

**ADVANCING COLLABORATION TO RESPOND TO CHILD SEX
TRAFFICKING – ATTORNEYS FOR CHILDREN, GUARDIANS AD
LITEM AND COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES AS A KEY
RESOURCE**

First Star Institute

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Advancing Collaboration to Respond to Child Sex Trafficking – Attorneys for Children, Guardians ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocates as a Key Resource

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Attachment A: List of Selected Federal/National Child Sex Trafficking Initiatives

Advancing Collaboration to Respond to Child Sex Trafficking – Attorneys for Children, Guardians ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocates as a Key Resource

A. Introduction

Efforts at the national, state and local levels to address the problem of child sex trafficking (also referred to as the commercial sexual exploitation of children or CSEC) have increased in recent years. Child welfare practice, in particular, has worked to strengthen its capacity to better identify, prevent and respond to child sex trafficking.¹ Two key pieces of federal legislation have in large part driven these various advancements and defined child welfare’s roles and responsibilities to act on this difficult issue.²

Despite these legislative changes and other progress, child sex trafficking “is one of the most complex and least understood forms of child abuse.”³ Jurisdictions continue to struggle in identifying, preventing and serving children and youth who have been or are at risk of being sex trafficked. The problem is especially acute for children with prior or current involvement with the child welfare system who are known to be at higher risk for sexual exploitation than other children. Research indicates that 50 to 90 percent of victims have been involved in child welfare systems at some point.⁴ Within the child welfare system, certain youth (e.g., children and youth of color or LGBTQ+ youth) are disproportionately represented.

A cross-systems collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach that engages and incorporates the knowledge and experience from a broad network of partners is essential to effectively respond to child sex trafficking. Indeed, collaboration is one of 11 key principles that the National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States says supports a comprehensive response and should be incorporated into all identification, prevention and treatment efforts.⁵ A cross-systems collaborative approach expands the number and diversity of voices available to problem-solve, identify and connect children to the services that best meet their needs, and to leverage all existing resources.⁶ Part and parcel to collaboration is the value of extensive training to all systems partners on the many facets of child sex trafficking. Many federal grant programs, such as the Children’s Bureau’s Grants to Address Trafficking Within the Child Welfare Population, have sought to support states and local

¹ See Attachment A for a list of selected initiatives.

² The 2014 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (required states to develop procedures to identify and determine appropriate services for children and youth within the child welfare system who are or at risk of being sex trafficking victims) and the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) (required states to identify reports involving children known or suspected to be victims of sex trafficking, and train workers in identifying, assessing, and providing comprehensive services for sex trafficking victims, including coordination with other partners). The JVTA also required states to report data on sex trafficking victims.

³ National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States (September 2020). *Best Practices and Recommendations for States*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families (hereinafter *Best Practices*).

⁴ Human Trafficking Search, <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/human-trafficking-statistics-2017/>. See also Polaris, US National Hotline Statistics, <https://polarisproject.org/resources/us-national-human-trafficking-hotline-statistics/>

⁵ *Best Practices*, n. 2.

⁶ Bohannon, T., Cullen, C., Devault, A., Ely, C., Siegel, G. and Trescher, S. (2019). *Voices from the Bench: Judicial Perspectives on Handling Child Sex Trafficking Cases*, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

jurisdictions in strengthening and enhancing their cross-systems collaboration and partnerships to respond to the issue more effectively (see Attachment A).

Current Project – In Brief

With support from The Steve Nash Foundation (TSNF), the First Star Institute (FSI) sought to build from the existing knowledge base to focus more in depth on defining and leveraging the important – and likely largely untapped – role that attorneys for children, including those acting as guardians ad litem (GALs) and court appointed special advocates (CASAs) play in such collaborative efforts.

This project expands upon FSI’s extensive expertise on the right to counsel for children in child protection proceedings. In 2007, First Star⁷ identified counsel for abused children as a critical issue and released the first edition of *A Child’s Right to Counsel* (now in its 4th edition). The movement for counsel for these children gained momentum and currently has widespread support, with most states providing some form of legal representation for children as well as providing a role for CASAs. Moreover, in 2023, FSI expects to release a report on the national scope of legal and lay representatives in these proceedings. The information developed in preparing that report provides a solid understanding of the complexity of the possible collaborative partners, including counsel for children and CASAs, especially those acting as GALs.

Project Areas of Inquiry

- **The priority unmet needs and gaps in the system** (policy, practice, service and systems improvements) to better serve and support children and youth with involvement in the child welfare system who have experienced or are at risk of child sex trafficking.
- **The progress and challenges** associated with implementing a multidisciplinary collaborative approach to address child sex trafficking within the child welfare population.
- **What unique role(s)** children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs can play in responding to child sex trafficking.
- **Strategies and promising practices** for how children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs can effectively collaborate with other system partners to respond to child sex trafficking.
- **Key lessons** from experienced jurisdictions on advancing the role of children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs in addressing child sex trafficking.
- **Key training needs** for children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs to better serve children and youth who are trafficking victims and identify, prevent and mitigate child sex trafficking and its effects.

⁷ First Star, which was co-founded in 2000 by one of FSI’s directors, Sherry Quirk, continues operations largely focused on the development of foster care academies. FSI continues the policy work initiated by First Star.

Approach

To learn more about the involvement of children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs in cross-systems collaborative efforts to address child sex trafficking, particularly among the child welfare population, FSI conducted a set of targeted key stakeholder interviews with selected jurisdictions that have established collaborative child sex trafficking initiatives. We focused our efforts primarily on selected sites from the Children’s Bureau Grants to Address Trafficking Within the Child Welfare Population, representatives from select specialized child sex trafficking courts, and selected CASA associations focusing on this issue.

From mid-October to late November 2022, FSI completed 11 interviews with 15 key stakeholders.⁸ Those interviewed represented attorneys for children, GALs, CASAs, judges and child welfare professionals spanning eight states (Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Washington and Washington DC). Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes long and transcribed. We assured interviewees that their comments would remain confidential (i.e., nothing would be attributed to them by name) and we would present only summary results.⁹ The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit information and insights on effective cross-systems collaboration to address child sex trafficking among the child welfare population; the primary role of children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs in responding to child sex trafficking; major unmet training and education needs; and key lessons to share with other jurisdictions about the role of children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs. The interviews were designed to be exploratory in nature rather than draw definitive conclusions.

During our initial efforts to identify and reach out to key stakeholders to interview, it became clear that in many of the targeted jurisdictions, the children’s attorneys – and the GAL and CASA volunteers in particular – were not as actively involved as a primary collaborative partner as we had expected based on our background research. Indeed, several individuals remarked that our desire to learn more about the role of the children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs was an important and uncharted area of inquiry.

Given this unexpected discovery – which itself was a valuable finding – we determined it would be helpful to try and supplement the key stakeholder interviews by surveying a wider group of CASA/GAL stakeholders. In light of the project’s time and resource constraints, we quickly developed and disseminated a brief online CASA/GAL survey in mid-November. We targeted the GAL/CASA State Program Directors (pulling contact names and information from the National CASA website and State CASA websites, where available¹⁰). In addition to completing the survey, we asked the State Directors to distribute the link to their local GAL/CASA programs to help us obtain as many perspectives as possible. The 10-question survey was a mix of close- and open-ended questions and, much like the interviews, focused on the primary role of GAL/CASA volunteers in responding to child sex trafficking among the child welfare population, the major challenges they face in carrying out those roles, and priority training needs for this group. The survey also included contextual questions to gauge the prevalence of child sex

⁸ Two of the interviews included multiple stakeholders from the given jurisdiction.

⁹ Because of our confidentiality assurances to participants, FSI is not including a list of the individuals we interviewed in this report.

¹⁰ FSI project staff met with the National CASA office to discuss the project in general and the CASA/GAL survey specifically. They expressed support for the initiative and reviewed a draft of the survey. However, they were not able to assist us with the survey dissemination (either by providing a list of current contacts or sending out the survey directly) due to organizational policy regarding outside surveys.

trafficking in their jurisdiction and among their caseloads, and the extent of their involvement in any local, state or national initiatives to address child sex trafficking.

A total of 41 GALs/CASAs representing 21 states responded in the brief two-week timeframe. Since this survey was a brief exploratory add-on to supplement the work proposed to TSNF, FSI did not conduct any follow ups to prompt additional responses. Moreover, given the timing of this additional survey component and the overall project's short time period, only preliminary data analyses are included in this report. FSI does hope to further analyze the survey data and perhaps conduct additional outreach to GAL/CASA stakeholders, as resources allow.

In addition to the GAL/CASA survey, we developed a similar survey for the children's attorneys. The ABA's Children's Rights Committee provided feedback on the draft survey. In late November, both the ABA and the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) disseminated the survey to their members. Given the very short turnaround time on the attorney survey, we had received only 9 responses at the writing of this report. Because of the small sample size, the attorney survey results are not included in this report. FSI is looking at working with the ABA and NACC, as resources allow, to conduct additional follow-ups to obtain more responses. We believe continued work in this area would be especially valuable in gaining a deeper understanding of the extent to which children's attorneys are involved in collaborative efforts to address child sex trafficking.

Structure of Report

This report focuses primarily on what we learned in the key stakeholder interviews. Preliminary GAL/CASA survey data is woven throughout the report, where applicable. The next section begins by highlighting 11 overarching themes that emerged from the interviews. The following section then explores more specifically the role of the children's attorneys, GALs and CASAs in addressing child sex trafficking, including some of the key challenges they face and suggestions from interviewees on how to strengthen their role. We then discuss key training and education needs for this stakeholder group. The final section provides concluding thoughts and potential next steps for building on the project's findings.

Note: We refer to children's attorneys, GALs and CASAs regularly in this report because both attorneys and volunteers may be meeting with children in dependency cases, and may be given the title, GAL. States vary considerably in the type of legal representation provided to children and what they call the person providing the representation. In addition, almost all states allow for the appointment of lay (non-lawyer) volunteers such as CASAs who may assist the dependency court, often by meeting with the child and providing recommendations as to what they believe to be in the child's best interest.

B. Overarching Themes

Several overarching themes emerged from the key stakeholder interviews, which fall into three domains:

- **Developing a Cross-Systems Collaborative Infrastructure.** These five themes reiterate the importance of a collaborative approach in addressing child sex trafficking among the child welfare population and highlight practices and challenges for building that infrastructure and capacity that includes children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs.
- **Meeting the Needs of Children.**¹¹ These four themes highlight certain services and service delivery approaches that interviewees identified as effective in meeting the complex needs of children who are victims of sex trafficking.
- **Addressing Larger Systems Issues.** These final two themes identify some important areas to strengthen in the ongoing efforts of children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs to respond more effectively to child sex trafficking within the child welfare population.

Survey Says...

When asked how much of an issue or problem child sex trafficking is in their county or state, 46.3% of GAL/CASA survey respondents said it was a **serious** issue, while another 34.1% felt it was a moderate issue. The remaining 19.5% said it was a minor issue. No respondents said it was not at all a problem.

Developing a Cross-Systems Collaborative Infrastructure

- **Cross-Systems Collaboration is Indeed Essential to Effectively Respond to Child Sex Trafficking**

Consistent with the literature, the key stakeholders we interviewed underscored that a cross-systems collaborative approach is the most effective way to address child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. They all emphasized that no one agency or organization, on its own, can adequately identify and respond to the needs of children who have been or are at risk of being sexually exploited. The many systems in which these children are involved have a shared responsibility to help children achieve and maintain safety, permanency, health and well-being. As one interviewee stated, “We have come to the conclusion that unless we work together, we really are not going to be able to get anywhere.”

Yet cross-systems collaboration is complex and multi-faceted and can ebb and flow over time. When asked about essential elements of effective collaboration, interviewees reinforced the importance of key factors such as understanding each partner’s operations, needs, mandates and competing demands; clear roles and responsibilities; ensuring everyone is on the same page with a shared mission and goals; and cross-systems training on best practices and

“It’s important for us to figure out beyond we’ve got everybody at the table, but what is your specific role in the life of the young person and how can we support one another ... in our role within the young person’s life. And how can we complement services as opposed to all working in our own silo with the child or the family and not knowing what other providers or supports are doing.”

¹¹ For ease of reading, we use “children” to refer to children and youth in this report.

proven interventions to improve outcomes for children who are victims of or are at risk of sex trafficking.

Above all, interviewees stressed the need for open, timely and effective communication among all partner agencies and individuals. As one interviewee noted, “It’s important to have that key communication and do it quickly, communicating anything that might be a challenge. We want to make sure that there’s consistent messaging for the child, consistent understanding of what the child needs.” Interviewees acknowledged, however, that this best practice can be an ongoing challenge. Further, they identified lack of communication as a major barrier to effective collaboration. As another interviewee pointed out, “There’s so many different agencies that get involved with this one child and if people are not communicating, things fall through the cracks. The kids don’t get what they need in order to heal from [trafficking] and move forward and not fall back into it.”

“One of the things that can really create a big barrier for families in having multiple providers in their lives and in their homes is when every time a new provider walks through the door, they have to go through everything they just did with the last provider. As the caregivers and the service providers, the onus is on us to create space where we’re updating each other and we are saying, this is what I did, so that when you go in you can build off that as opposed to making [the children and families] redo it.”

- **Specialty Trafficking Courts Provide an Effective Collaborative Response to Handling Trafficking Cases**

Currently, there is no standardized model of care for addressing the needs of children who have been or are at risk of being sex trafficked. However, specialty trafficking courts are increasingly emerging as an innovative and effective approach to serve the complex and unique needs of these children.¹² Such courts provide a collaborative infrastructure for bringing together all key partners (court, child welfare, social services, attorneys, law enforcement, survivor advocates and services, mental health and other providers, education) to work closely together in a coordinated, integrated and non-adversarial manner to address the complex risk factors and diverse needs of child sex trafficking victims.

As one interviewee explained, “[Our specialty court] was created essentially to pull people out of their various silos.” Another interviewee noted their specialty court brings together “anybody that’s working with the child, all for the common goal of bettering the child and ensuring that we’re addressing any of the child’s needs.” Indeed, the specialty court’s depth and breadth of cross-systems collaboration and its ability to leverage relationships and resources to meet the needs of exploited children help distinguish it from a traditional dependency or juvenile court. The courts are also typically part of a larger county or community trafficking collaborative or task force.

“All of our [specialty court] partners work very well together because they want to be in [the specialty court]. They want to be here. They see that they have the same vision ... to make sure the needs of trafficking victims are being met.”

¹² Bath, E.P., Godoy, S.M., Morris, T.C., Hammond, I., Mondal, S. et al. (2020). A specialty court for U.S. youth impacted by commercial sexual exploitation. *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 100: 104041.

These specialty trafficking courts may operate within the juvenile delinquency or the dependency system. A single presiding judge is assigned to handle all the cases with a dedicated calendar and team to provide a consistent response and relationships for the child. Moreover, specialty courts provide more frequent contact and hearings with children and families, which enables the team to address issues in a more timely and effective manner than traditional dependency or juvenile court. Children and families receive intensive, holistic services and supports for longer than they might in a traditional dependency case, understanding that these children may need longer time to heal. As one interviewee noted, “It takes a little bit longer, especially because human trafficking victims have been exposed to so many layers of trauma.”

All team members are trained in trafficking and trauma-informed, survivor-centered practices to provide a safe, secure and non-punitive environment for the child. Indeed, these courts operate from a vantage point of healing and empowerment and strive to reduce the stigma and shame associated with trafficking. The names of these courts reflect this – for example, Growth Renewed through Acceptance, Change and Empowerment (GRACE) Court; Succeeding through Achievement & Resilience (STAR) Court; and Dedicated to Restoration and Empowerment through Advocacy and Mentoring (DREAM) Court.

“I know not every jurisdiction has a specialized court designated for these children in the foster care system. For us, that made a big difference.... having that specialized court really, really helped us and helped [our GAL] program understand the needs and become very active on these cases.”

With its emphasis on broad cross-systems collaboration, a specialty court provides children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs a prime opportunity to play an active role in addressing trafficking and serves as possible leverage point for increasing their involvement. Among those we interviewed, the involvement of the children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs varied – some of which was a function of whether the court operated within the juvenile delinquency or dependency system. For example, in GRACE Court, the GAL program was a major partner, while in Hope Court, the CASAs were not involved in many cases. In Los Angeles County where they operate two parallel courts, the children’s attorneys are actively involved in representing the child in DREAM Court (on the dependency side), while they participate primarily as an auxiliary attorney in STAR Court (on the juvenile justice side).¹³

Recognizing that not all jurisdictions have a specialized trafficking court or the capacity to implement one, the question becomes what effective practices from these courts can be applied more generally to all collaborative responses to address trafficking? One interviewee cited the value of the court’s focused attention and systemic framework (e.g., more frequent meetings, added layers of review, protocols for having consistent staff, training of all team members on the complexities of trafficking and trauma) and the fact that all team members operate from the same foundational knowledge and recognition that the child needs certain therapeutic services. Another best practice that can be infused in a non-court setting is the multidisciplinary team, which is discussed below.

¹³ If a child has juvenile justice petition, they are in STAR Court and if they have dependency position, they are in DREAM Court. If the child has dual petitions (about 75 percent of the children), they are supervised by both courts, with one of the courts assuming the lead.

- **Multidisciplinary Teams are Key to an Effective Collaborative Response to Trafficking Cases**

Multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) are a nationally recognized, evidence-based practice that many states mandate to address child abuse. It follows that this proven approach would be highly effective for serving child trafficking victims who are involved in multiple systems.¹⁴ Indeed, MDTs align with best practice recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth, which notes, “One of the most important facets of the public health approach [to trafficking] is its focus on multidisciplinary collaboration, which incorporates knowledge and experience from a variety of stakeholders.”¹⁵

“I think the core question is what can be done to make [the MDT] a more effective model within each case.... It’s very challenging for a multidisciplinary team to create unity and collaboration with the consistent turnover from the [child welfare department] and with the lack of experience in this area of newer social workers.... If there were a way to create an endlessly funded model where there was a fully trained Intensive Care Coordinator and parent partner for every family, that would be an amazing step.”

MDTs bring together systems partners spanning the courts, child welfare, law enforcement, legal advocacy, physical and mental health providers, schools and other community-based service providers to regularly (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly) review and discuss cases. Among those we interviewed, the children’s attorneys were regular partners in MDTs to address trafficking cases, while GAL/CASA involvement varied. MDTs may operate a bit differently by jurisdiction and whether it is a juvenile delinquency or dependency case, but most share that common purpose to provide a way for all partners to work together on a case and implement a comprehensive plan to address a child’s various needs. Noted one interviewee: “For us having that [MDT] – in the sense of we have to work together, otherwise it won’t work – really has made a big difference when creating this system that we have in our county [and] sharing the information and respecting everybody’s role.”

The coordinator or facilitator of the meeting may differ by jurisdiction but is often the child welfare agency, child advocacy center or contracted child services agency. Regardless of who is facilitating, the MDTs provide a structure and venue for ongoing communication to discuss any challenges that arise. As one interviewee described, “One of the magic parts of [the specialty] court is that we have MDTs and they happen every week.... Those are the moments that are great, when I can actually hear the social worker talk versus having to go through a million layers of translation. The MDT really is a

“When we moved the MDT into the Child Advocacy Center, [it was] night and day difference for things working. That has been the biggest positive plus. I am the biggest proponent now of incorporating the anti-trafficking work and the CSEC work into Child Advocacy Centers ... instead of trying to recreate the wheel. They have long histories of partnerships talking about child abuse. People are used to coming together in this format. They are all accredited. The protocols, the MOUs, it’s already there.... It’s just so much better, so much cleaner, so much easier working within the Child Advocacy Center than trying to create a whole separate MDT outside of it.”

¹⁴ Epstein, R. & Edelman, P. (2014). *Blueprint: A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Domestic Sex Trafficking of Girls*. Washington, DC: Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law.

¹⁵ National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States. (2020). *Best Practices and Recommendations for States*. Washington, DC: author.

special process. There are all these resources and everyone sits around, ‘Okay, what else can we do?’ and we try to come up with a plan.”

- **Dedicated Units or Specialized Staff Provide Consistent, Experienced Professionals to Handle Trafficking Cases**

Given the complexity and length of trafficking cases, dedicated staff or specialized units help facilitate access to services, increase integrated service delivery, reduce barriers to services, and increase the team’s understanding of trafficking and children’s needs. These can be dedicated units of specially trained children’s attorneys, GAL or CASA volunteers, child welfare case workers or other key staff. They are also a useful strategy to help combat the problem of frequent staff and volunteer turnover, which interviewees identified as a major barrier to effective collaboration to address child sex trafficking (see next overarching theme).

“How do we make things actually systemic so that when so-and-so leaves an organization, a new person from a different organization can outreach to them and they’re like, ‘Oh, we know about this partnership. We know about this relationship. Let’s continue on.’ Instead of, ‘Who are you? Why are you calling? What are you talking about?’ We’re trying to [institutionalize it] at the task force and having that as a place of connection where agencies and organizations can check back in.”

An added benefit is that designated staff obtain expertise on sex trafficking cases because they are, as one interviewee said, “immersed in it.” Staff develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics and complexities of these cases and what needs to happen. Another interviewee talked about the significance of having all their dedicated attorneys, including the parent attorneys, specially trained to handle the sex trafficking cases because “there are certain complexities involved that the average attorney, no matter how good you are, may not be equipped to handle.... The attorneys recognize what these cases need that the average dependency case doesn’t need.” Dedicated or specialized staff can handle cases more efficiently, as they know the various team players and what services the team can access for the children and where. Moreover, having the same attorney, advocate or social worker at every hearing provides a critical level of consistency for the child (see also the next overarching theme).

Selected Examples of Dedicated or Specialized Staff

The key stakeholders we interviewed noted several different ways in they use dedicated or specialized staff, including:

- Dedicated case manager or advocate who is specially trained to deal with trafficking issues and who receives all referrals and facilitates a collaborative team response.
- Specialized child welfare team that only handles human trafficking cases and completes all investigations of reports to the child abuse hotline involving trafficking.
- Dedicated unit of child welfare social workers for trafficking cases
- Dedicated unit of children’s attorneys for child sex trafficking cases
- Dedicated CASA who handles all the county’s child trafficking cases
- Appointed case manager in the specialty court who deals with all the sex trafficking cases in the county.

- **Consistent Staff are Vital in Promoting Cross-Systems Collaboration and Trusting Relationships with Children**

Interviewees repeatedly identified having consistent and adequately trained staff in place as key to collaborative capacity building to effectively serve victims of child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. Staff stability is all the more important in working with these children – not only in promoting more effective collaboration but also in presenting a united front and consistent message to children and gaining their trust.

Any long-term, broad-based collaborative initiative must inevitably deal with staff turnover. Such changes are inherent to the process and the nature of the child welfare, juvenile justice, law enforcement and other professions serving children who have been or are at risk of being trafficked. Indeed, most everyone we interviewed talked about persistent turnover among an array of team members, including child welfare social workers, children’s attorneys, and GAL/CASA volunteers. The global public health pandemic only served to exacerbate the problem. Burnout is a major contributing factor, especially among professionals working with such a specialized and complex population and who struggle with high caseloads and too many children in the system.

Constant staff turnover is a major barrier to effective collaboration and can severely affect a team’s ability to effectively serve children and achieve its desired outcomes. When people unexpectedly or abruptly leave, institutional knowledge often goes missing. Loss of team members and partners at all levels means other team members must backtrack and restart certain conversations—often with new people who may not share the same mission, vision, values and knowledge about child sex trafficking. As one interviewee remarked, “Communication is always the biggest stumbling block for me when I’m serving as a guardian ad litem, especially with the caseworkers [because] there’s so much turnover and you get new caseworkers that don’t know what they’re doing and [won’t talk to you] because they don’t want to talk about [things] that they don’t understand.”

It’s very challenging for a team to create unity and effectively collaborate when it has to rebuild relationships and understanding about the child’s needs and the overall case. Another interviewee described her experience: “The CASA could be on a case for maybe a year and they’ve worked with multiple providers. Although it benefits the child and the youth to have that CASA remain consistent, sometimes it’s difficult for the CASA themselves to really build a relationship with the other service providers if they change.” Moreover, constant turnover at the frontline level can make it difficult to engage and retain children due to changing “faces.”

A key message is that anti-trafficking collaboratives must anticipate staff turnover and do a better job of planning for and managing it upfront. As one interviewee stated, “Burnout is such a huge factor for any of the professionals here. Anyone who is in a training or supervisory role really needs to be ahead of that issue.... You need to factor that in from the beginning.”

Meeting the Needs of Children

- **Survivor-led Services and Mentors are Critical for Engaging and Connecting with Children who are Victims of Sex Trafficking**

A recurring theme among interviewees was the importance and value of having survivor mentors (also referred to as survivor leaders or survivor advocates) on the team. All those we interviewed had integrated survivor mentors and advocates into their service delivery models. Individuals who have lived experience with sexual exploitation (and often child welfare or juvenile justice involvement) are exceptional in connecting and building a trusting relationship with children who have been or are being trafficked – particularly the hardest to reach, including runaways. Interviewees described survivor advocates as “priceless” and a “game changer.”

“A key challenge is maintaining contact with the children, especially if the placement isn’t great or they’re placed somewhere they don’t want to be. That’s where we use our peer advocates. Having people that work with them, surround them, that know what they’ve been through [and] are there for them no matter what, has made a huge difference.”

Survivor mentors tend to be young people (generally women) that the children can relate to and do activities with that they may not feel comfortable doing with other professional staff or GAL/CASA volunteers. This ability to relate to the child in a different way from somebody who does not have that shared history can be critical in engaging children earlier, encouraging retention in services, making them feel safe and developing trust in other professionals. As one interviewee noted, “I think really working with advocates, having people with lived experience, that’s who the youth really open up to. That makes a huge difference when they can see somebody that’s been through what they’ve been through and isn’t judging them.... They’re like, ‘We’ve been in your shoes. We know how difficult this is. Let us walk alongside you.’”

Survivor advocates meet regularly with the children and provide various concrete supports (e.g., picking the child up and taking them out to get food or clothes), as well as emotional support and mentoring. They work closely with the children, helping them through the process. Survivor advocates know the issues, they go to court with the children, to appointments, whatever the children need. They provide ongoing support to the child during the length of their involvement in the child welfare (and juvenile justice) system.

A survivor mentor can not only help address and mitigate the stigma that a child may feel, but also reduce negative attitudes and stigma among agency and community partners toward children who have been sex trafficked. They serve as an important bridge between the children and professionals, building trust in each other and throughout the team. They enhance the support of the other agencies by providing subject matter expertise in trafficking and trauma that is often limited or missing among other team members. Interviewees emphasized the ability of survivor mentors to gather much more information about what is actually happening with the children and educate other team members on how to best respond.

“The girls really respond to the survivor mentors. They are kind of like our guide sometimes. They can give us ideas on what type of treatment or what kind of placement the girls need.”

Interviewees said the biggest challenge they face is a lack of survivor-led services (e.g., too few providers, wait lists). To build capacity, most everyone expressed the need to increase the amount and availability of such services. In exploring ways to enhance and sustain this capacity, anti-trafficking collaborators may want to draw on lessons from the mental health and substance use disorder field, which has long used peer supports, as well as the child welfare system which is increasingly turning to peer mentors. For instance, peer support services are a Medicaid billable expense in some places and under specific conditions.

- **The Lack of Appropriate and Safe Placements for Trafficking Victims is “A Crisis All Across the Country”**

Overwhelmingly, virtually everyone we interviewed cited the lack of appropriate and safe placements as the most predominant, pressing need for victims of child sex trafficking involved in the child welfare system. As one interviewee said, “Placement is a crisis all across the country.” The resources that are available – or not available – is a major challenge.

“We need the entire continuum of care from residential, inpatient to therapeutic foster homes, to independent living. We need all of it for young people. We don’t have enough and when we don’t have enough and young people are bouncing around, they run.”

Existing placements are not appropriate in several ways, according to interviewees. They do not provide the specialized services these children need. Many of the therapeutic models are not designed or effective for this population, given the difficult dynamics and complexities of child sex trafficking cases. Further, certain group home or other settings may be too restrictive and retraumatize some children. As a result, children are languishing in inappropriate places. As one interviewee bluntly stated, “Child welfare is failing on such a profound level to place our kids in safe places.”

Consistent with a 2019 study that documents the disproportionate representation of sexual minority youth in care, interviewees also highlighted the need for training and placements appropriate for LGBTQ+ youth.¹⁶ As the Children’s Bureau points out, “Adolescence is marked by rapid physical development and emotional changes while youth work to develop autonomy and a sense of identity. This period is further complicated by child welfare involvement, which is often associated with changes in social support and placement. Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or another diverse identity (LGBTQ+) are overrepresented in the child welfare system and face several additional complex challenges beyond those typically associated with adolescence, including discrimination and threats to their physical and emotional wellbeing. It is therefore extremely important to understand how to strengthen protective factors and effectively work with this population.”¹⁷

A complicating factor in the placement crisis is the lack of placement staff specifically trained on the dynamics of sex trafficking, the trauma these children have experienced and how to therapeutically respond to these children and their trauma responses. One interviewee explained: “Regular group

¹⁶ Fish, J.M, Beams, L.M., Wojciak, A.S., & Russell, S.T., Are Sexual Minority Youth Overrepresented in Foster Care, Child Welfare, and Out-of-Home Placement? Findings from Nationally Representative Data, *Child Abuse Negl.* 2019 March; 89: 203–211. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7306404/pdf/nihms-1594127.pdf>

¹⁷ “Working with LGBTQ+ Youth and Families.” Child Welfare Information Gateway. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/lgbtq/>. Accessed March 27, 2023.

homes, they just don't understand the trauma and they don't understand why kids are acting out and punish them for it." She went on to say, "When we are forced to place a child in a placement that's not really familiar with the issue, to try to bring staff in a group home up to speed on how to deal with [trafficking and trauma] and with the changing staff and all that, sometimes that's really difficult." Several interviewees mentioned the challenge of staff punishing the children as being a problem because they do not understand that children's behaviors are in fact responses to trauma.

One of the consequences of children placed in inappropriate or unsafe placements is that they often run – and runaways comprise the majority of youth at risk for sexual exploitation. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that one in six runaways are likely sex trafficking victims.¹⁸ Various studies indicate that the percentage of children and youth in foster care who run ranges from 19 to 46 percent.¹⁹ A Washington state study found that approximately 90 percent of youth in child welfare who were identified as being trafficked had at least one runaway episode (compared to 3 percent of the overall child welfare population), with the average being 8.6 runaway episodes. The study also found that these youth experienced an average of 27 living situation disruptions while in the child welfare system, with a disruption occurring on average approximately every 2½ months.²⁰

Some jurisdictions are focusing more on family-based settings. As one interviewee noted, "What we're missing is safe family homes for these kids.... We need great foster parents." Yet, interviewees emphasized that recruiting and retaining enough foster parents to work with this population is a significant challenge. One interviewee conceded, "This is a very challenging area to navigate, and some foster parents do get scared or burnt out. Sometimes they do need some time off and then come back and foster again."

"I've had some wonderful stories of kids going into these homes where we had a specialized curricula for them ... and I saw just tremendous things happen for these kids. But right now, over the last couple years you can't recruit these homes, it's almost impossible.... People are not willing to do it and states are becoming very particular in regard to the foster care programs.... These cases just have all kinds of different dynamics to them."

While the Family First Prevention Services Act offers potential to fund appropriate programs for these children, some professionals are finding the regulations and requirements too cumbersome to take full advantage of this opportunity. Still, interviewees stressed this is an area they are actively working to address and highlighted some worthwhile initiatives (see sidebar, *Working to Provide Appropriate and Safe Placements – Selected Examples from Interviewees*).

¹⁸ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2021). By the Numbers. <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking#bythenumbers>

¹⁹ Latzman, N. E., & Gibbs, D. (2020). *Examining the link: Foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking*. OPRE Report No. 2020-143. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

²⁰ Pullmann, M.D., Roberts, N., Parker, E.M., Mangiaracina, K.J., Briner, L., Silverman, M., & Becker, J.R. (2020). Residential instability, running away, and juvenile detention characterizes commercially sexually exploited youth involved in Washington State's child welfare system. *Child Abuse Negl.* 102:104423.

Working to Provide Appropriate and Safe Placements – Selected Examples from Interviewees

- **The Chance program** (Miami, FL) was created in 2013 and provides specialized therapeutic foster homes that house only one child at a time. “The safe haven gives them the therapeutic space and ... a new environment free from the pressures that put them in the trafficking system in the first place.” The model not only provides the child with one-on-one contact with a fully trained foster parent, but also mitigates the problem of peer recruitment. Therapists provide therapeutic services twice a week (more if needed). Children benefit from targeted case management as well as psychiatric services when needed. “When we put a child in those homes, they usually stay there for over a year which for us is very successful because it shows that [they are] doing well, not running away, and they truly benefit from that one-to-one attention.” There are currently 11 of these homes in Miami-Dade County that have been licensed as safe foster homes.
- **Doors to Freedom** (Richland County, SC) is a long-term placement facility that takes 20 to 30 children at any given time. They provide a host of wraparound services, including in-house counseling, life skills training and a job program that enables the youth to earn money while at the group home that they can spend on housing or other needs when they leave. The group home also has its own school so the children can do their education there while also receiving the other services. Unfortunately, it is currently the only specialized group home in the state for trafficking victims.
- **Missing from Care locators** (Washington) are specially trained, full-time social workers (employed by the Department of Children, Youth and Families) who do not carry a standard caseload like a normal child welfare social worker. Their entire job is to find children who are missing from care, usually trafficked young people. They spend all their time connecting with the community to locate these children and youth. Each of the six DCYF regions has one or two of these locators, depending on their community’s needs.
- **Placement Pilot Program** (California). The state’s 2022-2023 spending plan includes \$25 million to develop and implement innovative placement pilot programs that include prevention, intervention and services for youth who have been victims of sex trafficking or who are at risk of becoming victims. Program attributes must include: 1) intensive services using trauma informed practices and harm reduction strategies, 2) specialized trainings for caregivers, families and other support people, 3) peer and survivor mentors or support groups, 4) support from a secondary caregiver to provide mentoring and respite when needed, and 5) the availability of a “soft space” to serve youth who are otherwise missing from care or are not yet ready to be served by existing placement structures.

- **To Effectively Serve Children Requires Trafficking-Specific Services and an Individualized Approach**

Hand in hand with the lack of appropriate and safe placements, interviewees cited an overall lack of trafficking-specific services and resources to effectively serve this population as a glaring unmet need. They identified the following services in particular: survivor-led services, substance use and

co-occurring disorder treatment specifically for this population, and services and supports to help youth transition out of the systems. CASA/GAL survey respondents agreed: 62.5 percent (n=24) identified lack of services and resources as one of the top unmet needs. Having adequate resources to provide the services and interventions these children need is critical to an effective collaborative response.

Interviewees cited long waitlists for those limited providers that do exist as well as provider difficulty with hiring and retaining an adequate number of appropriately trained staff. As one interviewee noted, “Sometimes you might find a resource but the wait list to be able to go to that provider might be lengthy and sometimes a child doesn’t really have the time to wait for service, especially when it comes to behavioral health or mental health services.”

“Everyone is tapped out. There’s not enough resources across the board, particularly in the direct service realm.... Some organizations are at waitlist capacity.... We’re planning on having a conversation in the next couple weeks about triaging referrals. If we’re all referring young people and there’s not enough advocacy for all the young people, who gets helped first – and that’s a horrible conversation to have to have, that’s awful.”

Those we talked to pointed to some larger systems issues, such as a lack of sustainable funding and the general inflexibility and bureaucracy of the systems that serve children and families as contributing to the problem. For example, one interviewee stated, “We’ll have a therapist and the child will be moved and because of the agencies and different policies and where the kid is placed, therapy falls off and then we have to start over again. That has been a huge issue.” Another interviewee expressed a similar experience, noting, “The fact that mental health services for the kids are tied to where they’re living is a problem because these kids don’t tend to stay in one place. We can’t expect them to be making meaningful relationships with therapists every three months when they move, that’s just not realistic.... There’s got to be a way for the mental health services to be run independent of where the child is living.”

“There are certain parts of the way the child welfare system is set up everywhere ... that make it very hard to be responsive to kids in crisis, before the crisis blows up, as you see it ramping up.”

Moreover, as every child’s situation, circumstances and needs may differ, interviewees stressed the need to apply an individualized, tailored approach. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. As one interviewee explained, “Some of [the services and supports] are very cookie-cutter, like ‘Oh you’ve been exploited, so we need to do A, B and C.’ I think we need to be looking at more of an individualized approach.” Another interviewee echoed this sentiment: “The action plans are very much cut and paste from family to family. They’re not focused on the individual needs of the family.... The system as I see it does not serve children who are in trafficking situations effectively.”

One specialty court interviewee noted that the team sets different goals for different children and celebrates success for each child in a different way, recognizing that each child’s struggle is different and “what’s noteworthy for one child may be par for the course for another child.”

- **Importance of Building a Meaningful Relationship with Children and Youth**

Children who have been sex trafficked have histories of complex trauma, often distrust the systems designed to serve them due to prior negative experiences and have typically adopted survival coping strategies that may make working with them challenging. As one interviewee explained, “They have been told through a number of actions in their lives that people are not to be trusted. So, one of the hardest things about getting help for children who have been trafficked is getting them to trust you in the first place. Who are they going to trust?”

“Learning to trust the kids and developing that trust, which is very difficult and done on a case-by-case basis, is probably the biggest challenge. And for some kids, it can take a long, long time.... I don’t think you really can connect with the kids until you’ve developed that trust. I think you do that through having the same professionals involved all the time, not changing them. You do that by seeing the kids frequently, by being available to the kids on occasions other than 9-to-5 type thing.... That obviously takes a huge commitment from the professionals in the system.”

In addition, their diverse needs may vary and evolve throughout the process of leaving “the life.”²¹ These factors underscore the need to build a strong relationship with children who have been trafficked and to take the long view when working with them. Building rapport is so important because, as one interviewee noted, “There have been plenty of cases where you can say all the right buzzwords and things, but if that young person doesn’t trust you or doesn’t feel like you understand them or that you’re coming from a genuine place, then the wall is still there. I have seen that play out over and over and over again.”

Further, because children and youth who have been trafficked often do not self-identify as victims or ask for services, the collaborative response needs to meet youth where they are. Noted one interviewee: “One of our biggest barriers is when the children don’t realize that there’s a problem ... or they don’t want to [or] don’t understand why they have to receive therapy. Sometimes they’re therapied out.... The child just doesn’t want to do it and sometimes for us that becomes a barrier on being able to deliver what we know they need.” To promote children’s recovery, the professionals working with them need to strike a balance between helping them recognize that they are in fact a survivor of a crime and treating them with respect and an appropriate degree of autonomy.²²

Part of the relationship-building is really listening to the children, as they know best what they need and when. Indeed, this was a key lesson that interviewees would share with other jurisdictions. Regarding one of the most important ways to strengthen our response to sex trafficking, one interviewee noted: “All the professionals need to be open to the fact that the kids are experts in their own lives and to get away from the idea that we know best because we’re the adults.” Another interviewee agreed, stating, “Sometimes we do have to learn to step back and just wait

“The message to kids, in my experience, is always you need to do this or you need to do that and so then they don’t show up ... to their support services or to their programs or the little safe place that they had found. And so we lose them all together.”

²¹ Epstein, R. and Edelman, P. (2014). *Blueprint: A multidisciplinary approach to domestic sex trafficking of girls*. Washington, DC: Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law.

²² *ibid*

for a child to be ready.... For us, that has been a learning curve. We have to wait for them and let them know we're here when you're ready. We're here, we're not going anywhere."

Addressing Larger Systems Issues

In moving forward and thinking about how we collectively can strengthen our collaborative response to identify, prevent and respond to child sex trafficking among the child welfare population, interviewees identified several systems-level areas ripe for improvement.

- **Increased Focus is Needed on Prevention and Early Intervention and Expanding Outreach to the At-Risk Population**

"Kids who are system-involved are not held at a value level where there's enough attention placed on this that there's consistent funding to fund organizations that can collaborate and work together to intentionally support and provide comprehensive resources to kids who are at risk of and involved in trafficking and track [them]."

Interviewees stressed there is such a fine line between children who are being sexually exploited and those who are at risk and on the verge of being sexually exploited that we need to work with all of them. For children who are in the child welfare (or juvenile) system, this includes putting supports in place for children when they are young. These children have suffered abuse, neglect and trauma that led to their system involvement in the first place. They are then further traumatized in a foster care system plagued by instability and uncertainty, putting them at increased risk for victimization.

For children who are not involved in the system, we need to do a better job of identifying and reaching out to them "upstream" to provide them with community-based services and supports to keep them from falling through the cracks. As one interviewee pointed out, "Here's a young person who would clearly benefit from [having a GAL or CASA] and they're not connected because there isn't the underlying legal mechanism in place to get them connected."

The approach may differ somewhat for the two populations. In Los Angeles County, for example, they developed separate curriculums for working with children who are already being trafficked and those at-risk of being trafficked, recognizing the message is somewhat different for the two groups. As one interviewee noted, "We've got a pretty good handle on when we have a youth who has been exploited or is being exploited, we know the steps we need to take. The at-risk [children] can be a little trickier. What supports can we surround you with? What extracurricular activities can we get you involved in? What can we start educating your family about? And those are tricky conversations."

"I've had plenty of clients who were not trafficked when they were 12, and they've been in the system since they were 10, but we get to age 14 and they are [trafficked].... There are a lot of cases where it was not happening and the inception of the trafficking is while the child is in care. I do feel that ... being in the system puts them at profound risk."

Interviewees agreed that the larger community, including parents and the schools, needs to play a role in earlier identification and intervention with at-risk children. The challenge, as one interviewee identified, is "How do we build stronger alignment between community organizations that are supporting youth and families and create real grassroots systems that can support the young people directly, ideally without having them become involved in the systems."

- **Widespread Community and Partner Awareness About Trafficking and a Shift Away from Criminalization and Punishment is an Ongoing Need**

The predominant feeling among those interviewed is that a significant amount of education and training is still needed to increase awareness among communities and certain cross-systems partners about the prevalence of trafficking, what it really looks like, its many factors and complexities, and how it adversely affects children in both the short- and long-term. In a recent discussion with several CASA programs, one stakeholder concluded: “I think the most important thing we’ve learned was to stop being naïve and recognize trafficking is happening everywhere—small towns, big cities, boys, girls, 4-year-olds, 20-year-olds.”²³

“There needs to be earlier intervention with these kids. If you make a relationship with these kids when they’re 6, then you’re not going to have as much of a problem when they’re 12.... For people who are victims of sex abuse, [sexual exploitation] is a very foreseeable outcome and that should be on everybody’s mind, even if they’re just 3 years old. There’s a role that both the community and the schools could take to interact earlier with these kids.”

One interviewee acknowledged that while there have been efforts to educate the community in recent years, we need to “take it to the next level of dedication from the community to really understand it and really be a part of the movement to address trafficking.”

“Society as a whole [needs] to see our survivors as more than just a collection of behaviors or a collection of ‘bad acts’ and really take the time to peel back the layers and figure out how we got to this point.”

This lack of general awareness is considered a major barrier to an effective collaborative response. As one interviewee so aptly stated, “It still feels like once you get out of the people directly doing the work, there is a lack of education, a lack of awareness and a lack of belief.... There’s a big part of the community that feels like, that doesn’t happen here, and so it acts as a barrier to increasing visibility and being able to have communities that are really aware of the

complexities that go into trafficking.” Goldfarb and Bouchard (2020) refer to the problem of “the invisible nature of CSEC and the collective misconceptions” among people, which can become harmful for victims seeking support, especially when they are prevalent within the systems set up to help these children.²⁴

Interviewees cited other partners’ lack of understanding as a major barrier to effective cross-systems collaboration and communication. At the partner level, an important facet of increased awareness is the need to move away from continued criminalization (arresting, detaining, charging and prosecuting minors for prostitution offenses) of children who have been sex trafficked. State laws regarding non-criminalization vary. Currently, 27 states and the District of Columbia have non-criminalization laws in place that remove criminal liability for

“As a system, we continue to criminalize young people who are at risk of trafficking. We continue to focus on the behavior and what they’re doing wrong and how they need to change fill-in-the-blank, without really recognizing and giving value to the experiences that they’ve had that have led them there.”

²³ Texas CASA Association (2021). “Five Things CASA Volunteers Should Know and Do to Fight Child Trafficking.”

²⁴ Goldfarb, S. and Bouchard, E. (2020). Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) program. In *Child Trafficking Victims: Approaches for Prosecutors and their Multidisciplinary Team Members*. Washington, DC: Association of Prosecuting Attorneys.

child and youth sex trafficking victims.²⁵ A punitive approach only fuels the stigma and shame that these children experience. The majority of those we interviewed expressed frustration that certain partners, particularly law enforcement and group homes, still criminalize and punish these children for their exploitation. There remains an ongoing need for a cultural and mindset shift. At least one jurisdiction we talked to is trying to move away from the term CSEC. “We see that if they’ve been labeled [as CSEC], that certain placements won’t take them. We want to properly identify, but not put this label that’s so detrimental on them. We need a lot of education.”

Several interviewees noted how children may be seen as manipulative, combative or defiant, when they are in fact exhibiting normal trauma responses. As a result, these children can be castoff as a behavior problem rather than engaged as a survivor of trafficking. As one interviewee described, “There are some who don’t fully understand why someone in a group home will be recruiting other children in that home. Staff don’t fully understand why that’s happening and try to blame that one child, even though that’s still a child and they’re probably doing it to protect themselves.”

Interviewees also pointed to the problem of law enforcement and other partners who feel that detention should still be a tool for safety. The collaborative partners, as one interviewee remarked, need to “reimagine how we help these young people.” Another interviewee said working with law enforcement and community-based organizations on alternative responses was critical in their jurisdiction, “because it wasn’t enough just to say, you can’t arrest.” They needed to have a culture shift among law enforcement and others “who felt like their hands were tied, who were like, ‘But we see something happening and the only way we think we can have that youth be safe is to lock them up or to get them off the street and what can we do?’” (See also Section D. Major Training and Education Needs.)

“One of the things that I think would make a significant difference is if there were a way to get all the parties involved on the same page, with the same knowledge as it relates to trafficking.... We all spoke a different language. It was very hard to bring us together to have one conversation and very hard to get one approach or strategic approach accepted and moved forward.”

²⁵ Shared Hope International (2022). Safe Harbor Laws. Available at: <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SafeHarborMapDec2022.pdf>

C. Children's Attorneys, GALs and CASAs – A Valued Resource

This section focuses more specifically on the role of the children's attorneys, GALs and CASAs, some of the challenges they face and how we might strengthen their differing roles to help address child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. This section begins with a brief description of the roles that children's attorneys and CASAs play in child welfare cases generally, to provide important context. We then highlight the value and opportunity that these systems partners can bring in responding to child sex trafficking more specifically, as well as some key challenges they face in doing so. We conclude this section with interviewees' suggestions for how children's attorneys and CASAs can strengthen their involvement as key stakeholders in collaborative efforts to identify, prevent and respond to child sex trafficking among the child welfare population.

Survey Says...

To what extent does your GAL/CASA caseload include children who have experienced sex trafficking or are at risk of being trafficked?

- ◆ Great deal: 17.9%
- ◆ Moderate amount: 28.2%
- ◆ Occasionally: 35.9%
- ◆ Rarely: 12.8%
- ◆ Never: 5.1%

A Word About the Differing Roles of Attorneys for Children and CASA Volunteers

While a child in the child welfare system may have both an attorney and a CASA volunteer at some point during a case, the roles of each are very different. Although much could be written about these roles, for this project, a brief summary here is sufficient. Attorneys provide legal representation for children, with most states requiring or permitting either legal best interests representation (often titled guardians ad litem) or client-directed representation (which may require the attorney to provide best interests representation if the child is unable to form judgments and direct representation). Attorneys generally are required to maintain client confidences and owe a duty of loyalty to their client.

CASA volunteers do not provide legal representation. While their responsibilities can vary by state and county, they are often appointed to assist the court by conducting independent interviews, meeting with the child regularly and making a recommendation to the court as to the child's best interest. In some states or counties, they are appointed as guardians ad litem. CASA programs do not exist in all counties.

The Strengths that Children's Attorneys, GALs and CASAs Bring to Collaborative Efforts

With their respective roles, children's attorneys, GALs and CASA volunteers can help respond to the needs of children who are victims of or at risk of sex trafficking. Interviewees indicated they can:

- Build a trusting and consistent relationship with the child – which is instrumental in identifying sex trafficking as well as establishing a line of communication if a child runs or is in an unsafe situation.
- Advocate for and connect children to critical resources and services – to address children's

"The role of the attorneys (and the CASAs) is the same as everyone in the system's role: You need to be trying to make a real connection with the kids because that's when the kids will start to trust you and listen to you.... The good players, regardless of what their role is in this system, are the ones that are willing to invest in the kids. That means being with them when they were in the ER and also when they are graduating from high school, just being as accessible as possible regardless of the situation the kid is in."

immediate, short-term needs as well as establish ongoing, long-term supports that are needed after the case closes. This includes, as one children’s attorney stated, “pointing out when the system is failing the kids.” Another interviewee concurred: “Every time we go to court and there is a child lingering or in an appropriate placement, we can, and we do bring it to the court’s attention.”

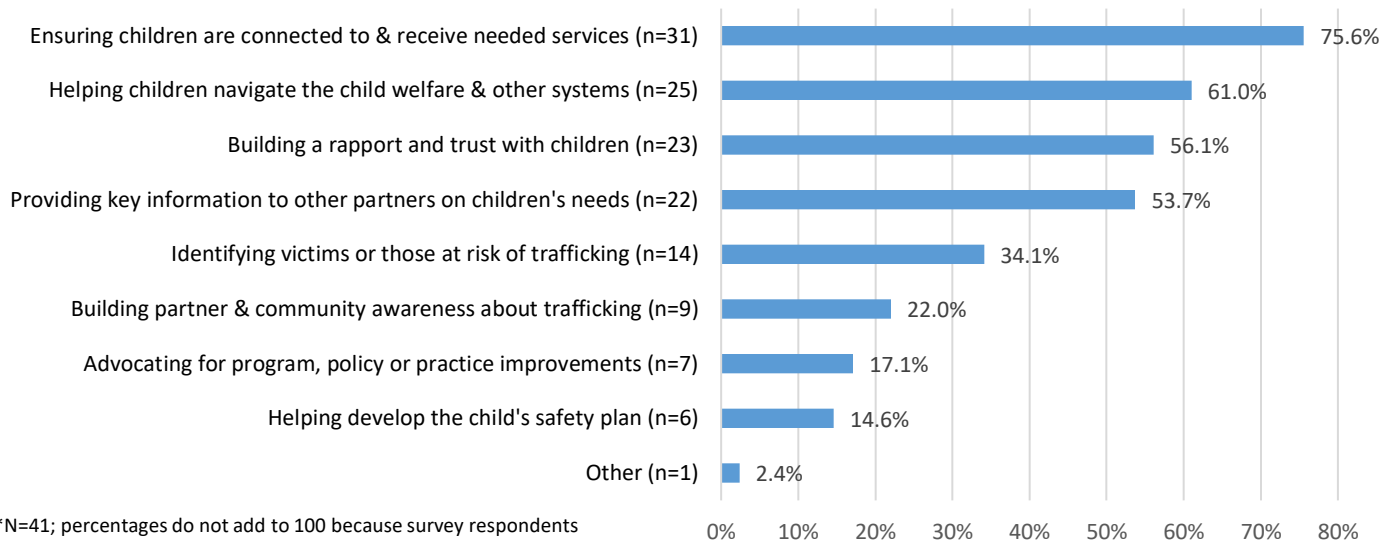
- Provide important knowledge and insights to the larger team – which is vital to inform the court’s decision making and service orders, and promote a comprehensive, coordinated response. CASA volunteers are, as one interviewee said, “boots on the ground,” able to see the child outside of the court in various contexts and settings (e.g., home, foster home, community, school). In doing so, they provide essential insight and input into what the child may need.

Among those we interviewed, the extent of GAL/CASA involvement varied by jurisdiction, the collaborative infrastructure that was in place and the experience and knowledge of the individual GAL/CASA. For the most part, though, GAL/CASA volunteers were not involved on every trafficking case. In some jurisdictions, the lead agency or core team members directly reach out and involve GALs/CASAs or the court may appoint them. In others, it seems to be up to the GAL/CASA to take the initiative and responsibility to get involved in a case if they are interested. For example, one interviewee commented, “There are some GALs that are particularly in tune with various risk factors and may alert you or say, ‘Hey, I want to have a meeting to talk about these particular issues.’”

“With these really hard cases, it takes a very unique CASA. The CASA who can manage the 7-year-old boy who we need to help with speech therapy and getting karate lessons is just different than the kid who’s going to call you 14 times in a night telling you that her trafficker is about to kill her, and you better get her an uber. It’s just a different skill set.”

As Figure A below shows, GAL/CASA survey respondents echoed much of what we heard in the interviews regarding the key roles that these volunteers play in addressing child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. Overall, interviewees stressed the importance of providing adequate specialized training and support to GAL/CASA volunteers. As one CASA stakeholder remarked, “It does come with a different type of knowledge scope than a general case we might assign a CASA. Having them be fully trained to be able to identify red flags, accurately ask questions without judgment and shame, and respond appropriately to the children is very important.”

Figure A: Primary Role of CASA/GAL Volunteers in Addressing Child Sex Trafficking Among the Child Welfare Population*



Key Challenges Attorneys, GALs and CASAs Face in Responding to Child Sex Trafficking Cases

Interviewees pointed to a few fundamental and universal key challenges that children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs alike face in adequately responding to child sex trafficking:

- Lack of Adequate Staff Support.** As stated earlier, lack of adequate staff is a major barrier to collaboration and carrying out their roles effectively. Interviewees said they need more GAL/CASA volunteers that are interested and willing to work on child sex trafficking cases, and also adequately trained to do so. One interviewee added: “The GALs being incredible points of connection to services means that they also must spend their time – which they don’t have – to identify and build relationships with organizations so they know what the organizations do, they know the people who work there and trust them and are then able to make that connection. So, again, we need more of them so that they have more time to dedicate to each case.”

“In terms of the attorney playing a holistic role, one challenge is definitely vicarious trauma.... When you’re spending a lot of time, every day on the phone with kids who are in just profound crisis, I think vicarious trauma can happen.... How do we set boundaries, so this doesn’t happen? How do we support attorneys in every way we need to, so they have breaks and rest and rejuvenation? One of the hardest parts is the emotional toll that it takes because if you’re going to be there for these kids, what they require is you need to be there all the time and that’s not possible.”

- Lack of Available Services and Resources.** As discussed in the overarching themes, the overall lack of services is a major unmet need facing children who are victims of sex trafficking. Interviewees noted that this gap hampers their ability to connect children to needed services, which is one of their primary roles. Stated one interviewee: “We are, by definition of our positions, temporary in a young person’s life. We might be able to provide support right now, but we’re temporary. So how do we get long-term community-based connections?”

- Challenges in Building Relationships with Children and Youth.** Interviewees talked in general about how building trust and establishing a relationship with children and youth is a long and slow process. Developing a relationship and maintaining contact with children and youth can be even more challenging in certain circumstances. For example, one CASA volunteer said it is especially challenging “if you are appointed a case where the young person is already on the run or not consistently accessible. When the young person is already in a really high-risk situation that can be a huge barrier.”

“One of the hardest things about getting help for children who have been trafficked is getting them to trust you in the first place. Who are they going to trust? It only takes one person. You need to get one foot in, but it’s hard to trust if you’ve been traumatized in the way that they have.”

How One Initiative Builds Trust with Children

In one jurisdiction, the attorneys, social workers and probation would plan empowerment events for the children (e.g., horseback riding, ceramics, self-defense class) that exposed them to new activities and allowed them to interact with the professionals and the system in a less formal way. “From the perspective of the professionals in the system, it was great because it was very revitalizing to us because it was a way to see the kids when you didn’t have to discipline them.... It was just a really good, positive way to interact with the kids.”

Additional Challenges Unique to Children’s Attorneys

- Coordinating with Prosecutors and Public Defenders.** While many partners in cross systems collaboration are working toward the same overall goals with respect to child sex trafficking, there are times when a specific step may be at odds with what the child would like or what the GAL determines is in the child’s best interest. The role of the child’s attorney, whether as a best interest or client-directed attorney may require negotiating with some partners to protect the child’s expressed or best interests. Interviewees indicated that children’s dependency attorneys are particularly good at dealing with either prosecutors or public defenders involved in related criminal or juvenile prosecutions. This can be critical to providing needed services to these children. As one interviewee stated, “We’ve had a couple issues where public defenders have restricted kids from getting services because they’re afraid the kids are going to disclose information that then will be turned and used against them, and that’s never happened.... It’s like we have this little window to put some services in place for this kid before they take off again and the public defender fights it. Then there’s no intervention and we lose that kid again.”
- Communicating with Child Welfare Social Workers.** Communication between attorneys and social workers can be problematic. A lack of understanding about the role of a children’s attorney was noted as an impediment to cross-systems collaboration. As one attorney stakeholder stated, “One of the biggest obstacles we face is a lack of understanding [about our respective roles].” In one jurisdiction, children’s attorneys cannot speak directly with social workers without county counsel present. This barrier, the interviewee indicated, slowed the exchange of information and made collaboration much more difficult.

- **Managing a Child’s Best Interests and Stated Interests.** While acting in the child’s stated interest may be the attorney’s primary and most important role, it can sometimes be a source of tension in sex trafficking cases when trying to manage what is in the child’s best interest. One interviewee who has worked as both a GAL and the children’s appointed attorney said, “The big difference is now as attorneys our role is to advocate for what the child wants. As GALs, our role was to tell the court what we thought was in the child’s best interest. That’s a huge shift... Now, if the children don’t want or refuse services, we have to advocate for what they want. They can also tell us things which we are required to keep confidential because we have the attorney client privilege. As GAL, we did not have that.”

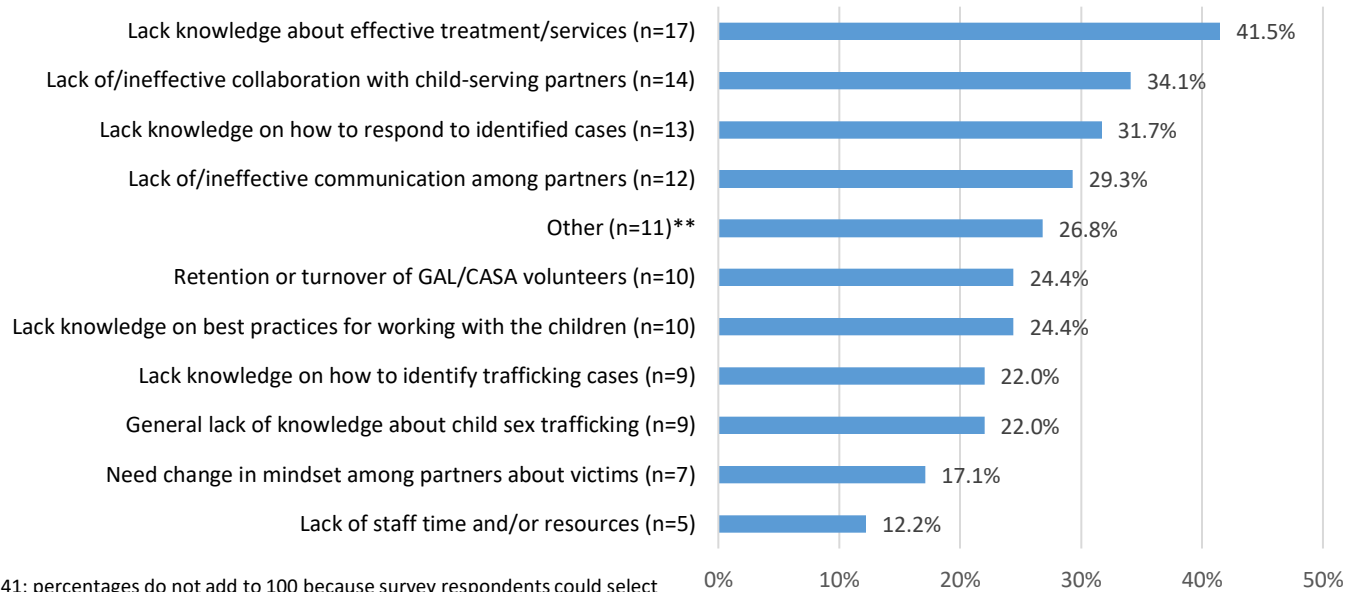
“Hopefully we can explain to the clients why it’s important to do certain things and hopefully they will buy into it. But if they don’t want to do something, our job is to tell the court what it is they do not want.... It’s a hard position sometimes.... It’s talking to them, being honest with them, and then also encouraging them to get therapy or services, suggesting different options.”

“I think [the role of the children’s attorneys] is very much up for debate. The understanding has been that lawyers should do the legal advocacy in court and social workers should handle all the services and placement. But when we started doing our CSEC work, the idea was you’re not just going to be that kind of attorney because a youth who has been trafficked doesn’t need some due process cog in the wheel to just say hi to them every 6 months when you have a hearing. That’s not going to work.... Our role can be not only to be an attorney, but to also do more holistic work where we’re looking at every area in which the child has a need, not just in the courtroom, but outside as well. The problem is that sometimes runs straight into what the social worker’s trying to do.... I’ve been trained that we should go over and above and be representing the children holistically, but I’m understanding the tension there.”

Additional Challenges that GAL/CASA Volunteers Face

As Figure B below shows, GAL/CASA survey respondents also identified ineffective collaboration and communication with other partners as primary challenges in carrying out their roles. They also pointed to a lack of knowledge about effective treatment services for children who are victims of sex trafficking as a major barrier.

Figure B: Primary Challenges that CASA/GAL Volunteers Face in Carrying Out Their Roles to Address Child Sex Trafficking Among the Child Welfare Population*



*N=41; percentages do not add to 100 because survey respondents could select top 3 challenges

** Other included various challenges related to services, children and youth, and attorneys and the courts.

How to Better Leverage and Strengthen the Role of the Children’s Attorney and GAL/CASA Volunteers to Address Child Sex Trafficking

Throughout this report, we have highlighted many actions that interviewees felt would strengthen the role of children’s attorneys and GAL/CASA volunteers in addressing child sex trafficking and enhance cross-systems collaboration more broadly. These include, for example, increasing available services and resources for victims of child sex trafficking, improving communication between agency partners, and resolving larger systems barriers that prevent a coordinated and effective response. Beyond these actions, interviewees posed two other recommendations:

- Get involved at both the case level and the larger community level.** Interviewees suggested GAL/CASA volunteers should proactively learn more about child sex trafficking and get involved in existing MDTs (or similar collaborative case planning meetings), noting their active participation will benefit the children they serve. Interviewees also urged children’s attorneys and GAL/CASA volunteers to become part of the various anti-trafficking efforts in their community or jurisdiction. One interviewee recounted how she took the initiative to regularly attend various task force meetings to not only explain their collaborative

Survey Says...

How involved are you and/or your state or local GAL/CASA association in any initiatives at either the local, state or national level to address child sex trafficking?

- ◆ Very/extremely: 14.1%
- ◆ Moderately: 36.6%
- ◆ Slightly: 34.1%
- ◆ Not at all: 14.1%

project’s goals regarding child sex trafficking among the child welfare population, but also to offer her assistance to the different task forces. “That opened their eyes to see that our team from the foster care system can actually be very beneficial and assist with a lot of their investigations.”

As one GAL/CASA interviewee who chairs their county’s task force stated, “Having that voice of the victim represented within our task force is really important because you can read stories all day long about trafficking, but it’s not the same until you get to know that person intimately and hear their story. Every victim has different needs and to truly represent that, if you’re not talking to victims, there’s no way to make sure you’re doing the right things.”

Among the survey respondents, one CASA stakeholder said their CASA Director of Public Policy is the board president of a regional Coalition Against Human Trafficking, and also sits on the governor’s/county’s Child Advocacy Center MDT advisory board, the Mayor’s Office Advisory Board and the Office of Attorney General’s anti-trafficking task force.

Their program also created a CASA-focused anti-trafficking training that is used to train CASAs across the state, and which may be expanded nationwide. One of the children’s attorneys noted their staff are members of the Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, while they personally are a member of the State Expert Committee on Child Abuse, Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking. The attorneys also regularly consult with statewide and local partners, provide community education and outreach, and engage in policy research and advocacy.

- **Build staff capacity and capabilities.** Interviewees identified three specific ways to build overall staff capacity. First is ramping up the sheer number of staff – for example, ensuring there are enough GAL/CASA volunteers available and willing to work these cases, as well as more case managers for the children’s attorneys who can work with the child welfare social workers. Interviewees then stressed the need for more training and ongoing training to increase understanding and knowledge of child sex trafficking, so staff and volunteers feel confident working on these cases. Indeed, 43.5% of GAL/CASA survey respondents agreed, citing training and education as one of the most important ways to strengthen their role in addressing child sex trafficking. One survey respondent suggested, for instance, that interested CASA volunteers could complete specialized trafficking training to become recognized “experts,” so that when trafficking cases arise, these experts could be assigned to the case to ensure proper handling. (The next section in this report discusses priority training needs further.)

“I think that CASAs don’t have the knowledge or the skills when they come into that position. Making sure that advocates are trained on the complexities of trafficking and have the tools they need to advocate and understand the different roles of the partners ... would be really helpful for CASAs to be able to show up more effectively in trafficking cases.”

Finally, interviewees said it was critical to provide children’s attorneys and GAL/CASA volunteers who are working on child sex trafficking cases with adequate practical and emotional support. One interviewee appealed to the CASA program “to really support the CASAs in feeling like they have a place at the table ... and encouraging them to step into that central role of facilitating communication among the team and ensuring the supports identified for the young person are being followed through on.” Another interviewee expressed the need “to really continue to support each other with a lot of compassion and a lot of love. I think sometimes we miss that and that’s really what we need.”

“Be part of the conversation. Attend meetings, attend trainings.... But to do that, attorneys need to have support from their management and supervisors. Are we giving them the time and the capacity to really engage or are there caseloads ridiculously overwhelming?”

D. Major Training and Education Needs

Repeatedly, interviewees expressed the importance of adequate training and education to strengthen the role of the children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs to meet the needs of children who have been sex trafficked, and also to work with the other partners more effectively.

Most child welfare, court, legal, law enforcement, advocacy and other professionals who work with victims of child abuse and neglect receive extensive training and education on how to work with the

child welfare population in general. However, as child sex trafficking was only recently and officially defined as a type of child abuse and neglect, child sex trafficking has not been a standard or required part of most professionals’ training. The landscape is changing, as more jurisdictions are instituting initiatives to address child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. Increased and widespread training is often a fundamental aspect of capacity-building efforts.²⁶

Still, there is an overwhelming feeling that more training is essential – and it needs to be ongoing because of frequent agency and service provider staff turnover as well as the evolving and changing nature of trafficking. “Training is crucial and it’s not just the one and done.... It really needs to be a commitment to ongoing training.”

“My personal philosophy is that literally every aspect of society needs training. And so, until we are at that point, there’s still a lot of work to be done. But at a minimum, all child serving organizations or people that are working with children need training.”

Moreover, those we interviewed cited a gap in skill-based training. They would like advanced trainings that go into more depth about how to apply their foundational knowledge and practice specific skills (such as motivational interviewing or how to respond in various scenarios) when working with victims or survivors of child sex trafficking. Several interviewees felt they had a solid understanding of how to identify children who have been or are being sex trafficked, but they needed more information and guidance on next steps after identification. This includes how to initiate and manage a conversation with children and youth around difficult topics (such as having sex for money or sexual assault) in an appropriate, engaging and non-triggering way. Survey respondents agreed this was a gap: 60.0 percent cited ways to engage and work with children who have been trafficked as a priority training need, while 57.5 percent called for training on how to best support survivors of child sex trafficking (see Figure C at the end of this section).

At a high level, interviewees also identified a need for cross-systems training and education. One CASA interviewee, for example, wanted training on how a case is handled within the law enforcement (police) and child welfare systems, specifically, “what to look out for, what to ask for, what to be wary of.” Another interviewee stressed the need to train other partners on what attorneys are supposed to do. “If we just really understood each other’s job responsibilities, I think that could be helpful.”

GAL/CASA Survey Says...

How much, if any, training have you received on child sex trafficking?

- ◆ A great deal: 30.0%
- ◆ A moderate amount: 25.0%
- ◆ Some: 15.0%
- ◆ A little: 22.5%
- ◆ None: 11.1%

²⁶ An exhaustive search and cataloguing of existing training at the local, state and national levels was beyond the scope of this project.

Those we interviewed also highlighted some more specific training topics requiring further attention:

- **Familial trafficking and multi-generational cycles.** One interviewee, for example, noted anecdotally that in about 90% of her more serious child sex trafficking cases, the caregiver (generally the mother) was also in “the life.” Her colleague noted they are also seeing cases where the older sibling is first trafficked and then a year or two later, the younger siblings come to the attention of child welfare for trafficking.
- **Gang-involved trafficking,** which one interviewee described as very location-specific and, similar to trafficking in general, always rapidly changing. Further, recruitment of sex trafficking victims by gangs can occur in several different ways.²⁷ Shared Hope International reported gangs are involved in human smuggling, human trafficking or prostitution-related activity in at least 35 states.²⁸
- **Social media and online exploitation.** In addition to training children’s attorneys and GAL/CASA volunteers on trafficking and technology, interviewees stressed the importance of training parents, children and the schools about online sexual exploitation – what it looks like and how at-risk children are given their extensive involvement in social media. As one interviewee stated, “Educating kids so they’re more aware of where they might be getting pulled [into trafficking] is essential for preventing trafficking in the first place.” In one jurisdiction we interviewed, the child welfare agency is working to ensure that in every child protective services investigation, whether or not there is an allegation of trafficking, the social worker has a conversation with the child about their social media use and asks them if anyone has ever asked them for pictures or sent them pictures, so they are not missing any children who have been sexually exploited, are in the process of being exploited or are at risk of victimization.
- **Available community resources.** Understanding the different community services and resources that are available and appropriate for children who have been sex trafficked is important, as one CASA stakeholder pointed out, so that when CASAs are providing recommendations in their court report, they can specifically say, “This kid needs trauma focused counseling, especially for sexual trauma,” or “My kid needs dialectical behavioral therapy.”
- **Serving specific populations** – in particular, transgender youth, boys and persons of color, who may be particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. As one interviewee remarked, “When you look at the numbers, especially for the sub-populations, identification is definitely an issue. Are we really seeing and reaching all the youth

“We often think of terms of individuals and fail to grasp the family systems and community systems that cause trafficking to reoccur over multiple generations. A reframing of trafficking away from individuals, and towards interrupting multi-generational trauma would be so helpful.”

“I think one piece that goes without saying... there is a huge racial component here, in terms of pure institutionalized racism.... I think it's really important to talk to attorneys and providers ... [about] the overrepresentation specifically of African American kids in this population.”

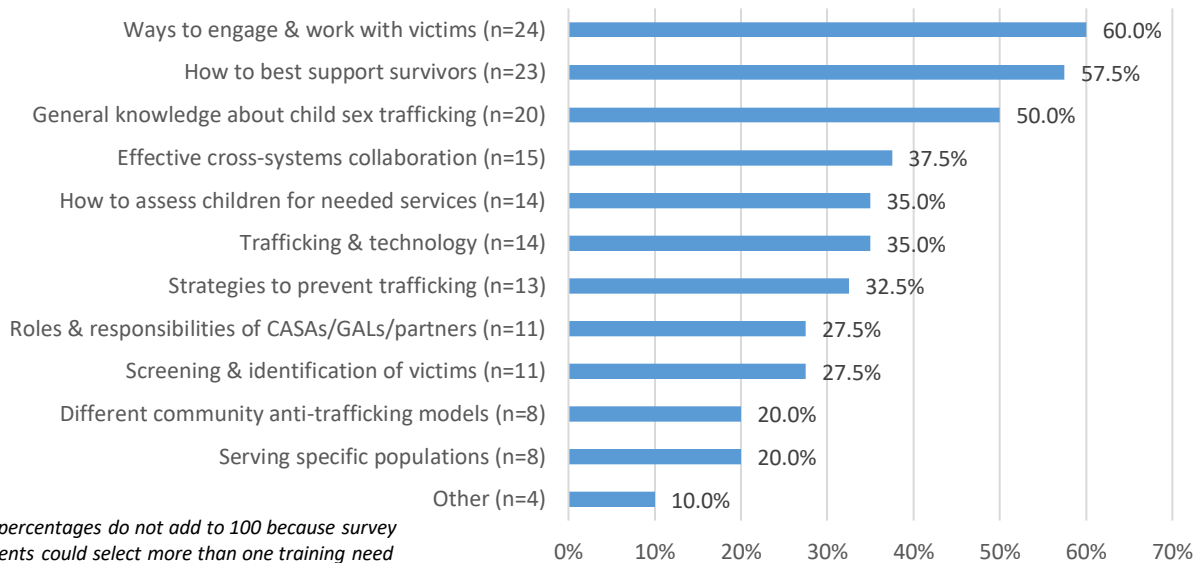
²⁷ Lugo, Kristina. (2019). Gang Sex Trafficking in the United States. In The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking. Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

²⁸ Shared Hope International (2014). Gang Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet. <http://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Fact-Sheet-on-Gang-Trafficking.pdf>

that are being exploited? How can we better about that? What outreach needs to be done? What education needs to be done?”

- Trauma and trauma-informed practices.** Interviewees stated that understanding how to recognize and respond to trauma is particularly important for law enforcement, group homes, foster parents, and juvenile delinquency and dependency judges (who are not involved in specialty trafficking courts). “It’s necessary for everybody to have that [basic] training and background in what kind of services and placement these children need,” said one interviewee. Another interviewee agreed, noting, “That training needs to be done for judges to understand even how to make a safe courtroom, how to make it a welcome space where the youth feels comfortable, what kind of questions to ask, certain phrases not to say.”²⁹
- Sex and reproductive health.** One children’s attorney interviewee, for example, noted she was trained as a reproductive health specialist. “The thing I loved about my training was it really taught you how you talk about it, how do you try and seek out people’s goals and then talk to them in a way that aligns with their goals.”

Figure C: Major Unmet Training Needs for CASA/GAL Volunteers to Address Child Sex Trafficking Among the Child Welfare Population*



²⁹ The National Center for Youth Law is in the process of finalizing bench cards for judicial officers on how to deal with child sex trafficking.

E. Concluding Thoughts and Suggested Next Steps

Without a doubt, a cross-systems collaborative approach is essential to address child sex trafficking among the child welfare population. The key stakeholders we interviewed emphasized the necessity of all agency and community partners – including children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs – working together to meet the complex needs of children who have been sex trafficked or are at risk of such victimization. They stressed just how difficult and intense the work is and the patience and commitment it requires among all individuals and entities involved.

Interviewees identified several effective approaches (e.g., specialty trafficking courts, MDTs), and also highlighted critical areas for improvement (e.g., resolving the lack of appropriate and safe placements, increasing trafficking-specific services, enhancing widespread training and education). The most important lessons they identified underscored these points (see sidebar, *Most Important Lessons to Share*). Those we interviewed also shed light on the primary role that children’s attorneys and GAL/CASA volunteers can play to help address child sex trafficking. Further, they provided input on how the better strengthen and leverage this group’s overall role.

Importantly, our conversations with key stakeholders suggest – as we had initially anticipated – that the children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs are currently a largely untapped resource in collaborative efforts to respond to child sex trafficking. Their collective insights regarding the children’s attorneys, GALs and CASAs specifically and their experiences in tackling child sex trafficking more broadly indicate there is much work to be done. Below are suggested next steps for building on what we learned in this exploratory project.

“I think systems are slowly moving along. I think we take three steps forward and then a couple back, but I think we’re getting there. It just never feels fast enough.”

Looking Ahead - Suggested Next Steps

This project’s exploratory work provides a fertile launching point for next steps:

- The need for specialized training for child welfare attorneys and other advocates such as CASAs on child sex trafficking in jurisdictions where this is lacking.
- The use of regularly scheduled multidisciplinary team meetings as a leverage point to increase open and effective cross-systems communication and create a coordinated and integrated response on child sex trafficking cases.
- The need for cross-systems training aimed at improving communication between systems partners and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- The importance of including survivor mentors/advocates as a key team partner and building their leadership capacity to work with trafficked youth and all systems partners.
- The fundamental necessity of increasing the availability of appropriate and safe placements for children who are victims of sex trafficking.

The project pointed to several areas where additional research would be beneficial:

- Knowing that children who have experienced abuse and neglect and suffer from trauma are among the most vulnerable and at risk of becoming sex trafficked, how can the child welfare and other service systems help to prevent or mitigate child sex trafficking? What can be done, by whom and when?
- The country has been moving away from criminalization of child victims, but not at a uniform pace. What actions can be taken to facilitate a needed cultural and mindset shift among these systems and the individuals that work within them so they are using trauma-informed, victim-centered approaches with these children?
- What is the role of the Children's Advocacy Centers currently when it comes to responding to child sex trafficking and can their role be expanded or leveraged in other jurisdictions that are just beginning to address this issue?
- What are effective and promising strategies for breaking the cycle of intergenerational trafficking?

Most Important Lessons to Share

When asked the one or two most important lessons they would share with other jurisdictions, interviewees reiterated the importance of the following three elements:

Effective collaboration and communication

- “The only way that we’re able to help these children is by working together and understanding everybody’s role is important.... Everyone has an important voice. Everybody has an important role... We need each other to be able to help the child that we’re addressing.”
- “When you get a CASA, use them, communicate with them actively. Ask [them] to share what’s going on, to share where they can be helpful.... Be intentional, if you have a CASA, about really making sure they’re included as part of the team.... I think sometimes people are like, ‘Oh, it’s a volunteer,’ and so they don’t give it the clout that it can really have.”
- “It’s really important to build relationships across agencies and organizations. I think we’ve had our most success because [we] have worked really hard to know all the different players and to build relationships with them.”

Adequate staff capacity and support

- “For any of the professionals, this is really complicated and it’s really hard. And there’s no one answer. Each kid is going to be a little bit different. Support the professionals in that and how frustrating that can be.”
- “Know how you’re going to support the CASAs you’re assigning to these cases because sometimes there’s vicarious trauma.... Really make sure that the volunteers you’re going to use to serve these specialized cases are equipped to take on such cases and that you have the level of support ready and available for them.”
- “Make sure you support your attorneys, not only with training, but with mental health support. Help them set boundaries. It’s just such hard work.”

A strong relationship with children

- “Listen without judgment and ... be very consistent to do what you say you’re going to do, when you say you’re going to do it. Those are all things that will help you in your rapport with that youth, which will then help you with your representation of that youth and that collaboration and advocacy on behalf of the youth.”
- “The victim will tell you the best way forward. They know what the problem is, they know what is the most helpful for them both to get out of a trafficking situation but also to heal from it. So, listen to the victims.”
- “You have to look at your client as a unique individual, which they are. Try not to bring those [expectations] with you about how a child should act or react in certain situation. And just know that it’s going to be a long process and try to be there for the long haul.”

Attachment A: Selected Federal/National Efforts to Combat Sex Trafficking

Selected Federal Anti-Trafficking Grant Programs

- **ACF Children’s Bureau Grants to Address Trafficking Within the Child Welfare Population** (2014-2019). The purpose of this program was to 1) build greater awareness and better response, 2) add to research base on effective practices, 3) build internal capacity to work with victims and 4) build on federal anti-trafficking work. Grantees were expected to foster coordination and collaboration among child welfare agencies and other systems.
- **ACF Demonstration Grant Awards for Domestic Victims of Severe Forms of Human Trafficking** (2008 – current). The intent of this program is to build, expand, and sustain organizational and community capacity to deliver trauma-informed, culturally relevant services for domestic victims of human trafficking through a coordinated system of agency services and partnerships with community-based organizations and allied professionals.
- **ACF Demonstration Grants to Strengthen the Response to Victims of Human Trafficking in Native Communities Program** (2020). This program supports demonstration projects that will build, expand, and sustain organizational and community capacity to deliver services to Native American victims of severe forms of human trafficking.
- **ACF Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) - Human Trafficking Youth Prevention Education (HTYPE) Demonstration Program** (2020-2023). This program funded local educational agencies to partner with a nonprofit or nongovernmental organization (NGO) to create, implement, and build the capacity of schools to deliver prevention education and skills-based training to educators and other school staff and students; and to establish a Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol (HTSSP, or “protocol”) that addresses the safety, security, and wellbeing of staff and students.
- **Office of Victim Crimes (OVC) Enhancing Juvenile and Family Court Responses to Human Trafficking** (current). The goals of this program are to develop or enhance programs to provide direct services and diversion programs for youth in contact with the juvenile and family court systems who are victims of sex and/or labor trafficking or at risk of human trafficking due to past or current crime victimization, including child abuse and neglect.
- **OVC Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking** (current). Provides funding to improve outcomes for children and youth who are victims of human trafficking by integrating human trafficking policy and programming at the state or tribal level and enhancing coordinated, multidisciplinary, and statewide approaches to serving trafficked youth. This program furthers the DOJ’s mission by enhancing statewide or tribal jurisdiction-wide responses to human trafficking.
- **OVC Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking Program** (current). The purpose of this program is to develop and strengthen programs for victims of human trafficking, including enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and other stakeholders to identify victims and provide justice for those victims through the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers.

- **OVC Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Human Trafficking** (current). Funding to provide 6 to 24 months of transitional or short-term housing assistance for trafficking victims, including rental, utilities or related expenses, such as security deposits and relocation costs. The grants will also provide funding to help victims locate permanent housing, secure employment and receive occupational training and counseling.
- **OVC Preventing Trafficking of Girls Program.** Provided funding to support prevention and early intervention services, including mentoring and other direct support services for girls who are at risk of or are victims of sex trafficking.
- **OVC Services for Minor Victims of Sex Trafficking Program.** Provides funding to develop, expand and strengthen assistance programs for minor victims of sex trafficking. Under this program, the funded states, tribes, and units of local government will provide (directly and through partnerships) an array of services that minor victims of human trafficking often require to address their need for safety, security, and healing.

Selected Major Reports

- *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States* (2013). Institute of Medicine/National Research Council report
- *Coordination, Collaboration, Capacity: Federal Strategic Action Plan on Services for Victims of Human Trafficking in the United States, 2013-2017; updated 2021 National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*
- *Final Synthesis of Evaluation Findings: Grants to Address Trafficking Within the Child Welfare Population* (2020)
- *National Advisory Committee on Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States. Best Practices and Recommendations for States* (September 2020)
- *Report to Congress: The Child Welfare Systems Response to Sex Trafficking of Children* (2019)
- *Trafficking in Persons Report* (annual report from Department of State)
- *Voices from the Bench: Judicial Perspectives on Handling Child Sex Trafficking Cases* (2019)

Other Selected Initiatives

- *Domestic Human Trafficking and the Child Welfare Population project* (2016-2022). This project will help the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau to identify and better assist children and youth served by its programs who are victims of, or are at risk of, domestic human trafficking. The project will summarize current understanding of human trafficking and resources addressing human trafficking in the child welfare population. The project will also support practice-relevant research studies.
- *Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analysis Project* (2019-2024) (ACF OPRE and OTIP). Will inform development of anti-trafficking strategies, policies and programs to prevent and respond to human trafficking.
- *Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center* (Department of Justice)

- National Advisory Committee on Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States
- National Convening on Trafficking and Child Welfare (2015; managed by Capacity Building Center for States)
- National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC) – implemented in 2016
- President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (supports state systems integration and systems change to address trafficking)
- Shared Hope International’s Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking (current). Grades focus on states’ efforts to protect survivors of child and youth sex trafficking, including through the development and funding of Safe Harbor laws, an evidence-based and victim-centered approach to justice.