

CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL
COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN (CSEC) ACTION PROJECT
PROJECT PLAN: ACTION ITEM FOR JUNE 5, 2013 COUNCIL MEETING

Background. Building on the research presented in the report, “*Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California*,” the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Workgroup identified a series of recommendations to address the issue. These recommendations are based on three key premises:

- (1) Many children involved in the child welfare system are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation and an unknown number are being exploited;
- (2) Action by the child welfare system in collaboration with other child-serving agencies and organizations could prevent exploitation and aid victims;
- (3) Building on the collaborative strength of the Child Welfare Council, a CSEC Action Project would provide a leadership opportunity to implement a coordinated plan that empowers agencies and organizations to take action to reduce exploitation and protect and treat victims.

Upon approval by the Child Welfare Council of the Global Recommendation, the CSEC Action Team will immediately begin implementing the recommendations to address the needs of CSEC and those at risk of sexual exploitation.

GLOBAL RECOMMENDATION

Launch the CSEC Action Project to implement the recommendations
and secure funding to carry out this work.

Because public systems face many challenges in formulating an effective response to child sex trafficking, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed. Therefore, the CSEC Workgroup’s overarching recommendation is that the Child Welfare Council launch the CSEC Action Project to improve California’s response to commercial sexual exploitation of children. The CSEC Action Team will facilitate implementation of the recommendations in four focus areas: *Prevalence and Identification, Specialized Services, Prevention and Training, and Multi-System and Data Coordination*. These focus areas are described in further detail under “Specific Recommendations” below.

Vision. When the recommendations outlined in this plan are fully implemented, CSEC and at-risk children who are involved with the child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems (e.g. mental and physical health, education, the courts, nonprofit providers, etc.) will be identified, cared for, protected, and receive the services they need to overcome trauma and thrive.

Proposed Structure. The Project will be coordinated by a CSEC Action Team under the auspices of the Child Welfare Council. The Team will be co-convened by the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency and a community-based advocacy organization representative who has experience working with exploited children. Membership will include state and local government agency leaders, CSEC service providers, CSEC survivors, youth, CSEC advocates, court representatives, and other stakeholders.

Role. The Team will be charged with further developing and implementing the recommendations adopted by the Child Welfare Council and delineated in this Project Plan. Its work will be guided by the *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* report and the following principles:

- 1) Essential to the project’s success will be the involvement of CSEC survivors, at-risk youth, and their families or caregivers.

- 2) The Team will need to build effective partnerships with State and local agencies and service providers, as these will be central players in the implementation of CSEC programs, services, supports, and prevention efforts.
- 3) Addressing CSEC issues and the needs of exploited youth will require a coordinated, comprehensive approach. Therefore, the Team will need to establish a structure and tools to support multi-system collaboration.

Process and Methods. To implement a comprehensive multi-system response to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in California, the CSEC Action Team's methodology may include:

- Develop specific plans for each of the four focus areas, further developing and refining the strategies in this document and determining the sequencing of the strategies.
- Assess the current landscape of programs, services, and supports for CSEC children in California; identify gaps in current services and elements needed to address the needs of CSEC and at-risk youth.
- Research promising policies and practices in California and other states, and recommend how they can be implemented systematically on a local or statewide basis.
- Collaborate with stakeholders, including state and local agencies and service providers, to develop implementation timelines, lead agency responsibility and accountability, etc.
- Monitor progress, measure outcomes, and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken to address CSEC issues and the needs of CSEC and at-risk youth in California.

Funding. The urgency of CSEC issues in California justifies dedicated funding to support the CSEC Action Team's work, including support from government agencies and philanthropic foundations. This funding should provide for a CSEC Action Project Director, expert resources to establish the multi-system collaborative infrastructure and conduct project management and evaluation, and stipends to enable CSEC survivors and other youth to be full participants in the process.

FOCUS AREAS AND SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The CSEC Workgroup's recommendations fall into the following four focus areas:

- 1) ***Prevalence and Assessment.*** In order to understand the scope and nature of the problem in California and provide appropriate services, screen all children across systems for exploitation and risk factors and assess their CSEC-related needs on an ongoing basis.
- 2) ***Prevention and Training.*** Establish programs to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children, and train child-serving professionals to understand the CSEC problem, how to identify CSEC and at-risk children, and how to provide or refer to appropriate services.
- 3) ***Specialized Services.*** Develop and provide specialized services that will enable CSEC children to be safe, overcome trauma and thrive.
- 4) ***Multi-System and Data Coordination.*** Establish and support a systematic approach to multi-systems coordination, including strategies to improve service delivery to CSEC and at-risk children and enable the collection and sharing of data.

Within these focus areas, the following pages present specific recommendations including:

- *Immediate Actions* to be taken within the first year of the project, with regular status reports to the Child Welfare Council.
- *Longer-Term Strategies* that the CSEC Action Team will further develop and expand upon in the subsequent years, also with regular status reports to the Child Welfare Council.

1. PREVALENCE AND ASSESSMENT

In order to understand the scope and nature of the problem in California and provide appropriate services, screen children across systems and assess their CSEC-related needs on an ongoing basis.

Immediate Action

- *Prevalence*: Conduct an initial assessment to gauge the prevalence of CSEC in child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems:
 - Work with professionals in these systems to assess prevalence among the children and youth they currently serve.
 - Coordinate a systematic review of case files using a proven sampling protocol.
 - Conduct database mining and analysis of compiled data in child-serving systems.
- *Assessment*: Identify the best available screening/assessment tools, undertake an initial effort to disseminate their use among child-serving systems, and gather information regarding needed adaptations and improvements.

Longer-Term Strategies

- 1) *Prevalence*: Continuously update information regarding the scope and nature of the CSEC problem.
 - Support the establishment of data sharing agreements to allow for compilation of information about CSEC prevalence in the child welfare population and other systems.
 - Support the development and implementation of a coordinated system for collection and analysis of prevalence data.
 - Review existing reporting processes, protocols, and mandates.
 - Explore options to maximize identification and reporting of CSEC and at-risk children across child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems.
 - Support implementation of a coordinated system that provides a clear understanding of victims' trajectory through the systems and how to address the needs of at-risk and CSEC children.
 - Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the data collection/analysis system and identify needed improvements.
- 2) *Assessment*: Implement screening and assessment tools to properly identify all CSEC and at-risk children and address their needs on an ongoing basis.
 - Identify or develop multi-system screening and assessment tools that identify CSEC and at-risk children, evaluate their needs, indicate how well those needs are being met, enhance service delivery decision-making, and inform policymaking.
 - Support the implementation of screening/assessment protocols across child-serving agencies to systematically identify CSEC and at-risk children, and to assess their needs.
 - Adapt protocols for various CSEC populations and child-serving professionals (e.g., child welfare workers, probation officers, educators, health and mental health providers, etc.) to ensure screens and assessments are administered.
 - Continuously evaluate screening/assessment tools and protocols, and revise them based on quantitative and qualitative results.

2. Prevention and Training

Establish programs to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children, and train child-serving professionals to understand the CSEC problem, identify CSEC and at-risk children, and provide or refer to appropriate services.

Immediate Action

- Make CSEC training available (how to identify CSEC and at-risk children, how to refer to/provide CSEC services, etc.) for professionals in child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems.

Longer-Term Strategies

- 1) *Prevention*: establish statewide and local prevention programs that will reduce the number of vulnerable children that are exploited.
 - Support the establishment and implementation of guidelines on appropriate placement and services strategies for children at risk of exploitation in child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems.
 - Support the development and distribution of youth-friendly materials to youth who come in contact with child welfare and other systems to inform them about healthy relationships, the dynamics of commercial sexual exploitation, and strategies to avoid recruitment.
 - Support the development and distribution of informational materials for parents and other caregivers regarding CSEC, including what they can do to prevent youth in their care from becoming CSEC victims, and steps to take if they suspect a youth is being exploited.
 - On a semi-annual basis, evaluate the effectiveness of the prevention, awareness and training strategies, with recommendations for improvement.
- 2) *Training*: ensure that professionals in child-serving systems understand the CSEC problem, how to identify CSEC and at-risk children, and how to provide or refer children to appropriate services
 - Support the development and dissemination of youth-friendly programs to engage and educate youth at risk of exploitation:
 - Ensure that programs and materials are sensitive to the issues and needs of CSEC children, cultural differences, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
 - Incorporate or adapt existing CSEC specialized programs and materials (e.g. the “My Life, My Choice” curriculum, GEMS CSEC 101, OJJDP Training on CSEC, etc.).
 - Develop models and protocols for providing ongoing training, coaching and mentoring for professionals and caregivers who serve CSEC and at-risk youth on a regular basis at all levels—from managers to line staff.
 - Develop a train-the-trainer series for child-serving systems in state and county agencies, particularly child welfare, covering the spectrum of CSEC topics, for example:
 - Risk factors and warning signs of CSEC victimization.
 - Screening and investigating CSEC incidents involving parents, foster parents, guardians, other caregivers, and third parties and the criteria for assessing the ongoing safety of the child.
 - Strategies to engage youth and connect them with appropriate services and supports.

- The resources, services, and supports available to meet the needs of CSEC and at-risk children and their families or caregivers.
- For caregivers and administrators in out-of-home care settings that serve youth, develop strategies to ensure that they receive training in advance of placement of CSEC and at-risk children, as well as ongoing training and coaching during the course of serving those children.
- Engage educators and schools to increase awareness of CSEC, and train teachers, counselors, and administrators to identify, report, and work with CSEC children, at-risk youth, and their families.
- Support the development and delivery of specialized training on risk factors, warning signs, and the dynamics of exploitation for professionals in child-serving systems, such as juvenile courts (dependency attorneys, district attorneys, public defenders, county counsel, judges, probation officers, etc.) and professionals who regularly come into contact with CSEC and at-risk children (health care providers, mental health clinicians, etc.).
 - Identify and initially focus on high-priority areas and systems of higher risk (e.g. group homes, schools in impoverished areas where the sex trade thrives, etc.).
 - Focus the specialized training for practitioners on practical tools and skills in identifying CSEC and at-risk youth, and addressing the needs of this population.
- On a semi-annual basis, evaluate the effectiveness of the prevention, awareness and training strategies, with recommendations for improvement.

3. SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Develop and provide specialized services that will enable CSEC children to be safe, overcome trauma and thrive.

Immediate Action

- *Placement:* Work with county child welfare and probation systems and service providers to increase the availability of safe, protected, and appropriate emergency and longer-term placements for CSEC.

Longer-Term Strategies

- 3) *Specialized Services:* establish a continuum of safe and protected placement options and a coordinated system of specialized services that will enable CSEC children and their families or caregivers to overcome trauma and thrive.
 - Work with state and local officials and service providers to ensure that emergency housing is available to meet the needs of CSEC and at-risk children.
 - Further define the need for various kinds of transition and longer-term placements, facilities, services, and supports for CSEC children, including safe and protected facilities.
 - Work with state and local agencies to assess the availability of these needed placements, facilities, services and supports throughout California, and identify areas where there is a large gap between need and availability.
 - Drawing upon effective models, develop a continuum of care model for CSEC and at-risk children in California (e.g., case management, mental and physical health services, respite care, crisis response, specialized legal services, educational assistance, vocational training, etc.).
 - Support the establishment and implementation of guidelines on appropriate placement and services strategies for CSEC children in child welfare, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems.
 - Ensure that policies and protocols for those working with CSEC children include a focus on understanding and respecting victims' culture, gender, and sexual orientation.
 - On a semi-annual basis, conduct an assessment of the availability of placement options and specialized services, an evaluation of the effectiveness of those services, and provide recommendations for improvement.
- 4) *Policy and Legislation:* Identify opportunities to improve coordination and access to services for CSE and at-risk children through policy and legislative changes.
 - Analyze pending legislation and identify opportunities to advance strategies to address CSEC issues and enhance services for CSEC and at-risk children.
 - Study other states' laws designed to serve CSEC victims, including Safe Harbor and diversion laws, and make recommendations regarding steps California can take to strengthen its policies.
 - Assess potential policy changes to decriminalize CSEC based on their status as crime victims, in consultation with the Attorney General and the California District Attorneys Association.
 - Analyze California victims' rights laws and how they pertain to CSEC; explore options for asserting any enumerated rights.

4. Multi-System and Data Coordination

Establish and support a systematic approach to multi-systems coordination, including strategies to improve service delivery to CSEC and at-risk children and enable the collection and sharing of data.

Immediate Action

- *Multi-System Coordination*: Develop cross-system mechanisms and infrastructure for collaboration among CSEC providers, public agencies, and other stakeholders, while building upon structures, processes, and relationships already in place.
- *Data*: Establish strategies to collect and share data consistent with privacy protections, at the individual child level, to promote coordination of services, and at the aggregate level, to quantify the scope and nature of the problem and track emerging trends.

Longer-Term Strategies

- 1) *Multi-System Coordination*: Implement and evaluate mechanisms and a structure for collaboration.
 - Develop a model and protocols to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing, and collaboration to identify and address the needs of CSEC and at-risk children.
 - Develop multi-system protocols to coordinate service delivery as appropriate among child welfare, probation, education, mental and physical health, nonprofit providers, courts and other child-serving agencies, with full involvement of consumers in the process.
 - Continually monitor the efficacy of the protocols to identify areas for improving collaboration, and establish accountability measures to ensure that child-serving systems are addressing the needs of CSEC and at-risk children.
 - On a semi-annual basis, conduct an evaluation of the multi-system structure, protocols, and accountability measures. Include recommendations for improvement.
- 2) *Data*: Implement data sharing agreements that protect confidentiality while providing essential information to agencies and services providers at the individual level and that allow for data to be aggregated without client identifiers for program evaluation purposes.
 - Assess current data sharing agreements and proposed agreements among public health, education, and human services agencies and determine how they might support CSEC data sharing agreements, both at the individual and aggregate levels.
 - Develop model data-sharing agreements and other tools to improve information sharing, and encourage adoption across systems statewide.
 - Assess other improvements needed for effective data sharing (e.g. technology infrastructure, data compilation and analysis mechanisms, etc.) and support funding for and implementation of those improvements.
 - On a semi-annual basis, conduct an evaluation of data sharing and the usefulness of available data, including recommendations for improvement.