

An Implementation Proposal from the Fulton County Juvenile Justice Fund to Address the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

Problems and Assets Statement

Four years ago, the alarming rise of the sexual exploitation of children in metro Atlanta came to the attention of the Fulton County Juvenile Court. In spite of continued attention to the issue, particularly among court staff and judges, the number of identified victims has not decreased.

Available data regarding child sexual exploitation in the U.S. is inconclusive. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem is significant. Research shows that there are factors common to youth who are at risk. Sexual exploitation of children is closely linked with running away and it is estimated that there are 450,000 runaway children per year in the U.S., with an estimated 300,000 victimized children living on the streets.

In the state of Georgia, the number of girls arrested for runaway skyrocketed from 312 in 1988 to 1,645 in 1998. For most of these, violence and abuse in the home is often a factor leading them to the streets. A disproportionate number of street youth have histories of recurrent physical and sexual abuse at home and take to the street in a desperate effort to bring their abuse to an end. Frequently, however, running away from home increases the violence and abuse they are attempting to escape.

Though sexual exploitation of male youth is a recognized problem, statistics are difficult to obtain. Males, typically, are reluctant to disclose sexual abuse. Thus, information regarding this group is hard to quantify. Further, services provided to young males are sporadic and inconsistent.

Without early intervention, children who become victims of sexual exploitation enter adulthood caught in a cycle of abuse, exploitation, and criminal behavior. A child who is a victim of sexual abuse tends to experience a lifetime of recurrent self-destructive tendencies, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, along with the physical complications due to sexual transmitted diseases, malnutrition, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Many of these children die.

Comprehensive services are needed to address the complicated and complex issues of this problem. Those agencies mandated for the care and protection of children, from law enforcement to child welfare agencies, have identified barriers and challenges that prevent seamless delivery of services. Current programs and services in the juvenile justice system, for instance, are geared for girls who commit delinquent acts. While some delinquency charges may be valid, delinquency is an “effect” not the “cause.” The “cause” is sexual and physical abuse. The children are victims not criminals.

Until the Juvenile Justice Fund's successful collaborative efforts, there was not a coordinating entity, nor were there specific programs focusing on the victims of this exploitation. Until 2002, for instance, there were no emergency shelters or therapeutic housing addressing the specific needs of these girls in the southeastern United States. Left with no other options, these violently victimized girls were sent to youth detention, which served to revictimize them, and caused a delay in the delivery of desperately needed intervention.

In 2000, the Juvenile Justice Fund (the Fund), along with the Fulton County Juvenile Court, convened the Coalition to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation. Through these initial efforts, the Coalition raised public awareness regarding issues related to juvenile justice and child welfare including the issue of child commercial sexual exploitation. Strong, effective, communitywide collaborations with health care professionals, services providers, community volunteers, concerned citizens in the faith-based community, various branches of government, and in law enforcement, were developed, as well as, with those in the legal, funding, and education communities.

The Coalition comprised of persons from both agencies, community-based organizations, and the general community, forged the basis for an effective, working collaboration that continues to this day. From the efforts of this coalition several things were accomplished. Among them include the following:

- The passage of legislation which made pimping and pandering a minor a felony in the state of Georgia (until March 2001, this was a misdemeanor).
- Fundraising of over \$1 million, which lead to the opening of Angela's House, the first safe house for sexually exploited girls in the southeast.
- The creation of the Center to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) which provides advocacy, education, and training.
- The cooperation with the U.S. Attorney's office which lead to the conviction of 14 pimps operating in the community.

The advocacy work spearheaded by the Fund has resulted in change in the sentences judges are able to hand out to perpetrators convicted of commercially sexually exploiting children. The role of the Fund was critical in the initiation of the 2001 legislation that made pimping and pandering of children a felony in the state of Georgia. Prior to this legislation, under Georgia law, pimping of a child was a misdemeanor. Georgia Senate Bill 33 provides for a penalty of five to ten years imprisonment and a fine of \$2500 to \$10,000, for the crimes of pimping, pandering, and solicitation of sodomy when these crimes involve the prostitution of persons under the age of

eighteen. The Act also provides for a penalty of one to ten years imprisonment for the crime of pandering by compulsion, regardless of the age of the victim. Finally, the definition of prostitution is expanded to include the exchange of any sexual act, including sexual intercourse and sodomy, for any item of value.

The work of the Coalition was formalized in 2002 with the creation of The Center to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation (CEASE). An initiative of the Juvenile Justice Fund, CEASE works closely with legal professionals and law enforcement, both locally and on the Federal level, in assisting in the prosecution of persons responsible for the sexual exploitation of children

Coordination has been established, in which information obtained by CEASE is disseminated to law enforcement and prosecutors. This can be vital in the successful prosecution of those responsible for exploitation. Additionally, victims are referred to appropriate services for care.

CEASE provides multidisciplinary training to an array of professionals charged with the welfare and protection of children in Georgia. Training helps to ensure understanding and detection of child sexual exploitation. Through the training, legal professionals, and law enforcement learn how to develop relationships necessary to interview and obtain information from child sexual abuse victims for successful prosecution of perpetrators. Instruction is also provided in how to make a case when there is not a victim to testify.

In 2003, the Juvenile Justice Fund was awarded a planning grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention to coordinate a communitywide initiative to identify its specific barriers, opportunities, and strengths. Representatives from more than 30 agencies in metro area participated in a six month long effort to develop a series of recommendations to be implemented during the next five years. These included the two public school districts, the two main police departments, the district attorney, the Children Advocacy Center, The Department of Family and Children Services (child welfare), Juvenile Courts from the two largest counties, along with the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, the faith community, nonprofit agencies, and United Way.

Research demonstrates that youth, especially girls, involved in the juvenile court system have histories of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, have family problems, suffer from physical and mental disorders, have experienced academic failure and succumb more easily to the pressure of domination by older males. Children do not choose a life of prostitution. Juveniles lack the knowledge, maturity, and awareness to understand fully their actions and to make responsible

choices. They are lured into a life of prostitution by adult sexual predators, pimps, pedophiles, and members of organized crime. The average age reported for becoming a victim is thirteen. The target population for this project will be middle to high school aged youth, ages 10–17.

Project Utility

The implementation phase of this project allows the Juvenile Justice Fund to capitalize on the groundwork laid and the lines of communication established during the planning phase, which was completed in December 2003. The participating agencies are eager to move forward to capitalize upon the momentum, the level of awareness, and the confidence in the success of the planning phase.

The foundation is in place for the creation of a multisystems collaborative approach which will work toward the establishment of a perimeter of protection, both to prevent sexual exploitation of children as well as to identify and intervene earlier on behalf of those children who are already being victimized.

The expected outcomes and benefits are as follows:

- Design and implement a common intake assessment instrument, which allows participating agencies to quickly establish the level of risk for any child entering the child-protection system and to move to constructive intervention on behalf of the child as necessary.
- Activate the Memorandum of Understanding for Information Sharing among participating agencies and meet regularly to work through the implementation process to expedite the use of existing information on the child.
- Purchase and begin use of an integrative case-tracking database that will allow for timelier and comprehensive treatment recommendations for children and which will make better use of existing resources by eliminating duplication of services.
- Identify, design, and implement training and education/awareness programs specific to the target audiences of children, families, service providers, law enforcement, special advocates, etc. This step will also incorporate recruitment and training of volunteers and a team of trainers so that the programs are consistent and readily accessible to all concerned.
- Expand upon our initial efforts in community awareness and education by continuing community group meetings, through a public awareness campaign in partnership with United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, and via educational programs provided through parent groups, youth organizations, the faith community, etc.

Goals and Objectives

Year One

Key representatives of participating agencies will continue conversations regarding the quality of services to children in the Metro Atlanta area. The Juvenile Justice Fund will host quarterly interactive meetings, during which time participants will discuss challenges, obstacles, and potential solutions to the issues that they face on a regular basis. Members of the Executive Cabinet, which is composed of top-level decisionmakers in key agencies, will review the resulting recommendations from these task force meetings, assess their potential for implementation, and insure the buy-in from the top down.

Using the Risk and Protective Factors as a basis, a multiagency collaborative committee will develop a common intake assessment instrument to be used with children who enter the juvenile justice system via any participating agency in Fulton County or the City of Atlanta. This will provide a tool whereby the level of risk can be quickly determined for any child and the assigned case manager can determine the appropriate interventions.

To aid this multiagency collaboration, the Memorandum of Understanding will set the stage for cooperation across agencies to assess information on the identified child. This process will be reviewed quarterly by the participating agencies to assess the process and address any issues as they are identified.

Ongoing and up-to-date training for staff members of the participating agencies in the areas of identifying at-risk youth and children who are victims of sexual exploitation is a priority. Anyone on the front lines of child protective services will need to engage in training which will allow them to better serve these children. We will develop local education, training, and awareness programs—beginning with an assessment of programs available and building on that base to fill in any gaps. Fox Valley Technical College is one major resource to assist us as we work to institute train-the-trainer sessions in an effort to create our own Atlanta-specific programs.

In addition to training, the task force will develop a community awareness plan that will include a series of town hall meetings, a media campaign targeting men of the community (the consumers), a broad media public awareness campaign cosponsored by United Way and designed to help the general public, community and business leaders comprehend the personal/family and larger

economic ramifications of the sexual exploitation of children. Workshops will be targeted to parent groups and the faith-based community, to provide them with the awareness, resources and tools necessary for prevention, intervention, and services to existing victims

Year Two

The next step after the Common Intake Assessment Instrument and the Memorandum of Understanding for Information Sharing, is the full implementation of a case-tracking database serving all participating organizations allowing for expedited access to the profile for a child. Each agency will determine what information will be accessible to each approved high-level representative at other agencies. This year will provide for the installation of the database throughout the various agencies, training personnel to use the database, merging existing agency report forms and forms specific to the needs of the case-tracking process, and dealing with the inevitable period of adjustment. Ongoing, regularly scheduled meetings to address these issues will provide one method of speeding this process to a constructive result.

This multidimensional system of court orders, the Memorandum of Understanding, and access to the database will permit the multiagency collaborative teams to formulate the most thorough and appropriate recommendations for each child. It is the hope that by expanding this system into multiple geographic jurisdictions in the ensuing years, we will eliminate the challenge of sharing information across jurisdictional boundaries. In the past, this issue has provided a multitude of loopholes preventing continuation of care, delivery of services, and protection of children.

The initial benefits of the public awareness campaign are expected to be realized through the early identification of at-risk youth, and the program development assistance which will be provided to schools, faith-based and community institutions in developing programs and services specific to the needs of that community.

Years Three and Beyond

By providing vehicles for increased collaboration, accessible professional training, and improved community awareness, the continuing goals of the demonstration project would include these:

- Delivery of age-appropriate prevention programs to children K-12 via school-based programs and youth-serving organizations.
- The institutionalization of high-quality training programs to educators, social workers, and other such professionals ensuring the early identification of children who are at risk of or have already been victimized by sexual exploitation.

- Increased community awareness and understanding of the issue of sexual exploitation of children through ongoing education programs and public service announcements
- Improved communication among all the agencies that work to serve children, by increasing opportunities for collaboration, building better understanding of the nature of at-risk children and victims, and reducing issues of territoriality which stand in the way of addressing the needs of the child.
- More effective and efficient delivery of services to children victimized by sexual exploitation by providing a more thorough understanding of the total picture of the child and family through the case-tracking database and the multiagency collaborative teams. Expansion of the geographical area covered by this project will also be a goal in the third year and beyond.
- Serving as a model to other communities of how a large, complex, metropolitan area can cooperate to work on behalf of its children.

Project Strategy

A. Community Awareness

The victims of sexual exploitation are invisible to the majority of the community and presumed to be members of a narrow demographic profile—thus creating a “not my child, not my problem” mentality. Metropolitan Atlanta fails to understand the financial and psychological ramifications of this attitude—to individual families and to the image of the community as a whole.

Strategies:

- Create, in partnership with United Way, a media campaign to keep the issue of the sexual exploitation of children in front of Atlanta’s citizens and businesses and to help them understand the impact that this issue has on the image and future of the community.
- Continue community meetings and other programs to educate and increase awareness of this issue for all those who care about and serve children.
- Pursue implementation of preventive educational programs in schools, through youth organizations, and via the faith community.
- Move forward with the Men’s Campaign against the perpetrators of sexual exploitation of children.
- Continue to advocate for enforcement, through courtroom advocacy, of existing law dealing with pimping, pandering, and abetting the sexual exploitation of children.

B. Information and Data Sharing

During the planning phase a lack of efficient, effective means of communication among all agencies and organizations providing services to children was identified. As a result, children are left at increasing risk for extended periods of time. There are serious overlaps and gaps in the system and recommendations for services and programs often lack follow-through because the continuum of care is not clear. Finally, coherent and consistent data are unavailable.

Once a victim does enter the system at a critical or severe level, to address the needs of the child requires more services, more costly services, with a lower probability of complete recovery, and at greater cost to the community. All of this occurs in an economic climate that can afford fewer resources and which focuses primarily on the crises.

Strategies:

- Enact a Memorandum of Understanding for Information Sharing to allow for more efficient collaboration among the agencies who serve children, producing more comprehensive and useful recommendations on behalf of at-risk children.
- Develop and implement a common Intake/Risk Assessment instrument for both prevention and earlier identification/intervention for at-risk children.
- Implement the use of a Case-Tracking System to expedite information sharing at a level that corresponds to the guidelines for privacy for individuals and institutions (See www.networkninja.com) in partnership with the Fulton Children Advocacy Center.

C. Training of Professionals

Those entrusted with both the care and protection of children do not have access to training designed to help them understand the risk factors in the lives of children and therefore cannot identify and address the needs of potential or current victims. Too often these children are considered to be the criminals or the cause of their own problems and are treated accordingly.

In these times of limited resources (time, money, receptivity), adults who touch the lives of these children are unable to easily access the sort of training that would allow them to better comprehend—and therefore effectively address—the needs of the victims.

Strategies:

- Establish comprehensive curriculums addressing the specific needs of professionals and volunteers who serve children.

- Provide 'train the trainer' sessions in order that these curricula can be institutionalized within the various agencies and organizations, as well as provide short-term workshops throughout the community upon request.

D. Improved Delivery of Care

Once a victim has been identified, service providers have severely limited options regarding services to allow for assessment, treatment and safe housing. Short-term foster care in homes that have not received highly specialized training, placement in youth detention centers, or return to the home/environment which precipitated the original problem will cause even greater damage to a child who is already seriously at risk.

Quality long-term care options, which are necessary in order to truly rescue the victims, are few and too small to provide services to all who need them.

Strategies:

- Develop a multidisciplinary team-based response to the level of risk indicated in the Common Intake-Risk Assessment instrument, with clear guidelines as to agencies responsible for carrying out recommendations.
- Designate a case manager out of the Fulton Children Advocacy Center whose specialization is the identification and delivery of services for victimized youth.

Project Design

During year one of this project, the following will be accomplished:

The implementation of a multisystems partnership to increase cooperation among agencies, in collaboration with the Fulton Children Advocacy Center.

This will be accomplished by:

- The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (Appendix A) among identified agencies.
- The development of a risk assessment instrument to be piloted by selected agencies.
- The purchase and design of a shared data system.

Training curriculum and materials targeting those who are responsible for the care and protection of children, in collaboration with CEASE and the Fulton County District Attorney's Office.

This will be accomplished by:

- The identification of existing training resources available to the project.
- The identification of those target agencies and organizations and an assessment of their current training needs in this area.
- The development of training curricula, utilizing available resources and addressing unmet needs.
- Piloting the training among select groups.
- Conduct "train the trainer" workshops to insure the institutionalize of the training within the identified agencies.

Increased public awareness on both the risk and protective factors of youth, as well as, heightening the exposure on those who are the perpetrators of sexual exploitation, in collaboration with United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

This will be accomplished by:

- Identifying community partners and the business community who will provide resources to the development of a public awareness campaign.
- The development of key messages and materials.
- Identifying community groups to provide forums, town hall meetings, and awareness workshops.
- Buy-in of key electronic and print media to carry the message.

The coordination of the delivery of services to at-risk youth and to those victimized by sexual exploitation, in collaboration with the Fulton Children Advocacy Center.

This will be accomplished by:

- The hiring of a Teen Services Case Manager who will be responsible for the case management, forensic interviewing, therapeutic intervention, and treatment of victims.
- The development of a multisystems team, representing participating agencies, who will provide ongoing staffing, referrals, and support to the Case Manager for the support of the victims.

All activities of the project will be under the supervision of the identified Project Coordinator. The

collaborative partner, identified above, is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of their portion of this project. The Coordinator will work with participating agencies and partners to insure that the objectives are being met and the timelines adhered to. This will also include convening the project partners, including the Executive Cabinet, on a quarterly basis, or as needed.

The Project Coordinator will report to the Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Fund.

Management/Organizational Capacity

The Juvenile Justice Fund was incorporated in 2000 as a 501c3 organization by a group of concerned citizens for the purpose of identifying resources to facilitate the development of programs and collaborations which addressed unmet needs of youth and families in the juvenile justice system. In its short tenure the Fund has generated more than \$2.5 million for several programmatic initiatives. Among them:

- Angela's House, the first safe house for sexually exploited girls in the southeast.
- The Center to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation (CEASE).
- The first Special Education Advocacy program in a juvenile court in Georgia, providing assessment and advocacy for youth with unmet special education needs.
- The first organization in Georgia to launch a Multisystemic Services Therapy team.
- Supervised Visitation Centers in seven, faith-based institutions.

The Juvenile Justice Fund, and the OJJDP project, is under the management of Deborah Richardson. Ms. Richardson, with more than 26 years in nonprofit administration, brings extensive experience in project management, fund development, and organizational development. She is the founding director of the Fund. Her leadership is demonstrated by an ability to identify and create effective collaborations among diverse stakeholders in the community, spearheading public awareness and educational efforts, along with the creation of first-time interventions. Ms. Richardson has received numerous awards and recognitions for her community service in the Atlanta community.

The success of the planning period is due to the participation and buy-in of the more than 30 agencies, represented in both the Executive Cabinet and the work team. The project will be implemented by a team of professionals who bring a wealth of expertise in their specific areas.

As evidence of a true communitywide effort, the Fund will enter into agreements with key partners for the implementation of segments of this project (as identified in Project Strategies). The partners will sign a letter of agreement with the Fund outlining their areas of responsibilities,

expected timelines and evidence of completion. The Project Coordinator will provide ongoing monitoring to the activities as outlined.

The Fund will convene quarterly meetings of all the stakeholders to discuss activities to date, determine progress along the specific timeline and objectives, as well as to address identified concerns. The Project Coordinator will provide monthly updates to the Executive Director.