Meeting the Needs of Children and Youth Experiencing Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE):

A Survivor-Informed, Youth-Centered Guidance Manual for Youth Housing and Homelessness Services Providers in Texas

TNOYS
TEXAS NETWORK OF YOUTH SERVICES

CSEY Manual for Youth Housing and Homelessness Services Providers in Texas
Published November 2023

Authors

Ann-Charlotte Proffitt, MPAff
Director of Practice

Fedora Galasso, MPAff, MSSW
Chief Executive Officer

Sedoo Ijir, MPH
Program Manager

Alexander Polk
Program Coordinator

Editors

Mary Bergeron
Director of Communications

Alexander Pryor
Graphic Designer

Acknowledgements

TNOYS
TEXAS NETWORK OF YOUTH SERVICES

Table of Contents

TNOYS
TEXAS NETWORK OF YOUTH SERVICES

Executive Summary

A significant number of young people in Texas are victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) or commercial sexual exploitation of youth (CSEY). In 2016, there were approximately 79,000 minor and youth victims of sex trafficking in Texas.[1] Victims that are at higher than average risk of sex trafficking include children who have experienced abuse, those in the foster care system, and those who are experiencing homelessness.[2] Youth who lack integral family and community supports face a higher risk of trafficking victimization because they have no one to whom they can turn. The estimated rate of CSEY among homeless youth in Texas is 25 percent, much higher than the national average of 10-15 percent.[3] Youth and young adults (YYA) who experience commercial sexual exploitation report their first CSEY experience happening after they had nowhere to go.

Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a statewide network of over 80 youth-serving organizations and professionals who specialize in meeting the needs of youth and young adults to help them overcome challenges and achieve healthy development. While this network is well-positioned to screen for, identify, and respond to the needs of CSEY victims, these dedicated organizations too often face gaps in training, resources, and the tools necessary to address the critical issues of CSEY and effectively identify and serve victims. Although providers wish to expand their survivor-informed services, many are in need of support with understanding and implementing key principles such as trauma-informed care, youth voice, and the CSE-IT. Based on input from providers, youth and young adults (YYA), and the existing literature, TNOYS used this project to better understand the challenges and best practices for meeting the needs of children and youth who have experienced CSE. This manual incorporates these sources to equip youth housing and homelessness services providers with guidance on meeting the needs of this population.

As part of TNOYS' ongoing work to center the voices of youth and young adults, our team spoke with young people who have been impacted by homelessness and/or CSE to learn about their experiences and opinions on how youth housing and homelessness services providers in Texas can best meet the needs of CSEC and CSEY. TNOYS also spoke with stakeholders in the CSE services, youth housing and homelessness services, child welfare, and juvenile justice fields to learn about what they see in their work and their perceived strengths and challenges. These conversations with youth and professionals revealed many overlapping themes concerning knowledge and understanding of CSE; strengths and gaps in services and practices to prevent, identify, and address CSEC and CSEY; trauma and mental health; youth voice and survivor-centered services; the importance of cross-systems collaboration and coordination; and the impacts of organizational policies and procedures on both YYA and professionals. The themes that both providers and young people identified align with the evidence base for promoting healthy outcomes for youth and preventing and addressing CSE. TNOYS applied a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) model, which is an innovative approach to positive youth development in which YYA are trained to conduct research to improve their lives, their communities, and the systems intended to serve them.

Based on our findings, TNOYS developed recommendations that providers can implement in their policies and programs, including suggested tools, trainings, and approaches to support adoption of these recommendations.

1. Ensure providers have consistent and thorough knowledge of CSEY, trauma, and equity, and equip providers to talk to youth about CSEY and teach them about the risk factors, signs, and impacts.

2. Ensure youth are aging out of systems with access to resources and supports to prevent further systems entrenchment and promote success.

3. Implement a validated, universal CSEY screening tool, and establish and follow consistent screening practices.

4. Once a youth is identified as at risk for or experiencing CSEY, complete a uniform, comprehensive, and strengths-based assessment of that youth's strengths and needs to inform development of an individualized service plan for the youth.

5. Ensure services wrap around the entire youth to both meet their immediate needs and set them up for long-term success and independence.

6. Meet youth where they are, practice non-judgement, and demonstrate consistency, patience, and unconditional positive regard with youth. Reduce push factors and address pull factors by lowering barriers to entry for youth seeking services, creating normalcy, and showing YYA that there is a way out and a better path forward.

7. Prioritize a youth-centered approach, listen to youth and individualize services to each youth's unique needs and priorities, and let youth take the lead in their own lives.

8. Prioritize building a trusting relationship with youth as a key strategy for improving services and strengthening outcomes. Building a trusting relationship with youth includes being genuine and honest with youth, implementing practices that build rapport, and considering which staff can and do best connect with individual youth.

9. Understand the services available in the region and establish a diverse network of providers to support each other in meeting the needs of youth. Collaborate to identify gaps in CSEY data and implement a plan to collect robust data and safely share information in a trauma-informed way.

10. Partner with both staff and youth to develop policies and procedures that are flexible and responsive to their current needs and concerns. Continually invest in staff competence and well-being.

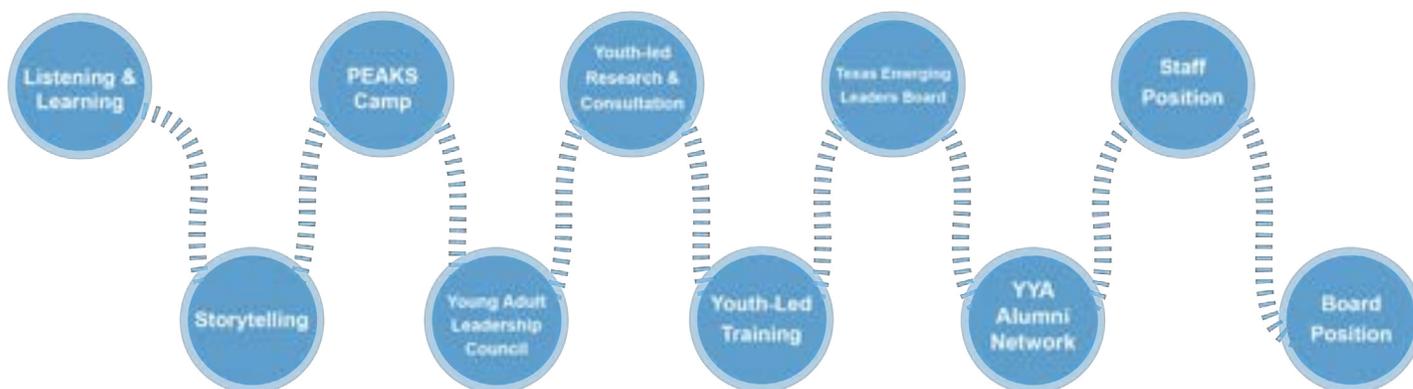## Introduction to the Issue and TNOYS' Work

About TNOYS and Our Partners

Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a statewide membership network that has worked for over forty years to strengthen services and support for Texas youth and families. TNOYS aims to foster collaboration, build organizational capacity, and effect change across seven systems that serve youth and young adults: housing and homelessness services, victim and survivor services, child welfare, justice, health and behavioral health, education, and higher education/workforce. A significant number of young people in Texas are victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children or youth (CSEC/CSEY). In 2016, there were approximately 79,000 minor and youth victims of sex trafficking in Texas.[4] Children and youth who have experienced abuse, homelessness, or the foster care system are at increased risk of being commercially sexually exploited. Further, youth who lack integral family and community supports face a higher risk of being exploited, causing youth and young adults (YYA) to report that their first CSEY experience happened after they had nowhere to go. Texas youth-serving organizations and professionals specialized in meeting the needs of young people are well-positioned to prevent, identify, and respond to the needs of CSEY victims, and they require resources and support to do this well.

TNOYS has a history of supporting providers to strengthen their CSEY prevention, identification, and response, and TNOYS is a statewide leader in meaningfully engaging YYA with lived expertise to inform tools and resources for youth-serving providers. Furthermore, TNOYS has been the go-to provider of training, technical assistance, and consultation for Texas' youth-serving organizations for over 40 years. Online CSEY Resource Center that provides a list of quality resources to support our member organizations in preventing, identifying, and responding to CSEY & CSEC. The Resource Center can be found here: https://tnoys.org/tnoys-csey-resource-center/

TNOYS trainings are informed, developed, and/or led by YYA with lived experiences. TNOYS' Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series is the first ever series that supports providers in effectively engaging YYA at all levels of interaction. TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement illustrates how we center youth with lived expertise through paid interviews, listening sessions, storytelling projects, as well as our two 12-month, work-based learning programs: TNOYS' Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC) and Texas Emerging Leaders Board (TELB).

TNOYS' Youth Engagement Roadmap

Listening & Learning — Storytelling — PEAKS Camp — Young Adult Leadership Council — Youth-led Research & Consultation — Youth-Led Training — Texas Emerging Leaders Board — YYA Alumni Network — Staff Position — Board Position

TNOYS' youth engagement roadmap illustrates how youth and young adults take part in the organization's work in both big and small ways.

About Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth (CSEC/CSEY) in Texas

Under Texas law, Child Sex Trafficking (CST) occurs when a person causes a minor (under age 18) to engage in commercial sexual exploitation, receives a benefit from the trafficking of that child, or engages in sexual conduct with the trafficked child.[5] For minors, force, fraud, or coercion does not need to be shown because a minor cannot consent to sexual acts. Further, commercial sexual exploitation is defined more broadly for minors to include sexual abuse, sexual indecency, sexual assault, sexual performance, employment harmful to children, and child pornography. Another word for CST is Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). The term TNOYS most often uses is Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth (CSEY), which occurs when the sexual activity of a young person (up to ~25 years old) is exchanged for something of value (e.g., money, material goods, basic needs like food or shelter, feelings of love, protection, or affection). TNOYS prefers to use the term CSEY to demonstrate that older youth (ages 18-25) still require specialized attention and support separate from adults over age 25. This is because the brain, and particularly the decision-making part of the brain, continues to develop until the age of 26. Moreover, many of these YYA have likely experienced abuse and exploitation for many years, beginning when they were minors, and such complex trauma requires specialized care. Throughout the manual, TNOYS will use the terms CSEC, CSEY, and CSE fairly interchangeably.

Although any young person may experience commercial sexual exploitation, certain factors can make some youth more vulnerable. Youth who have experienced abuse, family disruptions, and systems involvement (including child welfare and juvenile justice) are at increased risk for CSEY.[6] The complex trauma that stems from abuse, systems involvement, or being disconnected from a caring adult can create mental health challenges for YYA. This trauma can impact their ability to understand, process, and verbalize their emotions, and disrupt YYA's ability to detect danger cues or develop healthy and trusting relationships.[7] Moreover, LGBTQ+ youth are at increased risk of experiencing CSEY as they are also more likely to face rejection from family or a community due to their identity or orientation leaving them vulnerable to exploiters who offer a sense of belonging.[8]

Finally, homelessness and housing instability are primary risk factors for CSEY, as many youth become exploited when they have nowhere to go and no one to whom they can turn.[9] Underlying all of these vulnerabilities are unmet basic, emotional, and/or psychological needs, such as access to food and housing, medical care, education, and employment, or feelings such as love, safety, protection, connection, value, and stability.[10,11] When these needs go chronically unmet for a young person, that youth becomes more vulnerable to manipulation by an exploiter. In fact, exploiters intentionally seek out youth who are disconnected from a community and desperately in need of protection and support.[12] There is generally a grooming process in which exploiters gain the youth's trust and dependency by offering gifts, helping solve problems and meet needs, and introducing them to a new lifestyle, while simultaneously isolating them from other relationships and supports. Once youth trust and depend upon their exploiters, exploiters will begin making incrementally larger demands of the youth to coerce them into sexual exploitation.

In Texas, minors make up 50% of the victims in human trafficking-related cases, and in 2021 Texas had the second highest percentage of signals to the Human Trafficking Hotline.[13,14] The estimated rate of CSEY among homeless youth in Texas is 25 percent, much higher than the national average of 10-15 percent.[15] It is important to address CSEY in Texas because experiences of CSEY can have long-term impacts on youth and young adults, including their physical health, mental health, and behaviors. Trauma is a risk factor for nearly all behavioral health and substance use disorders.[16] The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study finds that childhood trauma exposure is linked to high-risk behaviors (such as self-harm, unsafe sexual practices, and illegal activities), chronic illness, cognitive deficits, and even early death.[17] Further, constant stress and complex trauma impacts development of the body's immune and stress response systems, as well as a young

person's emotional responses, behaviors, and impulse control. Youth who have experienced complex trauma are more likely to withdraw from activities, live in constant fear, and experience depression, anxiety, and anger.[18]

Left unaddressed, all of these consequences have long-term impacts for Texas' economy because of the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, and systems involvement.[19] Moreover, CSEY survivors require specialized services and support to successfully address their needs. Survivors' needs become more complex the longer they go unmet, which places a greater strain on service providers in the long run. Earlier CSEY identification and intervention leads to better outcomes for YYA and reduces long-term costs to support and rehabilitate survivors.

Youth homelessness service providers are likely to encounter youth who are experiencing or at risk of CSEY, yet currently, no formal guidance exists for youth homelessness services providers in Texas on meeting the unique needs of this population. In 2020, the National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States released recommendations for states to strengthen their efforts to prevent and address the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth.[20] Recommendation 5.12 is to "Create a manual for housing providers on housing options that includes specific guidance on meeting the needs of children and youth who have experienced sex trafficking." TNOYS answered the call to create such a manual that leverages our network of providers and centers the voices and expertise of youth and survivors.

Research Methods

To develop a manual for Texas youth housing and homelessness services providers who seek to better serve YYA experiencing or at risk of CSEY, TNOYS set out to:

- Use input from providers, YYA, and research literature to identify and understand challenges and best practices for meeting the needs of children and youth who have experienced CSEY;
- Develop clear and actionable recommendations and guidance for youth housing and homelessness services providers to effectively meet the needs of this population; and
- Ensure these recommendations and guidance address challenges and needs of both providers and YYA, uplift best and promising practices in the field, emphasize youth-adult partnerships and youth voice, and are research-based and survivor-informed.

Between January 2023 and March 2023, TNOYS facilitated five listening sessions (or focus groups) with 59 YYA with lived experiences around Texas to understand their needs, priorities, and strengths from the YYA perspective. We asked questions about their understanding of CSEY, experiences with providers, wants and needs from services, and sense of autonomy over their own lives. YYA were paid fairly for their time and contributions, and they had the option of a cash gift card or a direct deposit. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 27 years old, with an average age of 19 years old. 53.5% of participants identify as female, 43.1% identify as male, and 3.5% identify as transgender or nonbinary. In May 2023, TNOYS invited all YYA listening session participants to a virtual participant check-in where we presented our findings from the listening sessions and asked for any feedback, corrections, or clarifications to our analysis. This trauma-informed, youth-centered step ensures that we accurately reflect the beliefs, ideas, and experiences of the YYA who spoke with us, and that YYA fully understand how their input will be shared.

Between May 2023 and September 2023, TNOYS conducted eight interviews and four focus groups with 68 youth-serving providers, child welfare and juvenile justice judges, and other stakeholders to gather information on their best practices, challenges, and needs as it relates to serving this population.

TNOYS applied a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) model, which is an innovative approach to positive youth development in which YYA are trained to conduct research to improve their lives, their communities, and the systems intended to serve them. In partnership with TNOYS' YALC, we engaged YYA with lived experiences throughout the entire process. 12 YALC members between the ages of 17 and 25 were trained in CSEY topics, research design, and data collection and analysis. These YYA supported development of the listening session and interview questions and materials, co-facilitated YYA listening sessions, analyzed data to draw conclusions, and helped develop recommendations and present findings to stakeholders.

Findings and Recommendations

Theme and Findings	Recommendation	Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches
Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity among Providers and Youth • Providers' knowledge and understanding of CSEY, trauma, and equity varies dramatically. • Most youth learn about CSEY from peers, the media, and direct exposure, rather than from a caregiver, provider, or trusted adult. This is further complicated by the fact that YYA may become involved in CSEY through a diversity of pathways, and many don't know what is happening until they're in too deep.	Ensure providers have consistent and thorough knowledge of CSEY, trauma, and equity. Equip providers to talk to youth about CSEY and teach them about the risk factors, signs, and impacts.	• Certificate on Human Trafficking Training (NN4Y and the McCain Institute) • GEMS CSEC Trainings (Girls Education and Mentoring Services) • Not a #Number Prevention Training for Youth (Love146) • My Life, My Choice Prevention Curriculum for Youth (My Life, My Choice) • The Cool Aunt Series Prevention Curriculum for Youth (Rachel Thomas) • Ending the Game Intervention Curriculum for Youth (Rachel Thomas) • NetSmartz (NCMEC) • Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)® (Karyn Purvis Institute, TCU) • Trauma-Informed Care • The ARC Framework • TNOYS' Equity Training Series (TNOYS) • Safety Planning • Human Trafficking Trainings (Freedom Network USA)
Prevent CSEY by Providing Effective Services and Programs • Youth exiting systems are at increased risk of homelessness, which then places them at increased risk for CSEY. • YYA may become involved in CSEY through a diversity of pathways, often starting as a way to meet chronically unmet needs. • The most effective providers understand that prevention is programming writ large.	Ensure youth are aging out of systems with access to resources and supports to prevent further systems entrenchment and promote success.	• Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy) • Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Life Skills Study Guides (TNOYS) • Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services) • Family and Youth Success (FAYS) Program (Texas DFPS) • Community Youth Development (CYD) Programs (Texas DFPS) • Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) Program (Texas Education Agency) • Texas Foster Youth Justice Project (Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc.) • Not a #Number Prevention Training for Youth (Love146) • My Life, My Choice Prevention Curriculum for Youth (My Life, My Choice) • The Cool Aunt Series Prevention Curriculum for Youth (Rachel Thomas) • NetSmartz (NCMEC)

Implement a Validated, Universal CSEY Screening Tool and Follow Consistent Screening Practices • Providers' screening and identification practices vary dramatically, including tools, cadence and frequency, and identification and selection for a full screening. • Youth experience everything from not being asked about CSEY at all, to completing a one-question checkbox at intake, to receiving a comprehensive and trauma-informed screening.	Implement a validated, universal CSEY screening tool, and establish and follow consistent screening practices.	• Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT) (WestCoast Children's Clinic) • Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT) (Covenant House New Jersey) • Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT) (Vera Institute of Justice)
Comprehensively Assess Youth Strengths and Needs to Inform Services • Providers' assessment practices vary, including tools, cadence, data sharing, and completing a comprehensive assessment at all. As a result, providers lack a shared language and have limited ability to share information between organizations. • The most effective providers assess youths' strengths and needs immediately upon intake and use this information to develop individualized, comprehensive, and adaptable service plans for each youth.	Once a youth is identified as at risk for or experiencing CSEY, complete a uniform, comprehensive, and strengths-based assessment of that youth's strengths and needs to inform development of an individualized service plan for the youth.	• Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment-Commercial Sexual Exploitation Module (CANS-CSE) • Safety Planning

Provide Wraparound Services • Youth and providers alike report that their service priorities cross systems to include housing, health care, mental health care, supports to build vocational skills and overcome barriers to employment, and supports to build social-emotional skills.	Ensure services wrap around the entire youth to both meet their immediate needs *and* set them up for long-term success and independence.	• Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series (TNOYS). Specific modules: • Building Alliances with Youth to Reduce and Prevent Challenging Behaviors 　• Employing Youth with Lived Experiences • Safety Planning
Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services • Exiting "the life" is a difficult and non-linear transition with many push and pull factors. • Experiences of CSEY have lasting impacts on YYA, and a number of factors can hinder their path to stability. • YYA may feel judged for their past mistakes or circumstances, making them hesitant to open up to providers. • The most effective providers reduce barriers to accessing services, demonstrate unconditional positive regard for all youth, and move at the youth's pace.	Meet youth where they are, practice non-judgement, and demonstrate consistency, patience, and unconditional positive regard with youth. Reduce push factors and address pull factors by lowering barriers to entry for youth seeking services, creating normalcy, and showing YYA that there is a way out and a better path forward.	• Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series (TNOYS) • Motivational Interviewing / Motivational Interviewing for CSEY Responders (Baylor University) • Trauma-Informed Care • Therapeutic Options (Therapeutic Options, Inc.) • Crisis Intervention Training Programs (Crisis Prevention Institute)

Take an Individualized Approach to Services • YYA want to be seen as individuals, and they desire flexible services that match their unique needs and circumstances. • Youth have few, if any, opportunities to use their voices and make decisions about their own lives. • Youth often do not feel heard or listened to by program staff. When YYA do feel heard, they are able to open up and be vulnerable with providers. • The most effective providers work alongside youth to identify their stated needs and priorities, help them problem-solve for themselves, and find ways to address their needs in a way that works for each individual youth.	Prioritize a youth-centered approach, listen to youth and individualize services to each youth's unique needs and priorities, and let youth take the lead in their own lives.	• Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series (TNOYS) • Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy) • Positive Youth Development Framework

Build Trust as the Foundation of the Youth-Adult Relationship
• Many youth feel like they are just another caseload and don't actually matter to providers.
• When providers don't trust youth, it's hard for youth to trust providers in return.
• Youth want a trusting relationship with an adult who can provide mentorship and reassurance.
• YYA connect better with providers who have similar backgrounds or experiences as the youth.
• The most effective providers take their time to develop genuine relationships with youth and allow YYA to dictate the pace of the relationship and services.
	Prioritize building a trusting relationship with youth as a key strategy for improving services and strengthening outcomes. Building a trusting relationship with youth includes being genuine and honest with youth, implementing practices that build rapport, and considering which staff can and do best connect with individual youth.	• Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series (TNOYS). Specific modules:
		• Building Alliances with Youth to Reduce and Prevent Challenging Behaviors
		  • Employing Youth with Lived Experiences
		• Embedding Youth Voice in Your Organization's DNA
		  • Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy)
		• Positive Youth Development Framework
		• Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)® (Karyn Purvis Institute, TCU)

Collaborate Across Systems to Optimize Programming
- No one provider can meet *all* the needs of *all* youth experiencing or at risk of CSEY.
- The most effective providers have robust referral networks of specialized and generalized providers with whom they regularly collaborate and communicate.
- Data on CSEY in Texas is lacking, making it difficult to fully understand the landscape.

Understand the services available in the region and establish a diverse network of providers to support each other in meeting the needs of youth.

Collaborate with providers and the state of Texas to identify gaps in CSEY data and implement a plan to collect robust data and safely share information in a trauma-informed way.

- Join networks like TNOYS and get plugged into regional workgroups and collaborations like CRCGs.
- Attend conferences and events that bring together providers from different organizations and systems to learn from and with each other.
- Implement tools and platforms that facilitate data collection and sharing, such as the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT).

Develop Responsive Organizational Policies
- Providers struggle to recruit and retain effective, qualified staff because of burnout, secondary trauma, lack of guidance or mentorship, and funding.
- Overly rigid rules and structures may come across as punitive or untrusting of YYA, and they can stifle YYA independence and success.
- Youth have few, if any, opportunities to provide feedback or input on services or organizational policies.

Partner with both staff and youth to develop policies and procedures that are flexible and responsive to their current needs and concerns.

Youth-serving organizations should continually invest in their staff's competence and well-being.

- Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA Series (TNOYS). Specific modules:
- Embedding Youth Voice in Your Organization's DNA
- Employing Youth with Lived Experiences
- Creating a Trauma-Informed Workplace
- Going Beyond Self Care: The CE-CERT Model for Secondary Trauma (Centene)
- Science-Supported Strategies to Remain Calm in the Home, Workplace, and Community (Lighthouse Learning Resources)
- The Management Center Trainings and Resources
- Self-Care and Leadership Trainings (Kros Learning Group)

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY

Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity Among Providers and Youth

Our research finds that providers' knowledge and understanding of CSEY varies dramatically between providers and across the state. The most effective providers are extremely well-versed in risk factors for CSEY, red flags, and warning signs, and they understand the complex ways that CSEY experiences can impact a young person's behaviors, beliefs about themselves and the world, and relationships with themselves and others. While a small number of providers lack even a basic understanding of CSEY, the majority of providers we spoke with (at all levels of knowledge and expertise) recognize that CSEY is constantly evolving and new research and data continue to emerge, which necessitates regular learning and professional development. Specifically, providers report the following gaps in knowledge within the field: understanding what CSEY actually looks like (especially compared to media portrayals or differentiating from stereotypes and biases), identifying red flags and warning signs of CSEY, recognizing complex trauma and the ways it manifests in behaviors and impacts the brain, and effectively working with YYA with complex trauma histories including CSEY. A number of providers also mentioned the need to learn more directly from YYA about their experiences, insights, and recommendations for service providers. Further, a few providers expressed the need for more opportunities to put theories into practice through role playing, examination of real life scenarios, and similar applied learning.

Further, providers can do more to sharpen their understanding of how CSEY is inextricably linked with both trauma and equity. Not only are YYA who have experienced complex trauma at increased risk for CSEY because of the ways unresolved trauma can impact the brain, beliefs, and behaviors, but the experience of CSEY creates significant trauma in and of itself. Providers must be equipped to understand, identify, and address trauma and trauma responses in their interactions with youth, especially youth experiencing CSEY. Similarly, although any youth can be exploited, some youth might be more vulnerable than others because of systemic inequities that limit access to power, voice, and opportunity. It is imperative that providers understand both trauma and equity in order to adequately and appropriately address CSEY.

Most young people report learning about CSEY from peers, the media, and direct exposure to exploitation, rather than from a caregiver, provider, or trusted adult. This means that their knowledge and understanding of CSEY is incomplete at best and incorrect and potentially even harmful at worst. This is further complicated by the fact that YYA may become involved in CSEY through a diversity of pathways, and many don't know what is happening until they're in too deep. While some YYA were manipulated into an exploitative situation and felt controlled or cornered by their exploiter, others reported initially feeling that they were in control and engaging in CSEY to meet their needs. Almost all YYA report regularly being asked/pressured into CSEY, whether on the streets, at work or school, or as a way to meet their needs, and youth acknowledge that they might have responded differently

"When I started getting on my feet all by myself, a lot of guys tried to talk to me. If you ask for help, they want to have sex with you... Guys be like I'll help you out, but you gotta have sex with me."

– T., age 20, Dallas

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity Among Providers and Youth

to these situations if they had a better understanding of CSEY risks and pathways. Most YYA we spoke with revealed that they want to be able to talk about CSEY with a trusting, knowledgeable adult. These youth wish an adult or caregiver would broach the subject with them so they can ask questions and understand the risks, red flags, and strategies to stay safe, rather than having to learn about CSEY and related topics from peers or unreliable sources.

Recommendation: Ensure providers have consistent and thorough knowledge and understanding of CSEY, trauma, and equity. Further, equip providers to talk to youth about CSEY and teach them about the risk factors, signs, and impacts.

It is crucial that youth services providers in any setting, especially in the homelessness services field, understand vulnerabilities and risk factors for CSEY, warning signs, how CSEY and trauma are interrelated, and how different populations are affected disproportionately. Awareness of warning signs ensures providers accurately and quickly identify youth who are potentially at risk of CSEY, which in turn enables providers to respond appropriately with a proper screening, comprehensive assessment of strengths and needs, and wraparound services to meet a young person's individual needs. Potentially most crucial, youth who have experienced CSEY will often have extremely complex trauma histories, which can impact how youth behave towards themselves, providers, and other youth, as well as how youth perceive providers, the world around them, and their distinct role in the world. Providers who are serving CSEY-impacted YYA should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify signs of complex trauma and to respond in a trauma-informed manner that supports the youth at any stage of their journey. Lastly, providers face the risk of experiencing secondary trauma or burnout if they are not properly supported and trained to work with youth who have experienced CSEY.

Next, equipping providers to talk to youth about CSEY will ensure YYA receive accurate and consistent information and help to create an open, safe dialogue between providers and young people. Arming YYA with knowledge of warning signs and red flags in relationships or other circumstances, as well as strategies to respond to such situations, can help prevent youth from becoming involved in CSEY in the first place. Additionally, educating YYA about the potential harms of CSEY – such as its impact on short- and long-term health and mental health, relationships, education and employment, housing and stability, and more – can help YYA to better understand the reality of CSEY and reduce the allure that exploiters promote. Further, youth would benefit from being educated on strategies to maintain safety during dangerous situations, such as identifying options and being prepared to respond should an unsafe situation arise or when they are ready for a change. Beyond equipping youth with knowledge to make informed decisions and keep themselves safe, having these conversations with youth demonstrates that they can come to providers if they do have questions or concerns, and that providers are prepared to listen and brainstorm collaboratively on solutions without judgment.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Certificate on Human Trafficking (National Network for Youth and the McCain Institute):** The Certificate on Human Trafficking is a comprehensive, research-based training that teaches the fundamentals of human trafficking as well as practical skills and strategies for a trauma-informed response to CSEY. The training comprises two courses, for a total of 31 hours of training: "Foundations on Human Trafficking" and "Practical Applications on Human Trafficking." The certification training is currently available in a self-paced, online format through Arizona State University, and participants can choose to register for either course individually or for the full two-part training. Providers must complete both courses

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity Among Providers and Youth

to receive certification. Please visit the ASU course catalog to register, or contact the National Network for Youth to learn more.

- **CSEC Trainings from GEMS (Girls Education and Mentoring Services):** GEMS offers immersive, survivor-developed trainings for youth services providers and law enforcement on understanding and addressing CSE in a survivor-centered way. GEMS offers three distinct multi-day trainings: "Understanding and Identifying Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking," "VSL: Victim, Survivor, Leader™," and "Survivor's Guide to Leaving," and each training can be customized to address specific needs or skill sets. Trainings are offered both virtually and in-person. To request a training or register for a training, please visit the GEMS training webpage or contact their training department at training@gems-girls.org.

- **Not a #Number (Love146):** Not a #Number is an interactive, five-module prevention curriculum designed to teach youth (ages 12-18) how to protect themselves from CSEC through information, critical thinking, and skill development. Not a #Number uses a holistic approach focusing on respect, empathy, individual strengths, and the relationship between personal and societal pressures that create or increase vulnerabilities. Love146 also offers a facilitator certification to equip providers to deliver the curriculum with the youth they serve. To learn more or to request a training, please visit the Not a #Number web site.

- **My Life, My Choice (My Life, My Choice):** My Life, My Choice is a validated and evidence-based prevention curriculum designed to equip youth (ages 12-18) with the tools and knowledge to protect themselves from CSEC. The 10-module curriculum is survivor-developed, and it is designed to be co-facilitated by a CSE survivor. The curriculum is most effective for cisgender and transgender girls, but facilitators can and do modify the content for more expansive audiences. My Life, My Choice also offers a facilitator certification so that service providers can implement the curriculum with the youth they serve. To learn more or to request a training, please visit the My Life, My Choice training web page.

- **The Cool Aunt Series:** The Cool Aunt series is a survivor-developed CSE prevention course, designed for children and youth. The series comprises 12 video modules, is fully online, and is intended for youth-serving organizations, schools, or parents/caregivers. Learn more and purchase the series on The Cool Aunt Series website.

- **Ending the Game:** Ending the Game is an evidence-driven, survivor-developed, and survivor-informed CSE intervention course designed for child and youth survivors of CSE. This interactive, 10-module series is fully online, and it can be completed in group classes or in one-on-one sessions. There are also opportunities to become an ETG facilitator. Learn more and find a class or become a facilitator on the Ending the Game website.

- **NetSmartz (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, NCMEC):** NetSmartz is an online safety education program for children and teenagers. It provides free videos and activities for children and youth to increase awareness of potential online risks and teach strategies to prevent victimization. NetSmartz also offers caregivers, including providers, educators, and parents, free online online safety resources, including presentations, fact sheets, classroom activities, and on-demand trainings, all tailored for specific audiences and age groups. Learn more and access the free resources on the NetSmartz webpage.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity Among Providers and Youth

- **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) (Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (KPICD), Texas Christian University):** TBRI® is an evidence-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children and youth. TBRI® is based on attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, and it is designed for children who have experienced relationship-based trauma such as institutionalization, multiple foster home placements, and abuse or neglect. TBRI® is appropriate for parents, caregivers, teachers, and anyone who works with vulnerable children, and it can be used in a variety of settings, including residential facilities, juvenile justice and child welfare settings, courts and law enforcement, schools, faith communities, clinical practices, with CSE survivors, and more. KPICD even developed a specific TBRI® with CSE Survivors training that focuses on tools and practices to best support CSE survivors. To begin using TBRI®, Providers must complete TBRI® practitioner training. To learn more and find or request a trainer, please visit the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development's TBRI® website.

- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is a comprehensive organizational change approach to address the impacts of childhood trauma on long-term physical health, mental health, and behavioral outcomes later in life. The TIC approach establishes safe, trustworthy, and mutually collaborative relationships between service providers and clients, and it reframes interactions with youth and staff from "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?". [21]The six principles of TIC include: Safety, Trustworthiness and Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration, Empowerment, and Humility and Responsiveness.[22] To learn more and begin implementing TIC in your organization, please visit the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, or check out this issue brief on successful TIC implementation.

- **Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC) Framework:** The ARC Framework is a research-informed, strengths-based intervention developed for children and adolescents who have experienced complex trauma. The ARC Framework is designed to be used as an individual-level clinical intervention and as an organizational-level framework for services. The ARC Framework is applicable across a range of settings, including in the home, residential settings, child welfare and juvenile justice settings, schools, and more. To learn more, please visit the ARC Framework website.

- **TNOYS' Equity Training Series (TNOYS):** TNOYS' Equity Training Series is a five-part, youth-informed and youth-developed training series that equips professionals with a cross-systems, intersectional framework for providing more equitable and inclusive services to youth and young adults. Each module within the series focuses on key intersections between systems and identities, such as intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) and justice system involvement; youth homelessness, LGBTQ+ youth, and CSEY; and race and ethnicity, mental health, and the workforce. Participants will learn research-driven, youth-centered, and trauma-informed approaches to improve cultural competency, promote authentic youth engagement, and strengthen services within their organizations. To learn more or to request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or contact us at practice@tnoys.org.

- **Safety Planning:** A safety plan is a personalized plan designed to help individuals experiencing CSE stay safe, including assessing risk, considering options, preparing for a future crisis, and creating contingency plans. The intention of safety planning is to assess the long-term needs of survivors and provide support and skills to maintain current and future safety. Effective safety plans provide supportive resources, identify and practice coping strategies, create a detailed plan to respond to dangerous situations, and develop

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Ensure Consistent Knowledge of CSEY, Trauma, and Equity Among Providers and Youth

mini plans with role-playing opportunities. It is critical that youth are informed and involved in their own safety planning. Some great examples of safety plans include this personalized safety plan from the Texas Council on Family Violence, and this shorter personalized safety plan from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. To learn more or to request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or contact us at practice@tnoys.org.

- **Human Trafficking Trainings, Assorted (Freedom Network USA):** Freedom Network USA is a national training and technical assistance organization specializing in human trafficking topics. Freedom Network USA offers a diversity of human trafficking trainings, from basic introductory information to legal considerations, racial equity, and everything in between. To learn more, visit the Freedom Network USA training page.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY

Prevent CSEY by Providing Effective Services and Programs

Youth exiting systems, such as child welfare and juvenile justice, are at increased risk of experiencing homelessness.[23] Further, youth homelessness is one of the primary risk factors for CSE, and youth experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of mental health issues and substance use disorders.[24,25,26] The YYA we spoke with confirmed that exploiters prey on vulnerable YYA by promising to meet their needs, such as access to food and shelter, money, and material goods, as well as intangible needs like love, acceptance, and protection. Further, some YYA with experience in the child welfare system shared that they were not taught employment skills or otherwise given opportunities to learn about and explore career pathways. Without viable employment options or support, many of these young people fall into CSEY by default. Regardless, all YYA who experienced CSEY ultimately felt controlled and victimized by their exploiters who took advantage of their limited options. When YYA's needs go chronically unmet, they become more vulnerable to exploiters who promise to meet those needs.

"We're asking for help, but we're not getting any. We're tired of going in circles with phone calls and applying for stuff and just going in circles... There's no safe place for kids to go, kids that are on the streets because the shelters are full.

– A., age 19, Austin

The most effective providers understand that CSEY prevention is programming writ large. When YYA have access to comprehensive resources and supports that help meet their basic needs, build their independence, and foster social emotional skills and positive relationships, they become less vulnerable to exploiters who will otherwise try to fill those gaps in their lives.

Recommendation: Ensure youth are aging out of systems with access to resources and supports to prevent further systems entrenchment and promote success.

First and foremost, providers can help prevent typical pathways into CSEY by offering support and understanding rather than criminalizing YYA's survival behaviors. Criminalizing youth's survival mechanisms creates stigma, and it encourages youth to hide and discourages them from seeking assistance. Further, criminalizing behaviors increases the likelihood that youth will become involved in the justice system, which ultimately creates disconnection from society and puts them at increased risk for CSEY.

Next, it is best practice for providers to assist YYA with the steps necessary to quickly access and maintain stable housing. This can include support with accessing identification documents, addressing YYA's legal history such as justice involvement or evictions, support with accessing housing vouchers, or support with understanding, identifying, and applying for leases. Providers can also assist YYA with maintaining their housing through comprehensive case management. This includes ensuring YYA are equipped with the skills

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Prevent CSEY by Providing Effective Services and Programs

and knowledge necessary to be a good tenant, manage their household chores, budget appropriately, and access basic resources like food, clothing, and transportation.

Further, it benefits providers to understand the broader resources available to YYA so they can make quick and relevant referrals for services. For example, school-based programs offer an abundance of options that support YYA in developing critical skills for adult life, such as programs aimed at preventing justice involvement, school counselors who can provide mental health supports, and afterschool programs and peer groups that can help build youths' self-confidence and leadership skills. Additionally, it is a best practice for youth-serving organizations to provide, or help YYA access, comprehensive health and mental health care as well as education and employment opportunities so that youth can be their healthiest, most whole selves moving forward. Similarly, helping youth get involved in peer groups, where they can develop healthy and supportive relationships and build interpersonal skills can help reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and promote positive behaviors. Additionally, supporting youth to access and maximize education and employment opportunities is a key pathway towards self-sufficiency.

Finally, YYA and the organizations that serve them benefit from maximizing the state and federal resources available to youth and young adults, such as McKinney-Vento resources for students experiencing homelessness, DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) services for YYA exiting the child welfare system, and DFPS Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programs, such as Community Youth Development (CYD) programs for youth in regions with high rates of juvenile crime, and the Family and Youth Success (FAYS) program for families experiencing conflict. It is best practice for providers to collaborate with the agencies and entities providing these services to ensure that YYA understand and have access to all of the services available to them. Further, the state should continue to strengthen and invest in prevention programs and supports to transition-aged youth, such as PAL, FAYS, and CYD. Regarding the PAL curriculum specifically, youth report a desire for increased mental health care tools and management strategies, more support to develop basic life skills, better communication of (and support to access) available resources, more opportunities to develop social skills and assess healthy relationships, guidance to leverage their own internal resources and networks for success, and greater exposure to different possibilities for their lives.[27] Overall, effective prevention will require more upstream services like the ones listed, improved and more ubiquitous mental health supports, and more programming for opportunity youth (young people ages 16 to 24 years old who are disconnected from school and work) to get them re-engaged in school and work.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy):** Youth Thrive™ is a research-based approach to youth services that identifies protective and promotive factors to increase the likelihood that adolescents will develop into healthy, thriving adults. Youth Thrive™ is relevant to everyone who works with young people, including child welfare system administrators, supervisors and caseworks, teachers, staff at private agencies and nonprofits, judges and legal advocates, parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The complete training is made up of seven modules that can be presented all at once over the course of 2-3 full days, as a long-term series in five 3-hour sessions, or as individual piecemeal sessions that focus on specific modules. TNOYS, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the Academy for Competent Youth Work all offer online and in-person training opportunities. To learn more or register for Youth Thrive™ training, please visit TNOYS' upcoming events page or contact us at practice@tnoys.org, visit the CSSP Youth Thrive webpage, or visit the Academy for Competent Youth Work Youth Thrive webpage.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Prevent CSEY by Providing Effective Services and Programs

- **Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Life Skills Study Guides (TNOYS):** The TAY Life Skills Study Guides were developed to provide systems-involved youth with a comprehensive, central resource to help them in their transition into adulthood and independent living. The guides are youth-informed, and they include youth-friendly resources, engaging and interactive activities, and crucial information related to topics such as job readiness and education, financial management, housing and transportation, health and safety, personal and social relationships, and life decisions and responsibilities. The guides are open access, and TNOYS encourages providers to share these guides with the youth they serve. To learn more and access the guides, please visit TNOYS' TAY Life Skills Study Guides webpage.

- **Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services):** The PAL program provides services and supports to youth (ages 14-21) in the child welfare system to prepare them for adulthood and independent living. PAL programming includes independent living skills training, education and employment support, case management services, housing assistance, and other specialized activities. PAL services are provided regionally. Learn more about the PAL program on the DFPS website.

- **Family and Youth Success (FAYS) Program (Texas DFPS):** The FAYS program provides free counseling and crisis management services to youth and families in every county in Texas. FAYS is a Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) program, and FAYS services are provided regionally. TNOYS advocated for the creation of the FAYS program, and many FAYS providers are TNOYS members. Learn more about the FAYS program on the DFPS website.

- **Community Youth Development (CYD) Programs (Texas DFPS):** CYD programs provide Positive Youth Development (PYD) programming to youth ages 6-17 to reduce and prevent juvenile delinquency and juvenile justice involvement. CYD is another PEI program, and CYD services are only offered in regions with high incidences of juvenile crime. Learn more about the CYD program on the DFPS website.

- **Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) Program (Texas Education Agency):** The TEHCY program is authorized by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to address the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness and ensure educational rights and protections for these children and youth. Every Local Education Agency (LEA) in Texas has a designated McKinney-Vento Liaison (or homeless liaison) who is responsible for identifying homeless students in their region, enrolling these students in (and referring students to) appropriate services, informing guardians of students' options and rights, and helping homeless students access critical resources like transportation. Please visit the TEHCY webpage to find and contact the McKinney-Vento Liaison in your region and learn more about resources and supports available through the TEHCY Program.

- **Texas Foster Youth Justice Project (Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc.):** The Texas Foster Youth Justice Project provides an array of free and comprehensive legal support and guidance to current and former foster youth, including support to access identification documents. To learn more, check out their legal documents webpage for an abundance of resources related to accessing legal documents, and visit their website for the full offering of services and resources. Providers and youth can also contact the project directly at (877) 313- 3688 or info@texasfosteryouth.org.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Prevent CSEY by Providing Effective Services and Programs

- **Not a #Number (Love146):** Not a #Number is an interactive, five-module prevention curriculum designed to teach youth (ages 12-18) how to protect themselves from CSEC through information, critical thinking, and skill development. Not a #Number uses a holistic approach focusing on respect, empathy, individual strengths, and the relationship between personal and societal pressures that create or increase vulnerabilities. Love146 also offers a facilitator certification to equip providers to deliver the curriculum with the youth they serve. To learn more or to request a training, please visit the Not a #Number training web page.

- **My Life, My Choice (My Life, My Choice):** My Life, My Choice is a validated and evidence-based prevention curriculum designed to equip youth (ages 12-18) with the tools and knowledge to protect themselves from CSEC. The 10-module curriculum is survivor-developed, and it is designed to be co-facilitated by a CSE survivor. The curriculum is most effective for cisgender and transgender girls, but facilitators can and do modify the content for more expansive audiences. My Life, My Choice also offers a facilitator certification so that service providers can implement the curriculum with the youth they serve. To learn more or to request a training, please visit the My Life, My Choice training web page.

- **The Cool Aunt Series:** The Cool Aunt series is a survivor-developed CSE prevention course, designed for children and youth. The series comprises 12 video modules, is fully online, and is intended for youth-serving organizations, schools, or parents/caregivers. Learn more and purchase the series on The Cool Aunt Series website.

- **NetSmartz (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, NCMEC):** NetSmartz is an online safety education program for children and teenagers. It provides free videos and activities for children and youth to increase awareness of potential online risks and teach strategies to prevent victimization. NetSmartz also offers caregivers, including providers, educators, and parents, free online online safety resources, including presentations, fact sheets, classroom activities, and on-demand trainings, all tailored for specific audiences and age groups. Learn more and access the free resources on the NetSmartz webpage.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY

Implement a Validated, Universal CSEY Screening Tool Across CSEY Programs And Follow Consistent Screening Practices

Providers' screening and identification practices vary dramatically across the state and between programs. Providers report using a number of different tools to screen clients for signs and risks of CSEY, including the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT), the Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT), and various pre-screening tools. Some providers do not currently use any specific CSEY screening tool, and instead are trained to recognize potential signs of CSE and respond appropriately to gather more information. Still others do not screen for CSEY at all.

"Youth don't like to be judged. [Providers] assume stuff about our background, rather than asking about why something happened, where your head was at, what kinds of influences you had."

– R., age 21, Dallas

Most providers that do screen for CSEY only complete comprehensive CSEY screenings for a portion of the youth that they serve. A few different factors might trigger a comprehensive screening, such as observation of specific signs or risk factors for CSEY, demographic information about the youth (such as being female, pregnant, or a parent), or the results of a shorter pre-screening or risk evaluation. Similarly, some providers report that CSEY screenings are often inconsistent, with standard follow-up screenings being conducted at irregular intervals or not at all, which can impact the validity of the screening when not conducted as designed. Almost all providers we spoke with acknowledge that the majority of youth they serve do not readily disclose experiences of CSEY, and that many youth do not even recognize that they are being exploited, so providers do appreciate the importance of screening for CSEY. Regardless of their screening method or frequency, most providers emphasize the importance of trauma-informed practices and being able to rely on staff or community partners with the expertise necessary to provide specialized services if CSEY is suspected or confirmed.

Youth report even more variety in how service providers screen them for CSEY. Even within the same program, youth say that they experience everything from not being asked about CSEY at all, to completing a one-question checkbox at intake, to receiving a comprehensive and trauma-informed screening. The majority of youth who report being screened for CSEY in some capacity shared that providers asked them directly about CSEY, their relationships, and their safety. A smaller number of youth told us that providers asked them a series of questions about their experiences, relationships, resources, and similar indicators that hint at CSEY but do not explicitly mention it. Next, consistent with what we heard from providers, youth with specific demographics or risk factors (namely, females, runaway youth, and pregnant and parenting youth) seemed to report more frequent and more extensive screening experiences. Also consistent with our findings from discussions with providers, many youth did not recognize that they were being exploited and thus would not have been able to disclose that information to providers without targeted prompts.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Implement a Validated, Universal CSEY Screening Tool Across CSEY Programs And Follow
Consistent Screening Practices

Recommendation: Implement a validated, universal CSEY screening tool across the state, and establish and follow consistent screening practices.

Research tells us that YYA may be exploited for two to three years before they are identified and referred to services.[28] Screening allows for earlier identification of CSEY, which in turn helps connect youth with specialized services sooner. TNOYS recommends using a universal screening tool in which all youth who meet a basic minimum requirement, regardless of race, background, socioeconomic status, or other factors, are screened for CSEY. Universal screening helps to reduce bias and stereotyping when assessing risks, which leads to earlier, more comprehensive, and more accurate identification of CSEY. We also recommend using a validated screening tool, which means that the instrument effectively and accurately measures what it is designed to measure, and that it does not capture or misattribute confounding variables. Additionally, it is critical that providers screen youth at regular intervals in order to accurately capture any changes in risk factors or new insights. As providers build trust with youth over time, youth will become more willing to open up to providers, allowing for a more complete and accurate screening. Regularly screening youth for CSEY also provides snapshots of the youth over time, and these data can offer a more complete picture of CSEY risks, vulnerabilities, and demographics both at the individual youth level and at the broader systems level. Finally, screening youth consistently ensures that the screening tool is implemented as designed and maintains its validity and accuracy. TNOYS recommends that Texas providers use a uniform screening tool because this allows for shared language between providers when talking about CSEY and better facilitates sharing of data and information between providers and agencies.

Finally, screening tools provide youth-serving professionals with the information and language to swiftly respond to suspected or confirmed exploitation. Mandatory reporters can use the information gathered through the screening to substantiate a report of suspected child abuse to DFPS and/or law enforcement. It is best practice for providers to disclose any mandatory reporting requirements with youth as a function of transparency and trustworthiness and so that youth can provide informed consent.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **CSE-IT (Westcoast Children's Clinic):** The Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT) is a research-based universal screening tool that helps improve early identification of CSEY. The tool is appropriate for use by any provider serving youth, including child welfare workers, housing and homelessness services providers, probation officers, mental health clinicians, and first responders. The CSE-IT has been validated to ensure it accurately and consistently identifies youth who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation, and that it differentiates between youth who are at risk for exploitation and those who have similar life experiences. As a universal screening tool, the CSE-IT should be used to screen all youth ages 10 years and older, regardless of any other characteristics.[29] The CSE-IT is an information integration tool that can be incorporated into existing protocols at your agency, and it takes less than 10 minutes to complete. Over 11,000 providers in 230+ agencies across 24 states have been trained to use the CSE-IT, including child welfare agencies, juvenile probation departments, schools, and community-based organizations, resulting in over 230,000 screenings to date.[30] Over 134,000 screenings have been conducted in Texas to date, with 10% scoring a clear concern for CSEY risk and 15% scoring a possible concern.[31] The CSE-IT is the recommended screening tool of the Office

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Implement a Validated, Universal CSEY Screening Tool Across CSEY Programs And Follow
Consistent Screening Practices

of the Texas Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Team (OOG CSTT). To begin using the CSE-IT, providers must first complete a 3.5-hour user training. TNOYS and the OOG CSTT regularly offer online and in-person training opportunities. To learn more or register for a CSE-IT User Training, please visit TNOYS' upcoming events page or contact us at practice@tnoys.org, or visit the OOG CSTT webpage or contact them at cstt@gov.texas.gov.

- **Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (Covenant House New Jersey):** The Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT) is a validated sex and labor trafficking screening tool specifically designed for use in settings that serve runaway and homeless youth.[32] The QYIT is unique because it is a brief (4-item) yet highly sensitive screening, and it does not require a trafficking expert to administer. Further, the screening can be administered without any specialized training. The screening should be completed in a structured interview with the youth, and an affirmative answer to any of the screening items should immediately trigger a comprehensive screening for CSEY. To learn more about QYIT, please contact Covenant House New Jersey (CHNJ) or check out this video from CHNJ.

- **Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (Vera Institute of Justice):** The Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT) is another validated sex and labor trafficking screening tool. Unlike the other recommended screening tools, the TVIT was designed and validated for adults, but questions can be modified for children and youth. Additionally, the TVIT has not been validated with LGBTQ+ folks or individuals with disabilities, and the developers again encourage providers to modify questions as appropriate to fit the unique needs of these populations. The full TVIT includes 39 questions, and there is also a short version (16 questions) that can be used without loss of validity. The TVIT can be integrated into regular intake processes or conducted as a structured interview. There is no cost, user training, or permission required to begin using the TVIT, but providers should be well-trained in topics relevant to CSEY to use it most effectively. To learn more, please see the TVIT administration guidelines.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY

Comprehensively Assess Youth Strengths and Needs to Inform Services

Providers' assessment practices vary between organizations, including tools, cadence, data sharing, and completing a comprehensive assessment at all. Many providers conflate screening and assessment, and as a result, they often stop at screening and fail to complete assessments for the youth that they serve. Providers that do complete comprehensive assessments use an array of assessment tools. These disparities mean that providers lack a shared language for discussing youth's strengths and needs, have a limited ability to share information between systems and organizations, and are unable to provide services that build on what a youth has already received.

Further, when providers cannot reference shared data to develop a case history, they must complete a new assessment with each new intake, which means that youth repeat their stories with each provider they engage. Asking youth to recount their stories multiple times is not trauma-informed, and it is something that youth consistently tell us negatively impacts their relationship with a provider. The most effective providers assess youth's strengths and needs immediately upon intake and use this information to develop individualized, comprehensive, and adaptable service plans for each youth.

"Providers can't just follow the textbook. If I'm really going through it, forget the textbook. Assess the situation and needs in the moment, and respond accordingly. Be willing to adapt."

– J., age 21, Dallas

Recommendation: Once a youth is identified as at risk for or experiencing CSEY, complete a uniform, comprehensive, and strengths-based assessment of that youth's strengths and needs to inform development of an individualized service plan for the youth.

Whereas a CSEY screening is used to identify youth with possible experiences of (or risk for) CSE, an assessment is used to gather more in-depth information about a youth to ultimately inform service planning, such as the youth's history and experiences, risk factors, strengths, and needs. Both screenings and assessments are crucial to effective service provision and should be applied universally, but they serve two distinct purposes for informing decisions about a youth's case. It is important that the assessment is comprehensive in order to fully capture the youth's assets, challenges, and goals, which will inform service options and allow providers to truly individualize services to the youth's unique profile. When completed at regular intervals, a comprehensive assessment also measures changes in youth behaviors, risk factors, needs, and outcomes over time. Providers can use this information to assess a youth's progress with the prescribed service plan and make adjustments based on the youth's current needs, priorities, and circumstances. At an organizational level, such data provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of programming and provide regular opportunities for reflection and continuous improvement. Finally, TNOYS recommends that providers

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Comprehensively Assess Youth Strengths and Needs to Inform Services

across Texas use a uniform assessment, such as the CANS-CSE, in order to create a shared language when talking about CSEY risks and interventions and to allow for easier sharing of information and collaboration on goals between organizations and agencies.

Lastly, safety planning with YYA is an effective strategy to keep young people safe. Safety planning allows providers and youth to collaboratively assess risks and assets in a youth's situation and prepare for future crises. Although safety planning should not replace a comprehensive assessment, it can be an effective tool to contextualize the information gathered through the assessment and make it actionable.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment-CSE (CANS-CSE):** The CANS is a comprehensive, trauma-informed evaluation and communication tool. It is intended to prevent duplicate assessments by multiple parties, decrease unnecessary psychological testing, aid in identifying placement and treatment needs, and inform case planning decisions. CANS assessments help decision-making, drive service planning, facilitate quality improvement, and allow for outcomes monitoring. The CANS is easy to learn and is well liked by parents, providers, and other stakeholders because it is easy to understand and does not necessarily require scoring in order to be meaningful to an individual child and family. The CSE module is an optional add-on for the CANS that specifically assesses strengths and needs related to CSE risk and recovery. To learn more, please visit the Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) CANS webpage.

- **Safety Planning:** A safety plan is a personalized plan designed to help individuals experiencing CSE stay safe, including assessing risk, considering options, preparing for a future crisis, and creating contingency plans. The intention of safety planning is to assess the long-term needs of survivors and provide support and skills to maintain current and future safety. Effective safety plans provide supportive resources, identify and practice coping strategies, create a detailed plan to respond to dangerous situations, and develop mini plans with role-playing opportunities. It is critical that youth are informed and involved in their own safety planning. Some great examples of safety plans include this personalized safety plan from the Texas Council on Family Violence, and this shorter personalized safety plan from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. To learn more or to request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or contact us at practice@tnoys.org.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY

Provide Wraparound Services

Youth and providers alike report that their service priorities cross multiple systems to include access to housing, access to high-quality health care and mental health care, supports to build vocational skills and overcome barriers to employment, and supports to build social-emotional skills. Moreover, youth consistently emphasize that these same elements– health challenges, mental health challenges, and barriers to employment– are the primary factors that can hinder their pathway to long-term stability when exiting CSEY or homelessness. Youth also need more support to find and access wraparound services.

When youth are mentally and physically healthy, they are better equipped to set and achieve their goals. Conversely, health and mental health challenges can make it difficult for youth to achieve stability because they must then concentrate their resources and energy on addressing their health or mental health needs. As a result, youth may not be able to maintain full-time employment, complete their education, or otherwise focus on their other goals and aspirations. Youth report a strong desire for providers to provide, or help youth access, comprehensive and accessible health and mental health supports. Youth especially want high-quality mental health counselors who are available in person or online, are proactive in developing a relationship with the youth, and who truly listen to the youth and offer a diversity of options for treatment. Similarly, youth expressed the need for increased opportunities to build social-emotional skills, such as self-advocacy, coping, boundaries and healthy relationships, and appropriate behaviors for different settings such as the work place, school, and social settings.

"I have been to some places that have plenty of resources, it's just not available to everyone... you normally have to go through a whole process of checking the background, drug tests, all that. And a lot of the times, people have already been through most of those things that make them not eligible."

– P., Houston

Youth also spoke extensively about their need for employment support and opportunities. Youth want education and job training across a diversity of fields to prepare them for employment, and they also want more guidance when navigating their career options, applying for positions, and adjusting to the workforce, such as understanding unspoken norms. Youth report that they struggle to secure or maintain employment as a result of employer biases, lack of reliable transportation, unaddressed health and mental health needs that prevent them from working at their full capacity, and an inability to express themselves because of their trauma. Specific employer biases that youth recounted include reluctance to accommodate health and mental health needs, assumptions that youth are not reliable because of their circumstances, and unwillingness to provide professional development for young persons to build their skills.

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Provide Wraparound Services

Recommendation: Ensure services wrap around the entire youth to both meet their immediate needs and set them up for long-term success and independence.

It is important that services address all areas of a youth's life in order to prepare youth for a successful transition to independence. YYA's needs will span across many systems such as housing, employment, education, health and mental health, and legal. Therefore, it is crucial that youth services providers apply a cross-systems lens to their service provision. No one provider can, nor should, necessarily meet all the needs a youth might present, which is why providers must collaborate with a diversity of services and programs across youth-focused systems in order to connect youth to resources and effectively address all of a youth's needs.

In addition to addressing immediate and often urgent needs, such as housing, food and clothing, and health care, TNOYS encourages providers to support youth to think about their long-term goals and what they need to accomplish to reach those goals and achieve stability. This includes mental health support, education and employment services, and building social-emotional skills. Education and employment support goes beyond helping youth complete their GED or land a minimum wage job; it instead helps youth to identify and nurture their passions and skills, consider career pathways, and pursue any necessary accreditations or skill-building to achieve their goals. Further, youth benefit from opportunities to build professional and social-emotional skills through work-based learning and apprenticeship. A great place to start is to find or create positions within youth-serving organizations in which youth can practice and build their skills in a safe and supportive environment. Further, when youth pursue or secure employment outside of the organization, providers can support youth to overcome immediate barriers by offering transportation to and from work, providing letters of recommendation to employers and committing to helping hold youth accountable to their obligations, and supporting youth to build self-advocacy and communication skills so they can effectively express their needs and desires.

When supporting youth to build social-emotional skills, providers can focus on mental health resources as well as coping skills and self-advocacy skills, many of which can be developed through leadership opportunities. This is supported by the Positive Youth Development framework, a research-based approach to youth development that views youth as resources, not problems. Setting youth up for long-term success also includes ensuring that youth have opportunities to participate in normalcy activities and matriculate into society in a safe and supported environment. For example, taking youth to events or activities in the community, like the movies, a sports game, or a shopping trip, allows them to practice various interpersonal skills and emotional regulation while staff are also there to provide support and help de-escalate if youth are pushed too far out of their comfort zone.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Blueprint for Youth Engagement Training and TA Series (TNOYS):** The Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA series, modeled after TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement, equips providers from across youth-focused systems with the skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage youth in their services and programs as clients, collaborators, and employees. The 5-part training series is based on the latest research on youth engagement as well as TNOYS' experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from our own youth leadership programming. Training content focuses on topics such as

Focus Areas for Addressing CSEY
Provide Wraparound Services

relationship building and successful youth-adult partnerships, youth-centered programming and youth storytelling, creating supportive and trauma-informed work environments, and employing YYA with lived experiences. The entire training series is youth-informed and/or youth-developed, and all modules within the series are, or can be, co-led by youth with lived experiences. Providers may attend individual trainings within the series to earn CEUs, or they may participate in the full series to earn certification in the curriculum. Each module is one to four hours in length, and TNOYS offers the training virtually and in-person. To learn more, register for a training opportunity, or request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or TNOYS' Upcoming Events webpage, or email us at practice@tnoys.org. The following training modules within the series will be most pertinent to this specific recommendation:

- **"Building Alliances with Youth to Reduce and Prevent Challenging Behaviors":** This training explores the basis for the display of challenging behaviors in youth, such as refusing or running away from placements, disengagement, and conflict. Participants will learn and practice best practices that promote trauma-informed approaches, positive youth engagement, authentic relationship-building, and resilience. Through dialogue, first hand reflections from youth with lived experiences, and role-playing activities, participants will strengthen their framework for addressing and mitigating challenges and gain tools to add to their strategic repertoire.

- **"Employing Youth with Lived Experiences":** This training equips participants with a strengths-based approach to employing YYA with lived experiences. Learning objectives cover the importance of employing YYA with lived experiences and the positive impacts on the youth, staff, and the organization as a whole; strategies and guidance to support staff with lived experiences, such as navigating personal trauma, additional support needs, and on the job skill-building; and best practices for organizations and supervisors to achieve success.

- **Safety Planning:** A safety plan is a personalized plan designed to help individuals experiencing CSE stay safe, including assessing risk, considering options, preparing for a future crisis, and creating contingency plans. The intention of safety planning is to assess the long-term needs of survivors and provide support and skills to maintain current and future safety. Effective safety plans provide supportive resources, identify and practice coping strategies, create a detailed plan to respond to dangerous situations, and develop mini plans with role-playing opportunities. It is critical that youth are informed and involved in their own safety planning. Some great examples of safety plans include this personalized safety plan from the Texas Council on Family Violence, and this shorter personalized safety plan from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. To learn more or to request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or email us at practice@tnoys.org

Recommended Actions

Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services

Exiting "the life" is a difficult and non-linear transition with many stops and starts. The youth we spoke with shared that they may experience both "push" factors that push them away from services, such as overly rigid rules, lack of trust in providers, and being retraumatized when engaging in services feels like a transactional relationship; and "pull" factors that entice them back into CSEY, such as the money, glamor, freedom, and thrill. Further, when youth have to jump through hoops to receive support, or they face barriers such as long waitlists, slow services, or what they deem to be unrealistic expectations from providers, they can become discouraged and less likely to engage in services. Providers substantiated these claims, with many recognizing that if they fail to engage a young person the first time they come in for services, the provider might not have a second chance to make that connection. Some providers even express the sentiment that if they have to turn away a young person seeking services, they have failed at their mission. Additionally, youth who have experienced CSEY report feeling isolated, unable to express themselves, and a lack of safety, support, or trust in others as they adjust to a life after CSEY, all of which can have lasting impacts and further complicate providers' ability to engage and serve them.

Youth also shared that they often feel judged for their past mistakes or current circumstances when interacting with providers. Youth explained that rather than putting in the time and effort to get to know the youth, providers may make judgments that significantly impact a young person's access to services and eventual independence, such as deciding whether or not to accept or recommend a youth for a specific program. Similarly, youth are often hesitant to truly open up to providers and share their experiences, wants, or needs, for fear of how providers will react. In addition to concerns about being judged, youth worry that if they share the full reality of their minds, emotions, and situations with a provider, there is the potential to be penalized through medication or institutionalization. These experiences can make youth hesitant to return to a program after making a mistake, fearful of repercussions for their actions, and less willing to be honest or ask for help, all of which impacts a provider's ability to provide effective services.

> *"I feel like at a certain time, if you keep on getting back in the system... They keep on judging you off your background and then when you really try to change, it's like they go back and look at your past and be like 'no, this is how you were back then.' So, they wanna treat you the same way as, like, you did back then."*
>
> *– Anonymous, age 15, Fort Worth*

In combination, these factors can make a young person experiencing CSEY feel hopeless about their situation, or even see CSEY as the better option when compared to seeking services and support. The most effective providers understand this conundrum, and they prioritize reducing barriers to accessing services, demonstrating unconditional positive regard for all youth, and moving at the youth's pace.

Recommended Actions
Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services

Recommendation: Prioritize meeting youth where they are, practicing non-judgement, and demonstrating consistency, patience, and unconditional positive regard with youth. Further, reduce push factors and address pull factors by lowering barriers to entry for youth seeking services, creating as much normalcy as possible for clients, and showing YYA that there is a way out and a better path forward.

Providers can practice the first half of this recommendation by continuing to reach out to youth, offering services and support at varying levels of engagement, and reminding youth that they are available and waiting whenever the youth is ready to seek and accept more support. It is important to move at the youth's pace and prove through your actions that you are not giving up on them or going anywhere. It is also crucial that providers continue to welcome youth back with open arms regardless of that youth's historical or recent actions.

Reducing barriers to entry ensures that youth are given every possible chance to engage in services and mitigates the possibility that youth will become discouraged in this pursuit. A key strategy to reducing barriers to entry is ensuring that no youth who comes through your doors leaves empty handed. Even if a program is full, best practice is for providers to offer some sort of support to youth, whether that is a friendly ear, a snack and a drink, a supply kit with basic necessities, or a list of referrals and support connecting to those resources. Then, we encourage providers to stay in contact with youth to regularly check in on their needs and wellbeing, provide updates on their waitlist status, and provide additional information on potential resources as they become available. These actions demonstrate to the youth that they can continue to come to that provider for help and that the provider has a vested interest in that young person's outcomes.

"I don't think they understand the transition that one might go through when they come out... It's a hard crash from good, fast money, or at least a lot of money, to the little crappy $15/hour that I get now. Everybody says that's good money! It's not for me, nowhere close."

- J., age 21, Dallas

Similarly, providers might consider their requirements for program participation and whether or not these requirements might discourage youth from participating. For example, consider the intention of different requirements, whether any requirements can be adjusted or simplified to better meet youth's circumstances, and what kind of support the organization is providing (or can provide) to help youth meet these requirements. TNOYS recommends that providers seek feedback from youth about whether or not expectations are currently addressing the intended goals, the feasibility of their expectations, and what support youth might need to meet these expectations. Lastly, best practices for organizations to minimize invasive intake processes include taking the time to develop a rapport with the youth before asking sensitive questions, using a trauma-informed approach when completing assessments, and sharing data between organizations so that youth do not have to repeat their stories more than absolutely necessary.

Similarly, providers can mitigate pull factors like a desire for freedom and autonomy by creating as much normalcy as possible for the youth that they serve. Once again, TNOYS encourages organizations to consider their rules and expectations and seek YYA feedback to ensure they are providing services in the least

Recommended Actions
Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services

restrictive environment possible. A great way to assess your own practices is to partner with youth to seek their feedback on existing standards and brainstorm reasonable rules and expectations that the youth understand and support. When youth have the chance to weigh in on policies, they have increased buy-in and are more likely to respect and follow the rules. Further, organizations would benefit from considering the assumptions and intentions behind their policies. For example, strengths-based policies view youth as resourceful and capable and build upon youth's inherent abilities; trauma-informed policies abide by the six core principles of trauma-informed care: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and humility and responsiveness. Similarly, some youth discussed how the transactional nature of services can remind them of their relationship with their exploiter, which can trigger a trauma response and cause youth to shut down or reject the services offered. Strategies to avoid re-traumatizing youth in this way include explaining the reasoning behind specific expectations or requirements of youth and even considering which requirements are truly necessary to achieve your organization's mission. Youth reject services when they feel controlled and stifled, and this is especially true for youth who have experienced CSEY. One way providers can reduce these feelings is to allow for freedom and let youth have agency over their own lives. Youth need room to make mistakes and learn from them, and the provider's job is to offer resources and support through that process and guide youth to recognize the lesson and make more informed choices moving forward.

> *"Having a coach or someone who is passionate about their job goes a long way. That definitely makes a huge difference... My first time coming here was awful, but coming back now with my son things have been completely different, especially as far as the staff is concerned."*
>
> *– Z., age 24, Dallas*

Finally, youth need to be able to see that there is a way out of CSEY. This starts by encouraging youth's hopes, dreams, and aspirations and providing support and guidance to help youth meet their stated goals. To start, providers can support youth with their education and employment goals by providing access to education and employment resources that can expand youth's opportunities for the future. Further, youth who have experienced CSEY will likely be distrustful of service providers, their peers, and anyone who they believe might try to separate them from their exploiter or try to take advantage of the youth again (depending on their stage of recovery). Youth need opportunities to develop genuine connections and healthy relationships during this period. Not only do healthy relationships provide opportunities for youth to rebuild trust in themselves and in others, but the experience of being part of something bigger than themselves promotes self-efficacy and resilience.[33]

Lastly, youth benefit from seeing CSEY survivors who have succeeded in creating a meaningful life after CSEY. Youth regularly tell TNOYS how impactful it is to see someone like them who came out on the other side. Not only does this provide hope, but it enables youth to better understand and visualize their options and opportunities. Therefore, TNOYS recommends employing individuals with lived experiences as staff or peer mentors who can inspire youth currently exiting CSEY and provide a unique level of mentorship and support. Providers can bring more survivors to the table by employing individuals with lived experiences and incorporating peer mentorship models into programming.

Recommended Actions
Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Blueprint for Youth Engagement Training and TA Series (TNOYS):** The Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA series, modeled after TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement, equips providers from across youth-focused systems with the skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage youth in their services and programs as clients, collaborators, and employees. The 5-part training series is based on the latest research on youth engagement as well as TNOYS' experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from our own youth leadership programming. Training content focuses on topics such as relationship building and successful youth-adult partnerships, youth-centered programming and youth storytelling, creating supportive and trauma-informed work environments, and employing YYA with lived experiences. The entire training series is youth-informed and/or youth-developed, and all modules within the series are, or can be, co-led by youth with lived experiences. Providers may attend individual trainings within the series to earn CEUs, or they may participate in the full series to earn certification in the curriculum. Each module is one to four hours in length, and TNOYS offers the training virtually and in-person. To learn more, register for a training opportunity, or request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or TNOYS' Upcoming Events webpage, or email us at practice@tnoys.org. The following training modules within the series will be most pertinent to this specific recommendation:

- **Motivational Interviewing / Motivational Interviewing for CSEY Responders (Baylor University):** Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an evidence-based, internationally recognized counseling approach to behavior change. MI is a collaborative, guiding style of communication, designed to empower people to change by strengthening their personal motivation and commitment to a goal. MI helps guide individuals from ambivalence towards decision and active change through collaborative conversations. Many MI strategies are especially effective for CSEY survivors. In fact, Baylor University developed a unique MI for CSEY Responders curriculum that specifically addresses the unique needs of CSE survivors. To learn more, please visit the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT) webpage, or check out the MI for CSEY Trainers course on Baylor University course catalog. Please contact the Office of the Texas Governor, Child Sex Trafficking Team for further information regarding Motivational Interviewing for CSEY training.

- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is a comprehensive organizational change approach to address the impacts of childhood trauma on long-term physical health, mental health, and behavioral outcomes later in life. The TIC approach establishes safe, trustworthy, and mutually collaborative relationships between service providers and clients, and it reframes interactions with youth and staff from "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?". The six principles of TIC include: Safety, Trustworthiness and Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration, Empowerment, and Humility and Responsiveness. To learn more and begin implementing TIC in your organization, please visit the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, or check out this issue brief on successful TIC implementation.

- **Therapeutic Options (Therapeutic Options, Inc.):** The Therapeutic Options training is a research-based, person-centered, and trauma-informed approach to reducing violence and use of seclusion and restraint across a number of settings, including education, mental and physical health care, and residential programs. Please visit the Therapeutic Options website to learn more.

Recommended Actions
Mitigate Push and Pull Factors to Better Engage Youth in Services

- **Crisis Intervention Training Programs (Crisis Prevention Institute):** The Crisis Prevention institute (CPI) offers a range of evidence-based, accredited training programs to help organizations identify, prevent, and de-escalate crises, including Verbal Intervention, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, and Nonviolent Crisis Intervention with Advanced Physical Skills. Please visit the CPI website to learn more.

Recommended Actions

Take an Individualized Approach to Services

Perhaps the most common theme among the youth listening sessions was that youth want to be seen as individuals, and they desire flexible services that align with their unique needs and circumstances. YYA report that when they are given options and the ability to come up with their own solutions, rather than being imposed with a one-size-fits-all approach, they feel more satisfied with services, heard and respected, and better supported to achieve their goals. The most effective providers work alongside youth to identify their stated needs and priorities, support them to problem-solve for themselves, and find ways to address youth's needs in a way that works for each individual youth, as opposed to prescribing a predetermined pathway. Although most providers we spoke with discussed the importance of youth voice and youth autonomy, as well as a desire to prioritize these values in their interactions with youth, they do not always know how to do so effectively, or they are not necessarily implementing these practices as well as they might think. It is clear that providers need further guidance and support to do this well.

> *"Everybody is not the same; everybody is different. That's the main problem with the system: they try to treat everybody the same, but everybody isn't the same. This is not 'treat people how you want to be treated.'"*
>
> – A., age 22, Dallas

When asked about opportunities to use their voices to make decisions about their own lives, share feedback with providers about services and programs, or otherwise practice leadership skills within programs (such as helping to plan or execute a service or program), the majority of youth we spoke with were so unfamiliar with these concepts that they were actually baffled by the question. In other words, most youth report that they do not have opportunities to use their voices, share feedback, or otherwise learn and practice leadership skills. Further, many youth shared that they feel like they miss out on opportunities when they are not allowed to make choices about their own lives. For example, a number of YYA in the child welfare system were stuck in parental rights cases waiting for reunification they did not want, which impacted their ability to find a stable home, heal from trauma, reduce vulnerabilities for CSEY, and generally pursue their goals.

Additionally, many youth shared that they often do not feel heard or listened to by program staff, and they report being shut down or ignored when they try to advocate for their needs, express ideas, or voice concerns and give feedback on programming. As a result, many YYA claim that it is not worth sharing how they really feel or asking for what they need to bolster their journey to independence. When YYA do feel heard, however, they are able to open up and be vulnerable with providers, which in turn strengthens services and ultimately improves outcomes for youth because providers are able to make more informed and collaborative service recommendations.

Recommended Actions
Take an individualized Approach to Services

Recommendation: Prioritize a youth-centered approach, listen to youth and individualize services to each youth's unique needs and priorities, and let youth take the lead in their own lives.

Youth-centered approaches and Positive Youth Development in youth services is well researched and demonstrated to significantly impact outcomes. This is particularly true for youth who are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and other traumas. In cases where youth do not feel heard, or have repeated experiences in which their worries, concerns, or individual needs are not acted upon, they are less likely to report abuse or harm, seek help, and ultimately receive quality care when experiencing adverse events in the future.[35] On the other hand, when youth-serving providers meaningfully listen to and address the individual needs of youth, they work to reverse maladaptive frameworks and survival behaviors that stem from trauma, promote protective factors that increase resilience, and help prepare youth for adulthood and civic participation.[36,37]

Youth regain their power and autonomy when they have opportunities to use their voices and make decisions about their own lives, but these opportunities are often limited, if not non-existent. Best practices for providers are to evaluate the ways in which they seek out youth perspectives, insights, and ideas on their own lives, and to remember that authentically sharing power also requires the sharing of information and resources to ensure that youth actually have a real level of influence. Once the pattern of feedback is established, the organization will most benefit if it remains an ongoing process instead of a one-time event. From there, it is important that providers meaningfully follow through on that information to demonstrate that youth have been heard.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Blueprint for Youth Engagement Training and TA Series (TNOYS):** The Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA series, modeled after [TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement](#), equips providers from across youth-focused systems with the skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage youth in their services and programs as clients, collaborators, and employees. The 5-part training series is based on the latest research on youth engagement as well as TNOYS' experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from our own youth leadership programming. Training content focuses on topics such as relationship building and successful youth-adult partnerships, youth-centered programming and youth storytelling, creating supportive and trauma-informed work environments, and employing YYA with lived experiences. The entire training series is youth-informed and/or youth-developed, and all modules within the series are, or can be, co-led by youth with lived experiences. Providers may attend individual trainings within the series to earn CEUs, or they may participate in the full series to earn certification in the curriculum. Each module is one to four hours in length, and TNOYS offers the training virtually and in-person. To learn more, register for a training opportunity, or request a training, please visit [TNOYS' T&TA webpage](#) or [TNOYS' Upcoming Events webpage](#), or email us at practice@tnoys.org.

- **Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy):** Youth Thrive™ is a research-based approach to youth services that identifies protective and promotive factors to increase the likelihood that adolescents will develop into healthy, thriving adults. Youth Thrive™ is relevant to everyone who works with young people, including child welfare system administrators, supervisors and caseworks, teachers, staff at private agencies and nonprofits, judges and legal advocates, parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The complete training is made up of seven modules that can be presented all at once

Recommended Actions
Take an individualized Approach to Services

over the course of 2-3 full days, as a long-term series in five 3-hour sessions, or as individual piecemeal sessions that focus on specific modules. TNOYS, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the Academy for Competent Youth Work all offer online and in-person training opportunities. To learn more or register for Youth Thrive™ training, please visit TNOYS' upcoming events page or contact us at practice@tnoys.org, visit the CSSP Youth Thrive webpage, or visit the Academy for Competent Youth Work Youth Thrive webpage.

- **Positive Youth Development Framework:** Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a research-based, strengths-based approach to youth development that views youth as resources, not problems. PYD aims to increase protective factors in youth by providing them with opportunities for leadership, civic participation, learning, and positive relationships with their community. Research demonstrates that increased protective factors can support youth to better overcome adversities and are associated with more positive outcomes for youth. Youth services providers can embed elements of PYD in their programs by increasing opportunities for youth to: work in partnership with adults to develop solutions or implement programming, take on leadership and decision-making roles, meaningfully contribute to (and connect with) their community, and build their own skills and self-confidence, among others. To learn more about PYD, please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway, the Family and Youth Services Bureau PYD webpage, this Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) PYD literature review, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) PYD entry, or the Youth.gov PYD webpage.

Recommended Actions

Build Trust as the Foundation of the Youth-Adult Relationship

Almost unanimously, both providers and youth emphasize that a trusting relationship between youth and provider is essential to effective services. Although almost every provider we interviewed understands the importance of a trusting relationship with youth as the foundation of effective services, many providers struggle to implement this ideal in practice, and they need guidance and support to build trusting relationships with the youth that they serve.

Many of the youth we spoke with report feeling like just another caseload, rather than an individual who is worthy of attention and care. YYA feel like they don't matter to providers, especially when providers do not follow through on promises, get a youth's hopes up rather than be real with them, or hide behind policies when making decisions. These behaviors create a lack of intimacy between youth and providers and make it difficult for YYA to trust providers. As a result, youth do not feel safe opening up, which means providers miss potentially critical information about a youth's case. Another striking insight from youth is that when providers do not trust youth, it is hard for youth to trust providers in return. Youth are insightful, and they can see when a provider is being genuine with them or not. Beyond mere intuition, youth realize that providers do not trust them based on providers' actions, such as questioning and second-guessing a youth's words or actions, implementing overly restrictive rules and safeguards, not giving youth the space and freedom to make their own choices, and generally treating youth like children while expecting them to act like adults. Youth report a similar lack of reciprocity with providers in regard to community and transparency as well. Notably, youth want that trusting relationship with an adult who can provide mentorship and reassurance. They are open and willing to develop the relationship but are hoping for providers to facilitate these relationships. Finally, youth report that they connect better with providers who have similar backgrounds or experiences to the youth. This might be a shared systems experience, but it also might be shared culture, home life, race or ethnicity, gender or orientation, interests, or another commonality. This shared understanding makes providers easier to talk to, trust, and build a relationship with because the youth knows that the provider understands where they are coming from and sees them as more than a statistic.

> *"I don't trust nobody, but I know that it's more so I don't trust myself in choosing people..."*
>
> – A., age 23, Houston

As mentioned, providers recognize the importance of establishing a trusting relationship with youth in order to better assess their strengths and needs to ultimately provide appropriate services. The most effective providers take their time to develop genuine relationships with youth, and they allow YYA to dictate the pace of the relationship and services. These providers emphasize building rapport with youth before they begin interrogating the youth, even if this means they do not complete a comprehensive screening or assessment until their second or third meeting. Building rapport demonstrates that the provider cares about the youth on a personal level, ensures youth feel comfortable, and establishes a sense of safety. Providers acknowledge

Recommended Actions
Build Trust as the Foundation of the Youth-Adult Relationship

that these practices require training and support so that staff understand how to approach and engage youth, how to build relationships, and how to determine when a youth is ready to start answering questions. They also focus on creating a welcoming environment at their facilities by displaying warm and engaging signs; having food, water, and basic resources readily available for all youth, regardless of whether they are actively engaged in services; always having a staff person ready to greet youth who come in; making time for every youth who walks through their doors and not turning anyone away; and opening up common areas that welcome and encourage youth to come hang out. A handful of providers we spoke with also emphasized providing opportunities for fun and normalcy for youth, such as regular outings (e.g., movies or the zoo), basketball tournaments, and poetry slams.

Recommendation: Prioritize building a trusting relationship with youth as a key strategy for improving services and strengthening outcomes. Building a trusting relationship with youth includes being genuine and honest with youth, implementing practices that build rapport, and considering which staff can and do best connect with individual youth.

It is imperative that providers establish trust with youth as the foundation for youth to share their experiences, wants, needs, hopes, and fears. When youth trust providers to open up and share more information in this way, not only are providers better equipped to customize services to each unique youth, but youth are also emboldened to be vulnerable with the provider about what is and is not working. Providers should also prioritize honesty with youth and practice transparency whenever possible. Youth desire – and deserve – a reciprocal relationship in which both youth and providers trust and communicate openly with each other. Moreover, providers are responsible for modeling their expectations for youth and holding themselves to the same standards to which they hold youth. Foundational to a trusting relationship is building rapport. In fact, we recommend that, to whatever extent possible, providers prioritize building rapport over gathering information in their initial meeting(s) with youth. Quite simply, providers will not gather as robust of information if they do not first establish a foundation of trust and rapport with a youth, making the effort to do so overwhelmingly worthwhile.

Additionally, taking the time to build trust and rapport aligns with the principles of trauma-informed care by establishing a sense of safety, being responsive to youth's initial needs, leveling power differences, empowering youth to move at their own pace, and of course demonstrating trustworthiness itself. Similarly, given the importance that youth place on connecting with providers who have similar experiences, providers should consider ways that they can maximize this, whether that is intentionally recruiting and hiring staff with lived experiences, supporting current and former clients to take on paid mentorship roles, encouraging staff to find commonalities with the youth they serve, or simply being cognizant of how youth connect with different providers and being intentional to pair youth with the providers with whom they best align.

Finally, providers should not underestimate the importance of creating a welcoming environment and carving out time for fun and normalcy activities. Examples include offering snacks, water, and supply kits to youth seeking services, designating staff to greet youth who walk through the doors, displaying signs of inclusivity and openness, and organizing regular events and outings for youth. If you are unsure of how to implement some of these strategies, a great way to start is by asking the youth you serve what they would most appreciate or like to see! This could be a simple survey or focus group, or a more permanent committee of youth to brainstorm ideas and develop and execute a plan to bring those ideas to life.

Recommended Actions
Build Trust as the Foundation of the Youth-Adult Relationship

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Blueprint for Youth Engagement Training and TA Series (TNOYS):** The Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA series, modeled after TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement, equips providers from across youth-focused systems with the skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage youth in their services and programs as clients, collaborators, and employees. The 5-part training series is based on the latest research on youth engagement as well as TNOYS' experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from our own youth leadership programming. Training content focuses on topics such as relationship building and successful youth-adult partnerships, youth-centered programming and youth storytelling, creating supportive and trauma-informed work environments, and employing YYA with lived experiences. The entire training series is youth-informed and/or youth-developed, and all modules within the series are, or can be, co-led by youth with lived experiences. Providers may attend individual trainings within the series to earn CEUs, or they may participate in the full series to earn certification in the curriculum. Each module is one to four hours in length, and TNOYS offers the training virtually and in-person. To learn more, register for a training opportunity, or request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or TNOYS' Upcoming Events webpage, or email us at practice@tnoys.org. The following training modules within the series will be most pertinent to this specific recommendation:

    - **"Building Alliances with Youth to Reduce and Prevent Challenging Behaviors":** This training explores the basis for the display of challenging behaviors in youth, such as refusing or running away from placements, disengagement, and conflict. Participants will learn and practice best practices that promote trauma-informed approaches, positive youth engagement, authentic relationship-building, and resilience. Through dialogue, first hand reflections from youth with lived experiences, and role-playing activities, participants will strengthen their framework for addressing and mitigating challenges and gain tools to add to their strategic repertoire.

    - **"Employing Youth with Lived Experiences":** This training equips participants with a strengths-based approach to employing YYA with lived experiences. Learning objectives cover the importance of employing YYA with lived experiences and the positive impacts on the youth, staff, and the organization as a whole; strategies and guidance to support staff with lived experiences, such as navigating personal trauma, additional support needs, and on the job skill-building; and best practices for organizations and supervisors to achieve success.

    - **"Embedding Youth Voice in Your Organization's DNA":** This training teaches the fundamentals for establishing and maintaining youth input within a youth-serving organization for the long term. Participants will learn strategies to embed youth experiences in organizational processes, procedures, and projects while avoiding tokenism; tips and guidance for implementing and improving youth and client feedback practices; and best practices for partnering with youth and utilizing their feedback to impact organizational change, improve their lives, and ultimately the systems that serve them.

- **Youth Thrive™ (Center for the Study of Social Policy):** Youth Thrive™ is a research-based approach to youth services that identifies protective and promotive factors to increase the likelihood that adolescents will develop into healthy, thriving adults. Youth Thrive™ is relevant to everyone who works with young people, including child welfare system administrators, supervisors and caseworks, teachers,

Recommended Actions
Build Trust as the Foundation of the Youth-Adult Relationship

staff at private agencies and nonprofits, judges and legal advocates, parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The complete training is made up of seven modules that can be presented all at once over the course of 2-3 full days, as a long-term series in five 3-hour sessions, or as individual piecemeal sessions that focus on specific modules. TNOYS, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the Academy for Competent Youth Work all offer online and in-person training opportunities. To learn more or register for Youth Thrive™ training, please visit TNOYS' upcoming events page or contact us at practice@tnoys.org, visit the CSSP Youth Thrive webpage, or visit the Academy for Competent Youth Work Youth Thrive webpage.

- **Positive Youth Development Framework:** Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a research-based, strengths-based approach to youth development that views youth as resources, not problems. PYD aims to increase protective factors in youth by providing them with opportunities for leadership, civic participation, learning, and positive relationships with their community. Research demonstrates that increased protective factors can support youth to better overcome adversities and are associated with more positive outcomes for youth. Youth services providers can embed elements of PYD in their programs by increasing opportunities for youth to: work in partnership with adults to develop solutions or implement programming, take on leadership and decision-making roles, meaningfully contribute to (and connect with) their community, and build their own skills and self-confidence, among others. To learn more about PYD, please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway, the Family and Youth Services Bureau PYD webpage, this Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) PYD literature review, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) PYD entry, or the Youth.gov PYD webpage.

- **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) (Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (KPICD), Texas Christian University):** TBRI® is an evidence-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children and youth. TBRI® is based on attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, and it is designed for children who have experienced relationship-based trauma such as institutionalization, multiple foster home placements, and abuse or neglect. TBRI® is appropriate for parents, caregivers, teachers, and anyone who works with vulnerable children, and it can be used in a variety of settings, including residential facilities, juvenile justice and child welfare settings, courts and law enforcement, schools, faith communities, clinical practices, with CSE survivors, and more. KPICD even developed a specific TBRI® with CSE Survivors training that focuses on tools and practices to best support CSE survivors. To begin using TBRI®, Providers must complete TBRI® practitioner training. To learn more and find or request a trainer, please visit the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development's TBRI® website.

Recommended Actions

Collaborate Across Systems to Optimize Programming

The needs and strengths of youth experiencing CSEY are complex and cross multiple systems, including housing, health and mental health, education and employment, legal services, and more. Therefore, no one provider can, nor should, meet **all** the needs of **all** youth experiencing CSEY. From our discussions with service providers, we learned that the most effective providers have robust referral networks of both specialized and generalized services with whom they regularly collaborate and communicate. These providers also know what resources and services are available in their community, and they stay up to date on any changes to available resources, which enables providers to more readily share this information with youth and connect them with services more quickly. Further, providers emphasized the importance of properly vetting different service providers to ensure goodness of fit for the individual youth they serve, as well as facilitating "warm handoffs" when referring youth to different services and organizations to ensure youth are supported through the transition.

> *"Stop changing our caseworkers because we come and then we get a caseworker and then we get comfortable and then a couple weeks later, give us a new caseworker. While we're already in the midst of trying to get things going, we got to start all over again…*
>
> *– A., age 23, Houston*

Further, a number of providers lamented the lack of robust data on CSEY in Texas, which makes it difficult to fully understand the landscape and respond appropriately. Comprehensive data on CSEY prevalence, demographics, composition, risk factors, signs, and outcomes allow us to better visualize what CSEY actually looks like across Texas and can then inform statewide approaches that are efficient and maximize impact. Providers also report a need for improved data sharing at the individual level. Providers recognize that starting at square one with a new client to gather their history, assess their needs, and create a service plan is inefficient as well as potentially harmful to youth if they are repeatedly asked to recount their story with each new provider they encounter. Sharing pertinent information about a youth's experiences and case history allows providers to maximize any traction or gains from previous services, ensure continuity of any effective or promising approaches or services, apply lessons learned and avoid repeating the same mistakes, and be better informed about how to best approach a youth and meet their individual needs.

Recommendation: Understand the services available in your region and establish a diverse network of providers to support each other in meeting the needs of youth. Collaborate with other providers and the state of Texas to identify gaps in CSEY data and implement a plan to collect robust data and safely share information in a trauma-informed way.

Recommended Actions
Collaborate Across Systems to Optimize Programming

Additionally, It is important to collaborate across systems because youth do not receive services in a silo, and their needs often span multiple systems and focus areas. Among youth services providers, those within housing and homelessness services are often best equipped to facilitate this collaboration in order to address multiple challenges that their YYA clients are facing. These providers work with many youth who have past involvement in systems like child welfare and juvenile justice, making them intimately familiar with various pathways into homelessness and the different factors that need to be addressed for each young person to achieve long-term stability. Additionally, because each youth presents with diverse needs and priorities that span beyond just housing, providers become adept at accounting for each youth's unique history, strengths, and service needs, and identifying needs and resources beyond housing and homelessness services based on this information.

When providers collaborate across systems, they are able to better understand and spark dialogue among a range of stakeholders, stay up-to-date on referral sources, and nurture valuable partnerships that can lead to creative, systems-level solutions. Stakeholders to consider for collaboration might include: child protective services/DFPS, child advocates like CASA or the local children's advocacy center, health and mental health care providers, local schools or education professionals, higher education and employment resources, law enforcement, juvenile probation departments, specialized CSEY services providers, local shelters for children and adults, and street outreach programs and drop-in centers. In addition to engaging regularly in community events and workgroups, providers can proactively collaborate in their regions through the following strategies:

- Organize opportunities for joint training or professional development with multiple agencies or organizations;
- Join or establish a local cross-systems workgroup or coalition to develop and work toward shared goals for their services and clients;
- Get plugged into a local Community Resource Coordination Group (CRCG) to better understand and access available services in the region;
- Establish case planning protocols that bring a diversity of providers and stakeholders to the table;
- Include the youth themselves in the collaborations; and
- Simply take the time to research local services, reach out to establish a connection, and maintain a consistent and supportive relationship.

How providers refer youth to different services is almost as important as the services themselves. Youth are more likely to stay engaged in services if they feel supported and nurtured. It is crucial that providers properly vet their referral sources to ensure they are referring youth to safe, effective, and responsive programs. Proper vetting practices might include making sure that the organization is inclusive and welcoming of different identities and perspectives; understanding and communicating to youth the organization's eligibility criteria, participation requirements, availability and wait times, and potential pros and cons; supporting the youth to gather any materials or information needed to participate in the program; and confirming that the organization has the capacity and resources to meet the youth's individual needs. Further, "warm handoffs" are a best practice when referring youth to different services and organizations. A warm handoff during a referral might look like personally facilitating the introduction between the youth and the other provider; accompanying the youth to their first meeting or appointment, or otherwise ensuring the youth has what they need to attend (e.g., transportation, approved time off work/school); checking in with the youth before their first meeting to ensure they are prepared and after to ask how it went; and continuing to stay in touch with the youth to demonstrate that you are still interested and available to support them. Trauma-informed referral processes are the best practice.

Recommended Actions
Collaborate Across Systems to Optimize Programming

It is important to systematically collect and share data on CSEY in Texas for a number of reasons. At the organizational level, collecting and tracking data on youth outcomes after engaging in programs will tell us which services and approaches are most effective for which populations, challenges, and needs, which then allows providers to strengthen their services to more effectively address CSEY. At the systems level, robust data can help inform broader strategies and approaches to combat CSEY, including how providers collaborate with other systems and stakeholders, such as law enforcement, businesses, and the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Further, sequestering data in multiple, disjointed places creates inefficiencies and hinders effective cross-systems collaboration. TNOYS encourages regional and statewide efforts to improve data sharing between organizations and systems for the benefit of YYA. Although individual providers are not the final decision-makers on such efforts, they can advocate for change through collective action. For example, paying close attention to confidentiality requirements and privacy laws, regional collaborative bodies may consider developing a standardized informed consent tool for use across the region so that, with clients' permission, relevant and useful data can be shared across entities. In the short-term, partnering with your local CRCG can simplify data sharing.

On a larger scale, implementing a statewide integrated data system would allow for greater flow of information about cases and outcomes for YYA. Providers can support policy pushes to implement such a system across the state. When providers have access to the most up-to-date and relevant client information between staff, organizations, and systems, they are better able to make efficient use of their time, make effective choices to meet clients' needs, and avoid retraumatization of YYA. TNOYS recommends the development of a statewide interoperable data system that connects current youth-services data systems, allowing youth-serving providers to identify in real time when a youth is currently involved in another system and receiving services, while ensuring confidentiality where appropriate. This will help providers and systems work together to best meet the needs of each youth.

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- Join networks like TNOYS and get plugged into regional workgroups and collaborations like CRCGs. Networks and workgroups help to keep providers informed of the latest research, trends, opportunities, and challenges that might impact their programs and the youth they serve. They also provide regular opportunities for networking and information-sharing, training and professional development opportunities, and access to resources.

- Attend conferences and events that bring together providers from different organizations and systems where you can learn from and with each other.

- Implement tools and platforms that facilitate data collection and sharing. The Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT) is a great resource for collecting, tracking, and sharing data on CSEY risk among the youth that you serve. In Texas, the CSE-IT is integrated within Lighthouse, an online platform that enables users to complete screenings online and access and analyze CSE-IT data at any time. Allies Against Slavery, the developers of Lighthouse, aggregate the statewide CSE-IT data and display it against other data and trends to paint a more complete picture of CSEY in Texas.

Recommended Actions

Develop Responsive Organizational Policies

Many youth services providers struggle to recruit and retain effective, qualified staff for multiple reasons, including burnout, secondary trauma, lack of guidance or mentorship for staff, and of course funding. A particular concern is staff burnout due to secondary trauma, or the emotional stress that results from hearing about the first hand trauma experiences of another person.[38] The symptoms are comparable to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and it can negatively impact professional functioning and overall quality of life. Providers shared that secondary trauma and demanding responsibilities may lead to burnout when staff are not equipped with the resources and support to protect their energy and invest in their own self-care, such as sympathetic supervisors who can support their staff and engage in vulnerable conversations, flexible time off policies for staff to take the time they need to recharge, and opportunities for training on secondary trauma to learn tools and strategies to combat compassion fatigue and promote self-care.

Constant turnover means that organizations must spend their limited time and money on recruiting, hiring, and training new team members when they could otherwise be investing those resources into developing and strengthening their existing workforce. Similarly, providers struggle to recruit qualified staff who have the skills and mindset to serve these youth effectively and are also willing to accept the salaries many of these organizations can afford with their limited funding. Beyond training and accreditation in relevant topics, providers want staff who are flexible and understand the dedication such a position requires and that this is more than just a job. The most effective providers focus on the things they can control (such as their practices and procedures and how they support their staff), offer staff flexibility and autonomy to take care of themselves as needed (generous time off, prioritize self-care and counseling), equip supervisors to manage their teams effectively and compassionately, provide regular training and support to all staff to help them address challenges, and listen to what their staff want and need and respond appropriately.

> *"Me and a lot of us don't eat everything... I've been as grateful as I can be, but I still think that at least that day I should know okay, this what we having for dinner..."*
>
> – A., age 23, Houston

YYA also spoke about how organizational policies and procedures may impact a youth's receptiveness to services. Youth report that overly rigid rules and structures may come across as punitive or untrusting of YYA, which can stifle a young person's independence and long-term success. Further, the vast majority of youth we spoke with have not had any opportunities to provide feedback on services or input on organizational policies, which means they are effectively powerless when it comes to the services they receive and how they receive them.

Recommended Actions
Develop Responsive Organizational Policies

Recommendation: Partner with both staff and youth to develop policies and procedures that are flexible and responsive to their current needs and concerns. Additionally, continually invest in staff competence and well-being.

There are many factors that providers cannot control, like funding requirements, workforce shortages, heavy caseloads, and their clients' histories. TNOYS encourages providers to consider the factors that they *can* control and be mindful of the options available to them, rather than taking the status quo for granted. To start, it is imperative that providers listen to their staff and are willing to adjust their policies, procedures, and practices to address the challenges, concerns, and strengths that their staff present. This might look like providing training on specific topics that staff are struggling with, modifying certain procedures to better fit reality, or adjusting caseloads and organizational structures to make workloads and processes more manageable.

When staff have a voice and feel empowered to make decisions, they are more likely to stay in their role and to perform their job at their maximum capacity, which ultimately strengthens services and improves outcomes for youth. Similarly, organizations benefit when they partner with the youth they serve to collaboratively create community norms and allow for input on organizational policies and procedures. When YYA have opportunities to understand policies and provide their input to help shape them, they will have more buy-in and be more willing to comply with the established standards and protocols. To maintain this growth mindset is an iterative and ongoing process, and it requires organizations to regularly re-examine their policies and procedures, consider the latest research and best practices, and be willing to make adjustments for the betterment of their staff, their services, and the youth they serve.

Additionally, organizations are strengthened when they invest in their staff at the individual and interpersonal levels. One way providers can invest in their staff is to offer regular professional development opportunities on a wide range of topics, including self-care and burnout. Another strategy is for organizations to collect input from their staff on the types of trainings they would like to receive, including topics, format, trainers, and delivery method. Further, organizations would benefit from asking the youth they serve for input on areas where staff might benefit from training. Next, organizations can reduce burnout and turnover by encouraging consistent self-care among their staff. This might include organizing trainings and professional development events devoted to self-care, providing access to high-quality, affordable mental health services, and respecting and validating mental health days.

Additionally, organizations that cannot afford large salaries or regular pay raises might consider instead offering generous benefits like flexible time off, high-quality health insurance at minimal cost to staff, and retirement plan options. Finally, TNOYS recommends that organizations organize regular opportunities for fun and community-building. A healthy and positive workplace culture can help attract and retain high-quality staff. Similarly, organizations benefit when their staff attend conferences and other community events where they can network and learn alongside others in the field in a fun and engaging way. An enjoyable and supportive work environment, even in the face of stressors, is appealing to professionals and may outweigh other factors over which the organization has less control.

Further, organizations can provide structure and support to ensure staff feel authorized and informed to make decisions. For example, create clear policies and protocols for staff to follow in their interactions with youth, including how staff screen for, respond to, and provide services to address CSEY. Additionally, TNOYS encourages organizations to empower effective managers and supervisors that set the organization

Recommended Actions
Develop Responsive Organizational Policies

up for success. Strong teams are crucial to effective services, and this starts with effective, sympathetic, and responsive supervisors and managers. Organizations thrive when supervisors are equipped to lead with empathy, develop positive relationships with their direct reports, and facilitate honest dialogue with frontline staff about their needs. Strong teams and effective supervisors are a key strategy to reducing and preventing burnout.

Another way organizations can invest in their workplace culture and the youth they serve is by offering youth opportunities for work-based learning. Employing youth with lived experiences helps ensure organizations are trauma-informed by uplifting the principles of peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and humility and responsiveness. Many workplace norms and nuances cannot be taught in a classroom setting, such as communication methods and best practices, managing workplace tools like calendars, workplace hierarchies and supervision, time/project management, money management, complying with standards and policies, and stakeholder engagement. Learning in a work-based setting gives youth the opportunity to develop critical job skills and become comfortable in the workplace. When employing young people, it is best practice for organizations to ensure their policies and procedures are equitable and trauma-informed. For example, establish clear contracts and expectations with youth to ensure youth understand and accept the position's responsibilities, benefits, and job requirements and limitations. It is also a best practice for youth to be compensated fairly for their time. Paying youth a living wage is equitable and inclusive because it makes the position accessible to youth who cannot afford to work with little to no pay. It also provides an opportunity for youth to practice managing their money and participating in the workforce. Moreover, paying youth for their efforts demonstrates that the organization values youth's contributions, which helps to increase youth's confidence and self-efficacy. Finally, TNOYS encourages organizations to evaluate the equitableness of their job requirements. For example, consider which positions actually necessitate a Bachelor's degree and why, and whether there might be more pertinent traits or backgrounds to assess predictors of success in the role, such as empathy, passion, willingness to learn, emotional intelligence, and fluency in other languages. Organizations could be missing out on strong candidates because of restrictive requirements that have little true bearing on one's ability to perform the job duties.

> *"We don't get the chance. We offer up solutions to them, but they shut us down... It's no flexibility, they want to hit you with policy, policy, policy, policy, policy, but they don't wanna hit you with 'oh I understand, have a nice day' or 'oh, that's a good solution'."*
>
> *– Z., age 23, Houston*

Suggested Trainings, Tools, Approaches to Address Recommendation:

- **Blueprint for Youth Engagement Training and TA Series (TNOYS):** The Blueprint for Youth Engagement T&TA series, modeled after TNOYS' roadmap of youth engagement, equips providers from across youth-focused systems with the skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage youth in their services and programs as clients, collaborators, and employees. The 5-part training series is based on the latest research on youth engagement as well as TNOYS' experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from our own youth leadership programming. Training content focuses on topics such as relationship building and successful youth-adult partnerships, youth-centered programming and youth storytelling, creating supportive and trauma-informed work environments, and employing YYA with

Recommended Actions
Develop Responsive Organizational Policies

lived experiences. The entire training series is youth-informed and/or youth-developed, and all modules within the series are, or can be, co-led by youth with lived experiences. Providers may attend individual trainings within the series to earn CEUs, or they may participate in the full series to earn certification in the curriculum. Each module is one to four hours in length, and TNOYS offers the training virtually and in-person. To learn more, register for a training opportunity, or request a training, please visit TNOYS' T&TA webpage or TNOYS' Upcoming Events webpage, or email us at practice@tnoys.org. The following training modules within the series will be most pertinent to this specific recommendation:

- **"Embedding Youth Voice in Your Organization's DNA":** This training teaches the fundamentals for establishing and maintaining youth input within a youth-serving organization for the long term. Participants will learn strategies to embed youth experiences in organizational processes, procedures, and projects while avoiding tokenism; tips and guidance for implementing and improving youth and client feedback practices; and best practices for partnering with youth and utilizing their feedback to impact organizational change, improve their lives, and ultimately the systems that serve them.

- **"Employing Youth with Lived Experiences":** This training equips participants with a strengths-based approach to employing YYA with lived experiences. Learning objectives cover the importance of employing YYA with lived experiences and the positive impacts on the youth, staff, and the organization as a whole; strategies and guidance to support staff with lived experiences, such as navigating personal trauma, additional support needs, and on the job skill-building; and best practices for organizations and supervisors to achieve success.

- **"Creating a Trauma-Informed Workplace":** This training explores benefits, best practices, and practical applications to transform the workplace into a more trauma-informed environment for leadership, staff, and clients. Building on the core principles of trauma-informed care, participants will gain strategies and skills to address many of the different ways trauma may manifest in this setting and learn how to build equity in the workplace.

- **Going Beyond Self Care:** The CE-CERT Model for Secondary Trauma (Centene): This training equips youth-services providers with specific skills and resources from the evidence-informed model, Components for Enhancing Career Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT), to combat compassion fatigue and secondary trauma and ultimately reduce staff turnover. These tools help providers emotionally connect, thrive, and move beyond burnout. Centene offers online and in-person training opportunities, and their trainings are consistently featured at TNOYS' Annual Conference on Services to Youth and Families. To learn more or to register, please visit the Superior Healthplan training webpage, where you can browse and register for current offerings.

- **Science-Supported Strategies to Remain Calm in the Home, Workplace, and Community (Lighthouse Learning Resources):** This training provides insight into the brain, nervous, and sensory systems in order to help providers better process daily challenges while remaining regulated, which will in turn increase opportunities to learn, build relationships, and thrive. Participants will learn research-based approaches and sensory strategies that support individual self-regulation in all settings, such as at home, school, employment, and the community. To learn more or to request a training, please visit the Lighthouse Learning Resources webpage or email Robin Rettie at robin@LHlearningresource.com.

Recommended Actions
Develop Responsive Organizational Policies   51

- **The Management Center Trainings and Resources:** The Management Center (TMC) offers applicable, interactive training and resources for managers and staff to help build the skills and mindsets to run programs effectively. TMC offers distinct courses for managers and staff focused on specific skills and tools, such as delegation, role clarity, goals, and project management, as well as helpful resources and templates to guide everything from regular check-in meetings to performance management to hiring and culture. Further, all trainings and materials center equity and social justice. Training lengths and costs vary by training, and all templates and resources are open access. TMC regularly offers online training opportunities. To learn more, register for a training, or access their resources and templates, please visit the TMC website.

- **Self-Care and Leadership Trainings from the Kros Learning Group (Kros Learning Group):** Frank Kros offers a number of research-based trainings on topics concerning child welfare, child and adolescent development, individual and organizational leadership, and more! Specific trainings that TNOYS recommends include: Your Resilient Mind, Leadership with the Brain in Mind, Creating the Upside Down Organization, and Transforming our Understanding of Conflict. Please visit the Kros Learning Group website to learn more about these training offerings or to request a training.

Closing

In their day-to-day work, youth housing and homelessness services providers are likely to encounter children and youth who have experienced factors that put them at risk of CSE. Children and youth are at increased risk for CSE when they have unmet physical or psychological needs, including access to basic needs such as housing, health and mental health care, and education and employment opportunities, as well as intangible needs like love, acceptance, protection, and belonging. Survivors' needs become more complex the longer they go unmet, motivating the need for earlier identification and intervention paired with wraparound, long-term supports. In our conversations with YYA and providers, TNOYS identified many strengths and opportunities for improvement in the field, including consistent identification and assessment tools and protocols, investment in services such as prevention, the importance of trust, youth voice, and youth-centered programming, and the benefits of cross-systems collaboration.

As the foremost expert on youth engagement and survivor-informed services in the state, TNOYS is well-positioned to provide the necessary support and training to these youth-serving providers and other stakeholders. Tackling CSEC/CSEY in an effective, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered way requires extensive time, resources, and capacity on behalf of youth-services providers, the state, and other stakeholders. That said, with thousands of Texas children experiencing or at-risk of CSEC/CSEY every year, these strategies are critical to protect young people and ensure they can thrive. By equipping youth-serving providers with the tools they need, we can ensure that Texas' most vulnerable yet resilient youth and young adults can overcome challenges and achieve healthy development into adulthood. To learn more about TNOYS or get involved in our work or membership, please visit our website at tnoys.org. To browse our training portfolio or to request training or technical assistance please visit the T&TA page of TNOYS' website. Finally, we encourage you to check out TNOYS' online resource centers for further resources and materials to support your work, Including TNOYS' CSEY Resource Center for Preventing and Responding to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth, TNOYS' Youth Homelessness Resource Center, and more.

"You see, even though [my experience] gave me a lot of hell, a lot of pain, it made me who I am today... It taught me that basically, no matter what you go through in life, there's always a way back up. Even in the hardest or darkest moments, there is a light at the end of the tunnel; you just have to be willing to find it."

– P., Houston

Sources

1. Noel Busch-Armendariz et al., *Human Trafficking by the Numbers: Initial Benchmarks of Prevalence & Economic Impact in Texas* (Austin: 2016), http://hdl.handle.net/2152/44597.

2. Human Trafficking, *National Network for Youth,* retrieved October 2, 2023, https://nn4youth.org/learn/human-trafficking/.

3. Busch-Armendariz, Human Trafficking by the Numbers.

4. ibid.

5. Tex. Penal Code § 20A.02 (2023), https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/PE/htm/PE.20A.htm.

6. National Network for Youth, Human Trafficking.

7. Dana Basson, *Validation of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT). Technical Report* (Oakland: 2017), https://www.westcoastcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WCC-CSE-IT-PilotReport-FINAL.pdf.

8. Omar Martinez & Guadalupe Kelle, *Sex Trafficking of LGBT Individuals: A Call for Service Provision, Research, and Action,* The international law news, 42(4) (2013), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4204396/.

9. Lisa Pilnik, *Responding to Youth Homelessness: A Key Strategy for Preventing Human Trafficking* (Washington, DC: 2018), https://nn4youth.org/resource/responding-to-youth-homelessness/.

10. Basson, *Validation of the CSE-IT.*

11. Pilnik, *Responding to Youth Homelessness.*

12. Meredith Dank et al., *Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities* (Washington, DC: 2014), https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities.

13. Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force, *Fiscal Year 2022 Report of Annual Activities,* https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/human-trafficking/TaskForceReport2022.pdf.

14. National Human Trafficking Hotline, *National Hotline 2021 Data Report*, https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/resources/2021-national-report.

15. Ibid.

16. Understanding Child Trauma, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, retrieved October 2, 2023, https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma.

17. *Effects of Complex Trauma, National Child Traumatic Stress Network*, retrieved October 4, 2023, https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma/effects.

18. National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Effects of Complex Trauma.

19. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Understanding Child Trauma.

20. Best Practices and Recommendations for States, National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States, retrieved January 10, 2023, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/otip/nac_report_2020.pdf.

21. *What is Trauma-Informed Care?*, Center for Health Care Strategies, retrieved October 4, 2023, https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/.

22. Christopher Menschner & Alexandra Maul, *Key Ingredients for Successful Trauma-Informed Care Implementation* (Hampton: 2016), https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/childrens_mental_health/atc-whitepaper-040616.pdf.

23. Pilnik, Responding to Youth Homelessness.

24. Ibid.

25. Melissa Russell et al., *Homelessness youth and mental health service utilization: A long-term follow-up study*, Early intervention in psychiatry, 15(3) (2021), 563-568, https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.12985.

26. Jahnavi Jagannath et al., *Serving LGBTQ/GNCT Youth of Color Who Are Unhoused in Texas* (Washington, DC: 2021), https://www.urban.org/research/publication/serving-lgbqgnct-youth-color-who-are-unhoused-texas.

27. Sedoo Ijir, *Updating the PAL Independent Living Study Guides: Listening & Learning from Youth Transitioning into Adulthood* (Austin: 2021), https://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/TNOYS_TAY-Guides_Report-1.pdf.

28. Dana Basson et al., *Research to Action: Sexually Exploited Minors (SEM) Needs and Strengths* (Oakland: 2012), https://www.westcoastcc.org/research-to-action-sexually-exploited-minors-needs-and-strengths/.

29. Basson, *Validation of the CSE-IT*.

30. Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT), WestCoast Children's Clinic, retrieved January 10, 2023, https://www.westcoastcc.org/cse-it/.

31. The data and visualizations in Lighthouse are provided as-is with no warranties. The information is intended to inform Lighthouse users about human trafficking; it is not intended to predict human trafficking cases, demonstrate the efficacy of solutions, or identify individual victims or survivors. © 2023 ALLIES AGAINST SLAVERY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

32. Makini Chisolm-Straker et al., *Screening for human trafficking among homeless young adults*, Children and Youth Services Review, 98 (2019), 72-79, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.014.

33. Bonnie Bernard, *The Foundations of the Resiliency Framework*, Resiliency in Action, retrieved October 4, 2023, https://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-foundations-of-the-resiliency-framework/.

34. Center for Health Care Strategies, *What is Trauma-Informed Care?*

35. Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, *Voice and Lived Experience of Children and Young People Guidance for Practitioners*, https://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/files/voice_of_child.pdf.

36. Karen Pittman, *Youth Today: the power of engagement* (1999).

37. Isaac Prilleltensky et al., *The role of power and control in children's lives: An ecological analysis of pathways toward wellness, resilience and problems*, Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 11(2) (2001), 143–158, https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.616.

38. National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *Secondary traumatic stress: A fact sheet for child-serving professionals* (Los Angeles and Durham: 2011), https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/secondary_traumatic_stress_child_serving_professionals.pdf.