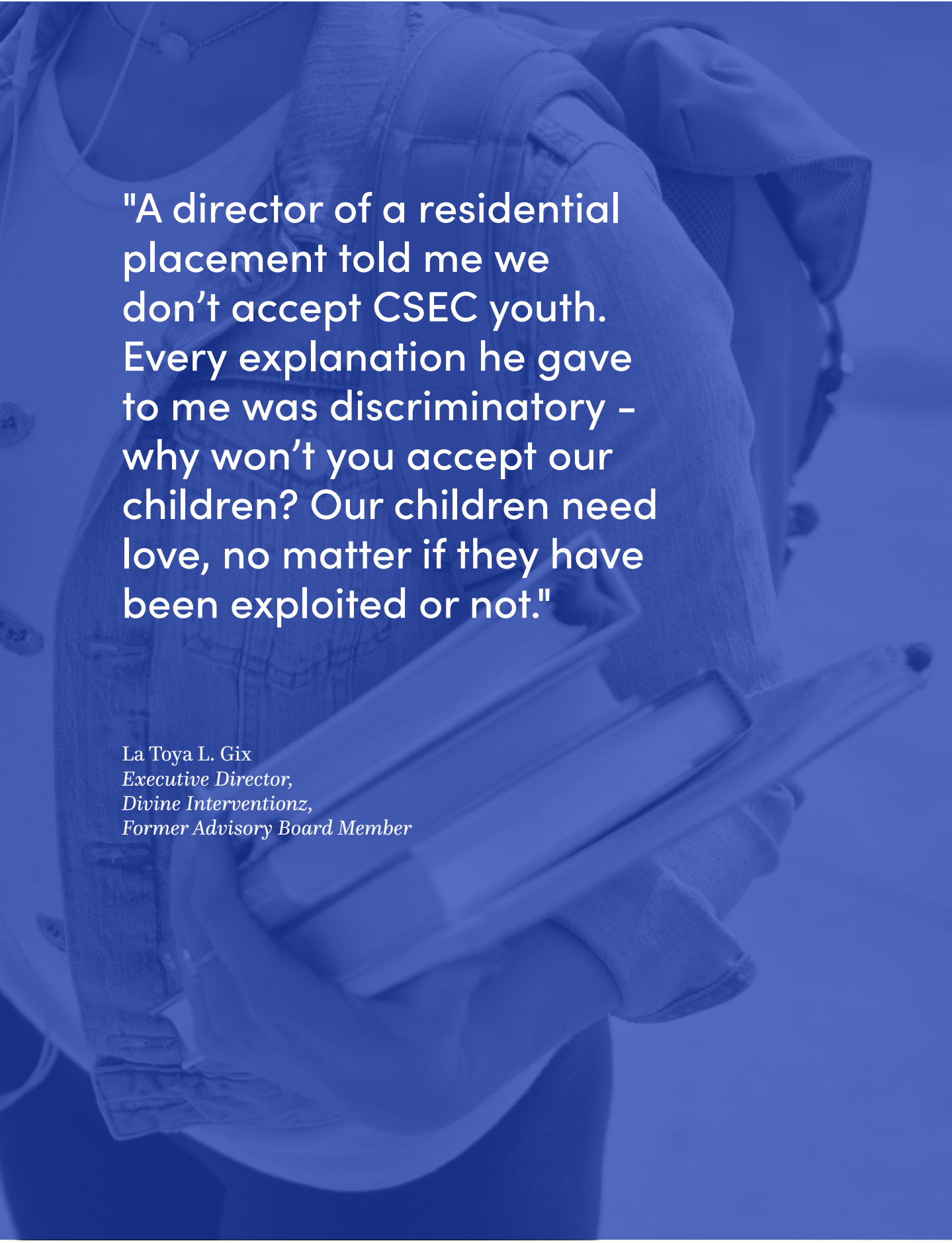
 [Learn More CSE Research to Action Brief](#)

 [Learn More CSE in LA County - An Exploration and Evaluation of Placement Experiences and Services Received](#)

“

The youth and survivors we work alongside are our best teachers. They are not merely a number. They are not a "CSEC." They are unique individuals with lives, passions, and experiences beyond exploitation. And they are experts, collaborators, and drivers of change. ”

Mae Ackerman-Brimberg
*Senior Attorney, National Center for
Youth Law, Collaborative Responses
to Commercial Sexual Exploitation
Initiative*



"A director of a residential placement told me we don't accept CSEC youth. Every explanation he gave to me was discriminatory – why won't you accept our children? Our children need love, no matter if they have been exploited or not."

La Toya L. Gix
*Executive Director,
Divine Interventionz,
Former Advisory Board Member*

Strength-based, people first language

Changing our language means more than just how we refer to children and youth impacted by exploitation. The general public and media use terms to refer to exploitation in ways that protect, anonymize, and even glorify the people causing the egregious harm. Further, using a systems-focused lexicon, rather than a strengths-based, people-focused one, also does a disservice to the young people we serve.

**Consider reframing some
of these common terms:**

Pimp → **Exploiter or Trafficker**
John/trick → **Purchaser**
Case or caseload → **Child or Family**
CSEC → **Youth impacted by or
experiencing exploitation**
Bed → **Space for Youth to live**
Placement → **Home**
Runaway or AWOL → **Youth who left
home or care**

The Harm of Overlabeling

In the effort to better identify youth who have experienced CSE, raise awareness about the issue, and develop specialized services for youth who have experienced it, the term “CSEC” became widespread, referring both to the act of exploitation and to the children who had experienced it. But what started as a useful and descriptive label for what had happened to a child and to help connect them to relevant services now can have the opposite effect.

Once attached, the label can stick with a youth for years, beyond the point where exploitation is a relevant issue for them, or can lead people to view the youth only as “a CSEC,” rather than as a whole person with individual goals, interests and needs. Sometimes the label even prevents youth from accessing services, housing or other supports because of misperceptions around what it means to have been exploited and fears that the youth might be a “bad influence” on others. And we now even hear youth and service providers alike referring to a young person “CSECing” on the street. Those of us working to shift policy and practice must take deliberate steps to counteract the potential harm of over-labeling, **focusing on what has happened to a child, rather than making it who they are.**

For more information on the harms of over-labeling and methods for countering in data collection systems, see CSEC Action Team data workgroup recommendations.



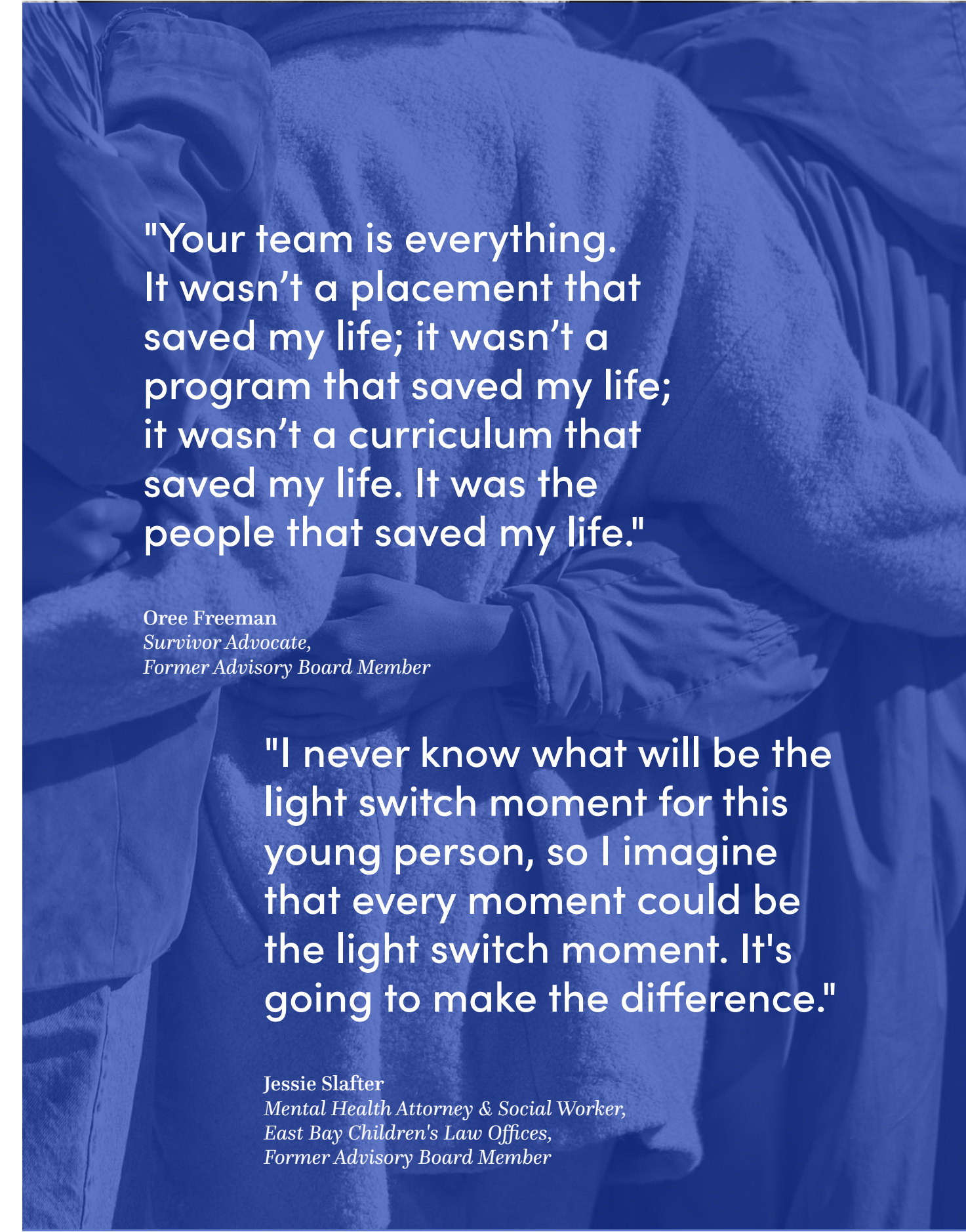
Connect & Collaborate

For many youth and survivors, strong, supportive, healthy relationships are one of the most transformative, critical elements of their healing journeys. Trauma and exploitation come in cycles, so fostering consistent connection through the ups and downs is paramount. Reform efforts must always center on strengthening and supporting genuine connections.

Youth who experience exploitation interact with a myriad of people and systems – juvenile court, child welfare, probation, mental health, medical, public health, law enforcement, education, attorneys, families, caregivers and housing providers, mentors/youth development organizations, and survivor leaders – all of whom must work together, in recognition that no single individual or agency can effectively meet the holistic needs of a youth and support their goals. This isn't always easy. It requires including nontraditional partners, working through historical rifts, and building trust.

→ ***Connection & Collaboration
are critical because they:***

- Coordinate a wide range of systems, community organizations, and impacted people
- Reduce retraumatization by ensuring that youth don't have to tell and re-tell their stories
- Avoid duplication of services to make service provision more efficient and cost effective
- Close unnecessary gaps in service for youth
- Encourage openness and transparency from the people serving on the front lines through high level management and policymakers
- Allow for a shared understanding of each agency and organization's roles, responsibilities, and legal mandates
- Expand the use of promising practices across multiple disciplines and communities
- Model positive relationships between youth and safe, healthy adults and peers



"Your team is everything.
It wasn't a placement that
saved my life; it wasn't a
program that saved my life;
it wasn't a curriculum that
saved my life. It was the
people that saved my life."

Oree Freeman
*Survivor Advocate,
Former Advisory Board Member*

"I never know what will be the
light switch moment for this
young person, so I imagine
that every moment could be
the light switch moment. It's
going to make the difference."

Jessie Slafter
*Mental Health Attorney & Social Worker,
East Bay Children's Law Offices,
Former Advisory Board Member*

Connect & Collaborate

 Case Study

 Relationships as Healing

It takes a village: From survivor to thriver

Oree Freeman is a national trainer and survivor advocate, a student, and a proud mother to her daughter. After enduring sexual abuse and trauma as a young child, she was trafficked at 11 years old. At age 15, with support from a staff member at her group home, she was finally able to leave the life. Relationships have been transformative for her – both in her own healing and now in her professional life.

“For me and my survivor sisters, I’ve learned that you can’t do the work on your own. As a victim, survivor, and a thriver, it takes a village. Consistent relationships help to heal broken wounds. When I was getting out of the life, I needed consistency when I didn’t know what consistency was. I came from a life of chaos. It was important for adults in my life to be consistent because it showed trustworthiness. It showed me that someone was willing to be there for me even when I didn’t trust them, that they were reliable, and that they loved me unconditionally. They had my best interest at heart. They showed up in spaces where I was alone. They showed up, especially in those hours

when they were told not to because those were the hours when I was most vulnerable. If they didn’t show up, I don’t know where I would be right now.

Mrs. Woolfolk, my probation officer, was more than a PO. She was the mom that I had within the system. I could talk to her about boys, what was right or wrong, about college and the experiences I hoped to get in higher education. The most important thing she taught me was about accountability and respect. I never questioned that she had my back, even when I was in trouble. But she also held me accountable because she knew that I knew better.


Now, as a big sister to others going through the same things, I try to be that for them. All they want is to be able to talk to someone without nagging. I don’t tell them they are wrong, but allow them to vent and process, and see there are other options for their lives. When I was a kid, I didn’t have any other choice. So much was taken out of me. You lose the genuine, friendly kid you were in order to survive. When you see other women standing up in a room, being powerful and having voice, I saw it was available for me, too. When I saw it was available, I jumped at it.”

“

When we work together, and stay focused on the kids, there is a collective energy and passion that not only drives the work forward, but also lifts us up when challenges feel insurmountable.

”

Allison Newcombe
*Attorney, Associate Director, National
Center for Youth Law, Collaborative
Responses to Commercial Sexual
Exploitation Initiative*



"We knew building collaborative partnerships could be a challenge. NCYL took the time to do ridealongs and understand the challenges from law enforcements' perspective. They genuinely valued the role we played, and we got a better understanding of how valuable the services they provide would be. We quickly saw that success comes with partnerships, and by working together, we could make a huge impact on survivors of human trafficking."

Lieutenant Eric Hooker
Long Beach Police Department

Connect & Collaborate
Case Study

Building Partnerships in
LA's First CSE Protocol

Invest time, build trust

Building early alliances was a critical first step in our work to understand this issue and ultimately build responses. Young people who have been or are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation interact with a ton of public systems and community partners. We began meeting with those entities individually and in groups trying to understand key points of interaction with youth and intersection among each other. We viewed those individual meetings as opportunities to have candid conversations and to get a broad range of perspectives on what might work. We also sat down with survivors and survivor-led organizations to learn the system pitfalls and bright spots. We gathered groups to begin building trust and coming up with shared solutions.

These collaborations didn't always go smoothly. Although there were some eager to roll up their sleeves and be champions, there were others who were skeptics. In 2013, as we were beginning to build the First Responder Protocol in Los Angeles County, one police officer sat in the back of the room, leaning back in his chair with crossed arms. He didn't audibly dismiss our proposals, but he certainly conveyed his skepticism with his frequent eye rolls and looks of incredulity. We spent time trying to understand his concerns with creating an alternative to arresting youth for prostitution, and did ride-alongs to see the situations he and his colleagues faced when encountering and identifying young people who were being exploited.

Ultimately, after months of cultivating trust and building what we and our other collaborative partners thought was a solid process for avoiding the arrest of youth and initiating a quick, service-based response, we got the officer to buy in and try the approach once. The Protocol called for child welfare or probation and community-based advocates to arrive on the scene within 90 minutes of his officers calling a report to the child protection hotline. The officer, believing it wouldn't work, pulled out a stopwatch. At the 72-minute mark, the advocates arrived, and we knew we'd crossed a threshold. He, and we, believed that this could actually work. The officer became one of the most fervent advocates for the approach, and saw the benefit of treating these young people as victims rather than criminals.

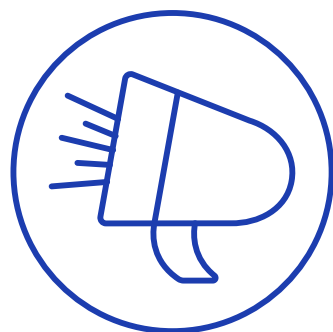
Making change that will impact the lives of the youth we serve often requires a leap of faith. And it also requires taking the time to forge relationships and build trust, in each other and in the process. It is that connection and trust that youth continually ask for and tell us makes the difference in their lives. If we can't do it among agencies and organizations, then we can't do it effectively for our young people.

 [Learn More LA County First Responder Protocol](#)

 [Learn More LA County First Responder Protocol, What We've Learned](#)

Keeping Our Principles *at the Core*

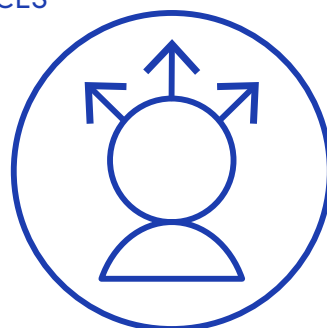
As we transition into the Action section of the Toolkit we want to take a moment to remind you that these Principles live at the center of all we do, and we encourage you to revisit them often. It is through a centering on and belief in these principles that the CRCSE team is able to effectively move towards meaningful action with all of our partners.



ELEVATE VOICES



CONNECT



GROW AWARENESS

Ready to get
to work? *Let's
chart your
path to change
together.*

