November 20, 2017

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-57-17

TO: ALL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE DIRECTORS
    ALL COUNTY PROBATION OFFICERS
    ALL COUNTY BOARDS OF SUPERVISORS
    ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
    ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES
    ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
    ALL GROUP HOME PROVIDERS
    ALL OUT-OF-STATE GROUP HOME PROVIDERS
    ALL FOSTER FAMILY AGENCIES
    ALL COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH PLANS

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR PROVIDERS SERVING COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN (CSEC)

REFERENCES: ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO. 17-14 DATED FEBRUARY 3, 2017

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to inform county child welfare agencies and probation departments of the attached “Recommended Practices for Providers Serving CSEC” information piece. The California Department of Social Services, in collaboration with the County Welfare Directors Association of California, the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Action Team and the California Alliance of Child and Family Services composed an information piece addressing promising services and strategies for providers serving CSEC or interested in serving CSEC.

The document builds upon ACL NO. 17-14, which outlines the requirements for Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs) applicants to maintain a current program statement that is culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and age and developmentally appropriate for the population(s) being served.
Recommended Practices for Providers Serving CSEC

The attached document marks the start of a series of communication pieces that will focus on harm reduction informed policies, protocols and strategies to support youth engagement throughout the Stages of Change.

The document is a resource for county providers who are drafting Program Statements as required for establishing STRTPs; and also informs other foster care placement types including Resource Families and Intensive Services Foster Care providers.

Contact Information

If you have any questions, please contact the Child Trafficking Response Unit, within the Child Welfare Policy and Program Development Bureau, at CSECProgram@dss.ca.gov or at (916) 651-6160.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

MARY SHEPPARD, Chief
Child Protection and Family Support Branch

Attachment

c: County Welfare Directors Association of California
   Chief Probation Officers of California
Promising Practices

Meeting the service needs of commercially sexually exploited children is an emerging field and researchers and practitioners are collaborating to identify the most appropriate approach to providing services and supports to CSEC. The California Child Welfare Council CSEC Work Group and multiple CSEC service providers have identified six components of promising practice and strategies:

- Safety and support planning for the youth, caregivers, and the staff serving them
- Collaboration across the multiple systems and agencies
- Trust and relationship building to foster consistency
- Culturally competent and appropriate service provision
- Trauma-informed programming
- Survivor involvement in the development and implementation of programming

Identified treatment and holistic needs for CSEC includes: Basic care and supervision, medical services, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, legal advocacy, long term housing, transportation, job training, independent living skills, mentoring, educational support and childcare in some instances.

Preliminary Vision for CSEC Providers

The California Department of Social Services, in collaboration with stakeholders, developed a shared vision for the services that will be helpful in providing adequate housing and treatment options for CSEC. Exploited youth often come in and out of placement, and at every touch point providers should focus on being that youth’s stable and trusted adult. The table below is not meant to be an all-inclusive list and many of the listed services are fluid and can cross over between Home Based Foster Care and Short-term Residential Therapeutic Programs.

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Recommended Models and Approaches for Providers

**Relationship-Based Approach**
A relationship-based approach involves developing and sustaining supportive professional relationships in unique and challenging situations and necessitates providers to re-evaluate their disciplinary methods\(^1\). Punitive disciplinary methods may not be appropriate when working with CSEC because the healing process for CSEC often involves behavior relapse and resistance to services. A relationship-based approach is necessary to provide a comforting and welcoming experience or help intervene. Positive relationships create feelings of trust and security that can assist in the recovery of CSEC.

**Trauma-Informed Care**
Individual trauma results from circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. A trauma-informed approach recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization\(^4\). Providing care in a trauma-informed manner promotes positive outcomes for CSEC, whom have experienced multifaceted levels of trauma, including trauma prior to exploitation.

**Harm Reduction Strategies**
Harm reduction strategies (HRS) focus on the prevention of harms associated with a particular behavior rather than prevention of that behavior and the individuals who continue to engage in the problematic behavior despite the harms. In the context of commercial sexual exploitation, the strategies are used with the idea that youth may continue to be exploited, may be unable or unwilling to leave the exploitative relationship and that any positive change in behavior is useful. In essence, “Harm reduction services are designed to meet people’s needs where they currently are in their lives.”

The strategies may assist to educate CSEC about the common myths regarding safe sex and protection. The strategies may assist on building the sexually exploited children’s own approaches, values their distinctive differences, does not conflict with their culture and tradition, and increases their options for self-determination, autonomy and control. The harms associated with exploitation can be lessened by empowerment or self-assertion. Preventative measures should be integrated in order to reduce potential harm associated with diseases, infections and pregnancies. If any harm does occur, CSEC must have access to adequate medical and mental health care. Exploited youth who advocate for the implementation of a harm reduction model argue that it “would allow them to care for each other safely and empower them to make safe choices.” In addition, the strategies encourage collaboration between local Community Care Licensing offices, placement staff, and local law enforcement. The goal is to create a supportive environment and reduce harm in order to improve quality of life, fostering self-empowerment\(^5\).

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