



Safe Harbor

Key Informant Interview Summary

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Methods

Between May and July 2015, Wilder staff completed telephone interviews with 24 of key informants. Participants came from a variety of sectors and geographic areas and played various roles in the implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model. Sectors represented included advocacy/lobbying (7), legal (4), prosecution (3), justice/corrections (2), law enforcement (2), youth victim services (2), community organization (1), crime victim program alliance (1), education (1), government (1), and judges (1)¹. Four participants worked specifically in and with tribal communities. In terms of geographic location, the majority of those interviewed did work statewide (14) and in the Metro area (9). One worked exclusively in Greater Minnesota. Participation was voluntary and participants were reminded that all of their responses are confidential.

Staff from Wilder used qualitative software (Atlas.ti) to analyze responses from the interviews.

Key findings

Before implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model

Strengths of identification and service provision

Key informants were asked about the strengths of identification of and service provision for sexually exploited youth before implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model. Respondents most commonly mentioned the existence of services for sexually exploited youth, steps already taken to end prosecution of youth victims, and an overall investment in supporting these youth.

- **Many respondents said that Minnesota already had a victim-oriented service infrastructure.** When asked about the strengths of identification of and service provision for sexually exploited youth before implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model, 71 percent mentioned that Minnesota already had a strong victim-oriented service infrastructure in place that Safe Harbor was able to build on. Several mentioned the strengths of programs and providers that were already serving these youth, including domestic violence programs, homeless youth and youth organizations, those in child protection, and other case managers and social workers.

¹ One participant represented two sectors.

"In Minnesota, we have a good history of strong victim services. We may not have everything in place we need to do but we have lots of services. We have a strong history of looking at the services we provide and trying to fill gaps. We're so strong in comparison to other states. I think we'll get to where we need to be in terms of these services."

– Justice/corrections sector Representative²

- **More than one-third of respondents (38%) said that Minnesota was a national pioneer in trafficking legislation.** Respondents said that Minnesota was already moving towards a model that identified survivors of trafficking as victims, as evidenced by legislation passed in 2005 that made forced trafficking a legal defense for those involved in prostitution and required sex trafficking data collection.³ They highlighted the fact that in 2011, some counties in Minnesota had decided not to prosecute youth for prostitution. They also mentioned several in the state who pioneered services for youth.

"We have a lot of pioneers in the state, and they have a good understanding of this population and their needs." – Respondent

- **Nearly one-third of respondents (29%) noted an investment in improving the wellbeing of sexually exploited youth.** They noted a willingness among prosecutors, service coordinators, and law enforcement to take action, collaborate, and raise awareness prior to the implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model.

Challenges to identification and service provision

Respondents were also asked to identify the challenges they had observed related to identification of and service provision for sexually exploited youth before the implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model. Misconceptions, lack of awareness, and lack of services for trafficked and exploited youth were the most commonly noted challenges.

- **Almost three-quarters (71%) cited misconceptions and/or lack of awareness of trafficking and exploitation as a key challenge before implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model.** There was often a lack of awareness and training among service providers, law enforcement, and others who came in contact with sexually exploited youth of what sexual trafficking was, that it was happening in their area, and how to identify those who are being trafficked. Some saw youth as

² For those respondents who gave permission, they are identified in their quotations by sector. For all others, they are identified as "Respondent."

³ Minnesota Legislative Reference Library. (n.d.) *Minnesota Women's Legislative Timeline: Significant Legislation Passed by the Minnesota Legislature since Suffrage (1999-2014)*. Retrieved from <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/womenstimeline/details?recid=62>.

delinquents instead of victims as well. Statewide representatives were more likely to say this than those working in only the Metro area.

"I mean I think on the identification issue, a lot of it was just very little public awareness of this issue generally. And so all the way from law enforcement to social service agencies, anyone who might encounter these children, there's very little awareness of what this looks like, what the right questions are to ask, what to look for -- very often these children and youth were identified as just delinquents or bad kids or whether they were truant or they were committing petty crimes, or whatever it was, that's how they were being flagged and went through systems accordingly, because people didn't know what to look for underneath the surface of that." – Respondent

- **Respondents cited a lack of services as a challenge prior to implementation.** Over half of respondents (58%) said that there was no service infrastructure or services in place` specifically for sexually exploited youth.

After implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model

Successful components of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model

When asked to identify the strengths of the implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model so far, respondents most frequently mentioned collaboration among stakeholders, trainings of law enforcement and service providers, the Navigator model, the change in law, and the availability of funding.

- **Respondents highlighted the success of collaboration across sectors.** Two-thirds of respondents said that the collaboration across and within sectors as well as across geographic locations that has characterized the implementation of the model has been an essential component of the model's success so far. Several said that trust was rebuilding between law enforcement and social service agencies.

"[One success has been] building collaboration amongst the systems people-- everything from human services and school people to law enforcement and health providers and prosecutors." – Legal Representative

- **Many respondents felt that trainings of law enforcement and other professionals were successful.** Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) said that trainings of professionals on trafficking, identification, and the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model were a successful component of implementation thus far. Of these, six mentioned that training of law enforcement has been effective and has helped with the identification of victims. Metro area representatives were more likely to mention the effectiveness of law enforcement trainings than those working statewide.

“Well I think the amount of training we've done across the state is going well. There's certainly been an increase in the amount of training done for system professionals to help them identify victims.” – Respondent

- **Several informants noted the benefit of having Navigators as points of contact.** 42 percent of those interviewed made comments related to the effectiveness of having Navigators who are able to coordinate efforts and act as a regional contact for other organizations and agencies.

“I think the Regional Navigators have had a huge impact on coordinating efforts -- it hasn't been without its challenges...but it's hard for me to overstate how different it is to be a child who has been identified as a trafficking victim -- how different it is now than it was before Safe Harbor.” – Respondent

- **One-quarter of respondents highlighted the passing of the Safe Harbor Law as a success.** They noted the decriminalization of youth victims of trafficking and exploitation as a key area of success.

“I think one huge thing, they're not facing criminal charges anymore. It's impossible to understate the importance of that.” – Respondent

- **Nearly one-third (29%) of respondents noted the importance of having funding and resources available for implementation.** This made it possible to implement the model, create services, and establish housing.

“I would say providing services has greatly been enhanced through funding for housing and service providers to intervene.” – Prosecution representative

Observed changes and outcomes related to implementation

Respondents also identified positive outcomes related to the identification of and service provision for sexually exploited youth. The most commonly mentioned outcomes included increased awareness of youth trafficking and exploitation, improved service provision, the creation of housing and services for victims, a shift in perspective to seeing youth involved in trafficking as victims, and the emergence of Minnesota as a national leader in youth trafficking legislation.

- **The most commonly mentioned change, observed by 58 percent of respondents, was increased awareness and understanding of youth trafficking.** This included awareness among service providers, health care professionals, state and county officials, and the general population of the existence of human trafficking and how to identify victims.

"I've seen it in the church bulletin-- I've just seen so much more awareness throughout our community and up to the Capitol since implementation of this [model]."
– Law Enforcement Representative

- **Half of respondents noted that there is now more conversation about how to best serve sexually exploited youth and attempts to improve service provision.**

Conversations have begun among and within organizations to evaluate and develop service provision practices and procedures. Discussions have also addressed how to serve male victims and youth who identify as LGBTQ. One respondent mentioned more awareness of effective interventions and treatment modalities.

"I think people are learning about what to do as far as engaging with these youth and engaging with them in a way to build a relationship and build trust. As far as providing services, people are learning more about the right ways to serve these youth."
– Respondent

- **Another noted outcome, mentioned by more than one half (58%) of those interviewed, was the creation of housing and services for sexually exploited youth.** Respondents said that there is more service infrastructure, services in more communities, and more service providers. Metro area representatives were more likely to cite this as a strength than those working statewide.

"The biggest success is that we've gone from a state with very few resources to one with the capacity to build capacity across the state. Now we have options. Before there was this huge gap -- if there was a victim, where do we send them?...It's remarkable that we've built capacity of the entire state. If they ever had contact with the victim before implementation of the model, they weren't strategic about it or doing outreach, and now they are. They are cognizant, strategic, and intentional." – Respondent

"In [our county], we have gotten a lot of trauma-care programming. We have a program called Hold Your Horses Equestrian therapy, trauma-informed yoga, and targeted case management specifically focused on working with these youth." - Respondent

- **More than one-third said that there has been a change in perspective to viewing sexually exploited youth as victims.** A total of 38 percent of respondents noted a shift in service providers, law enforcement, and the general population from seeing sexually exploited youth as delinquents to viewing them as victims.
- **One-quarter of respondents also spoke of Minnesota as emerging as a national leader in policy and service provision for sexually exploited youth.** They said that Minnesota has been creating awareness at a national level.

“Minnesota has really created a momentum, a movement, to bring awareness at a national level. There is a direct correlation of our work and SH model really introducing and paving the way for a national model. That is phenomenal.”
– Youth Victim Services Representative

Challenges and gaps in identification and service provision

Key informants were asked what gaps in needed services and supports existed. Gaps frequently identified by respondents included a lack of housing, a lack of services, confusion around confidentiality of youth information, and the debate around whether or not to have locked facilities. For many of these barriers, they were also identified as areas where improvements had been made but more work is needed as implementation continues.

- **A lack of housing for sexually exploited youth was mentioned as an ongoing challenge by 42 percent of respondents.** Respondents highlighted a lack of beds for males and youth who identify as LGBTQ. They identified a need for long-term placements, noting a gap in out-of-home placements for these youth. Statewide representatives were more likely to note lack of housing as a challenge than those representing only the Twin Cities Metro Area or Greater Minnesota.
- **Another gap, cited by 42 percent of respondents, was a lack of services.** They highlighted a need for more mental health service providers who are trained in working with victims and in complex trauma. This gap was particularly notable in tribal communities and in Greater Minnesota, but also existed in the Twin Cities Metro Area. They mentioned a lack of services for male victims and those who identify as LGBTQ.

“There aren't enough mental health providers with training in helping sexually traumatized youth. It's hard to find mental health providers period for Greater Minnesota, and also hard in the Metro.” – Respondent

- **More than one-third of respondents (38%) said there is a lack of clarity around confidentiality of victim information and interpretation of mandated reporting laws.** Several expressed that direct service providers are concerned that being required to report victim information to law enforcement may prevent victims from seeking services.

"I think the first and one of the biggest [challenges] is the lack of clarity around confidentiality issues and mandated reporting. That's something that at this point is based on what county you live in. I know service providers are unsure if it's a mandated report and how to go about doing that and who to go to and then, our member programs and direct service providers, they are really concerned about the effect that mandated reporting will have on young people seeking services. That is something problematic that we need to figure out how to handle." – Youth Victim Services Representative

- **One-quarter of respondents spoke of the debate over whether or not locked placements were needed for youth when they are initially identified.** Some feel that this is necessary because youth often leave services before they are assessed and receive appropriate treatment. Others feel that placing youth in locked facilities would be disempowering. Three of these respondents said there is a need for triage facilities, possibly secured, that could provide wraparound services for youth, including mental health services, medical services, and assessments.

"I would say the most important is more housing for the victims and the initial placement, and finding initial placement for victims when they're off the street. For most kids, they need something more secure and maybe there are ways we can provide full comprehensive services and that is the biggest thing that we need. Kids leave and go back on the streets and what they really need is a chemical dependency assessment or mental health assessment...I think kind of what is really needed is more of a medical model." – Respondent

Challenges related to the model

Key informants were asked what challenges they had observed related to the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model itself. The most commonly cited challenges were related to a lack of funding, difficulties with collaboration, the structure of the Navigator model, and implementation in tribal communities. Again, many of these challenges were also mentioned as areas where progress has been made but more work will need to be done as implementation continues.

- **Two-thirds of respondents (67%) said that a lack of funding inhibited full implementation of the model.** They said that full funding is needed for housing, services, training, and for law enforcement to cover the cost of investigations.

"[One challenge is] a lack of funding that's needed to adequately provide services to all youth who need them at the level we need them. There's not enough shelter space or money for ongoing services. This population needs long-term care. This isn't a 3 month or 6 month intervention. You need a minimum of 6 months to a year of services to be effective." – Prosecution Representative

- **As implementation moves forward, half of respondents said that there are still some challenges related to collaboration and creating a cohesive infrastructure across organizations and sectors.** There is still trust that needs to be built between service providers and law enforcement. Other challenges included a lack of clarity in the roles of various entities, differing approaches among sectors, too many task forces and a lack of cohesion, and a need for more coordination with those groups already serving sexually exploited youth, such as homeless youth organizations, domestic violence organizations, education, and afterschool programming.

“[One of the challenges is] probably lack of precisely knowing who is supposed to do what within the realm of service providers, the prosecutorial side, the victim service providers, county officials, nonprofits. It’s starting to be addressed but I think it’s still unclear what it falls under -- so we have coalitions of general crime, sexual assault, domestic violence. Who provides what services?” – Respondent

- **When asked about current challenges, half of respondents mentioned some aspect of the Navigator model.** They said that the role of the Navigator is somewhat unclear and may be too complex for one entity. Several also spoke of how the model is set up geographically, saying that there are too few Navigators and they are too spread out. It is especially a challenge in Greater Minnesota where Navigators cover larger regions that are less connected and have fewer services.

“A lot of times, programs are feeling overwhelmed, which is to be expected. We didn’t realize how big the [Navigators’] regions were – there is a lot of ground to cover. We’re trying to figure out where the Navigator needs to be, what role needs to play, building something sustainable so that it’s not all on the Navigator to coordinate.” – Respondent

- **One-quarter of respondents cited challenges related to the implementation of the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model in tribal communities.** They said that the model does not fit the realities of many tribal communities because tribes were not adequately consulted about the development of the model beforehand. They also said that there is a lack of awareness among tribal leaders and populations of the existence of the model, a shortage of services for victims, and a gap in culturally-appropriate services.

“People aren’t aware of it. People just aren’t aware of the law, including tribal leaders. We need to get the information to tribal leaders. There’s also this colonized thinking that we have to have lawyers develop tribal laws and codes for us. We don’t. We don’t have to model our laws after western laws. We can model them however we want to model them. It is important to get to tribal leadership to say this is a really good model, take a look at this, let’s get people together to put some language in place. Here’s the basic language we can add to it to make it more appropriate to our community.” – Respondent

Recommendations

Recommendations for changes to the Safe Harbor Law

When asked for suggestions on how to change the Safe Harbor Law, respondents recommended expanding the age limit.

- **Expand age limit of Safe Harbor Law:** The most commonly recommended change to the Safe Harbor Law (42% of respondents) was to expand the age limit of the law to include adult victims as well.

“Certainly there is no good intellectual or moral reason why victims need to be under 18. For youth who are aging out, if they’re identified at 17, they’ll still need help at 19. Having the system deal with victims of trafficking rather than youth victims of trafficking. Even if it’s split up, but making sure there’s not a gap, or a complete fall-off-the-cliff when you turn 18 is the single biggest thing to help victims.” – Advocacy Representative

“I think it would be great to increase [the age limit] so it’s not just for youth -- one day they’re 18, then the next day they’re 19, and in the same situation. That doesn’t mean that they shouldn’t be treated the same in our system.” – Respondent

Recommendations for changes to the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model and implementation

Key informants were also asked about recommendations for changes to the Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door model and implementation. Respondents mentioned several changes including providing full funding, improving collaboration, focusing on prevention, making the model more responsive to tribal communities, expanding training, creating more housing, and increasing public awareness of the law and of trafficking.

- **Provide full funding:** Nearly three-quarters of respondents (71%) said that full funding is needed in order to adequately implement services, create housing, and provide resources for law enforcement investigations and identification of exploitation.
- **Improve collaboration across sectors:** A total of 42 percent of respondents recommended focusing on building on and working with existing service infrastructures, finding ways to facilitate more communication among sectors, connecting youth service providers, and bringing more stakeholders to the table, such as those in education, after-school programming, health care, and working with adult trafficking victims.

"I think I'll go back to how to figure out how to intersect homeless youth agencies, homeless youth providers, and the homeless services community, in general, that might not be homeless-youth specific, but others who serve [as well as the] battered women's movement. There is just some bridge building that needs to happen. There is a little bit of turf and confusion, so for us all to move forward with increased understanding. Eventually we have to figure out how to do housing where people could just be housed and get the services they need. We can't just continue to create new pots of money that are specific to folks after it's happened. If we could just create more housing targeted to youth who are at-risk and try to do early interventions, wherever that takes us. We might find that beefing up some of the other mainstream systems that might be part of the role [is more effective than] carving out new pots of money. I know the needs are so great. Moving forward, [we need to] focus on how we can change other systems to help youth at-risk of sexual exploitation..." – Respondent

- **Focus on prevention:** A total of 42 percent of respondents said there needs to be more focus on prevention strategies, such as addressing the culture of demand for trafficking and providing education on healthy relationships and healthy sexuality.

"The culture today, when you pick up advertising or look at reality TV, and you see the objectification of girls and women and you see fashions for girls and women-- a little girl being dressed up like an adult in a sexual way. All that clothing says it's ok for us to look at a child or teen as a sexual object-- that needs to change. Second, there is this "boys will be boys" or transition from youth/teenage years to being a man, where that includes having sex, and not necessarily with someone who wants to have sex with you, and that it's ok to pay for sex. You have to look at the horrific ads online. We need to say that that's not acceptable in our world. Only then will we see a significantly reduced number of these victims." – Prosecution Sector

- **Make model more responsive to tribal communities:** One-third of respondents (33%) recommended focusing more efforts on making the law and implementation of the model more effective for tribes. They suggested bringing awareness of the law to tribal leaders and communities. They also recommended providing resources to help tribes develop codes similar to the Safe Harbor Law and implement services that are culturally appropriate for victims.

"I would also say finding really meaningful and appropriate ways to engage tribal communities better is something we need to work on. We know the rates are three times higher for native women and girls and that is a really important voice that could be better represented in this work." – Youth Victim Services Representative

- **Expand training:** Half of respondents (58%) said there is a need for more training, and funding specifically for training. The majority said that training is needed for sectors outside of law enforcement such as schools, sexual assault nurses, domestic violence agencies, child protection and welfare, homeless youth shelters, and other youth organizations. One recommended that working with trafficking victims be a part of the curriculum for social workers, counselors, and psychologists.

- **Create more housing:** 29 percent of respondents said that more housing is needed, including both short-term and long-term placements for youth who cannot return home.

“And so we need a place to triage for an immediate placement. We do have more places now, we still need places for longterm placement when they can't go back home, but we also need a triage place.” – Justice/Corrections Representative

- **Increase public awareness:** One-quarter of respondents recommended more efforts to increase awareness among the general population, service providers, and other professionals who come in contact with youth of the realities of human trafficking. One suggestion was to generate awareness along highway corridors.