

# Commercially Sexually Exploited Girls and Young Women Involved in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice in Los Angeles County:

## An Exploration and Evaluation of Placement Experiences and Services Received

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## KEY TERMS

- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth (CSEC/Y)
- Dedication to Restoration through Empowerment, Advocacy, and Mentoring Court (DREAM Court)
- Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- Foster Family Agency (FFA)
- Intensive Field Capable Clinical Services (IFCCS)
- Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)
- Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA)
- Probation Department (Probation)
- Probation Department Child Trafficking Unit (CTU)
- Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience Court (STAR Court)

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE AND PROJECT

This report presents the results of a first-of-its-kind study about specialized services and placements for commercially sexually exploited children and youth (CSEC/Y) in Los Angeles County.<sup>1</sup> In Los Angeles County, and across the nation, despite increased attention to the issue of CSEC/Y, and the development of programming to serve the population, there has been little research demonstrating the most effective placements and services for CSE and at-risk children and youth. This dearth in research limits our understanding and implementation of evidence-based practices and programs to support this population of young people. Stemming from Los Angeles County's efforts over the past eight years to better understand, identify, and serve CSE children and youth through multidisciplinary collaborations, this research explores the impact of different types of specialized services and placements for children and youth who have experienced CSE on their safety, wellbeing, and stability by hearing from youth in their own words and through an analysis of administrative data.

### Overview of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth

Across the country, thousands of children and youth are bought and sold for sex every year. Although previously thought of as an international problem, CSEC/Y is also a domestic issue. Commercial sexual exploitation can involve child sex trafficking, child pornography, child sex tourism, and trading sex to meet basic needs often referred to as “survival sex.”<sup>2</sup> Traffickers<sup>3</sup> often prey on already vulnerable children and youth, those who have experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse, violence or chaos at home, foster care and/or juvenile justice involvement, and/or homelessness or running away from home or placements.<sup>4</sup> Once on

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we use the term CSEC/Y to refer both to the act of commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, and to children and youth who have been commercially sexually exploited. We use these acronyms for ease of reference in this report, but we recognize that assigning a category or label to the young people that this study concerns presents challenges, and attempt to avoid labeling children and youth whenever possible. Use of a label tends to lump all children and youth together and cloud their individual characteristics, needs, strengths and interests. Moreover, not all youth would use the same terms or names to describe what they have experienced.

We also are deliberate in our use of both children *and* youth. Often one or the other is used as a catchall—when the statistics demonstrate that both young children, as young as 9 years old in Los Angeles County, and older youth fall victim to exploitation. Additionally, research and literature have demonstrated that children and youth of color, specifically black girls, are viewed as older and imputed with more control over their decisions, which often leads to their criminalization for actions for which their white counterparts are not (see Phillips, J. (2015). Black girls and the (im) possibilities of a victim trope: The intersectional failures of legal and advocacy interventions in the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in the United States. *UCLA L. Rev.*, 62, 1642.).

<sup>2</sup> Walker, K. (2013). California Child Welfare Council, Ending The Commercial Sexual Exploitation Of Children: A Call For Multi-System Collaboration In California. Retrieved from <http://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Ending-CSEC-A-Call-for-Multi-System-Collaboration-in-CA.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, we use the term trafficker to refer to individuals who financially or otherwise benefit from victims of commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking. Other terms often used for traffickers are exploiters, pimps, purchasers, buyers, and johns.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *supra* note 2 at 18-19; Hyatt, S., Spurr, K., Sciupac, M. (2012). Sexual Exploitation and Homeless Youth in California: What Policymakers Need to Know. Retrieved from <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/sexualexploitedhomelessyouthissuebrief.pdf>.

the streets, traffickers coerce children and youth into sex for hire using promises of love, drugs, and violence, subjecting children to beatings, rape, and starvation if they do not comply. Others manipulate children into submission with a mix of loving care, violence, and threats or shame, resulting in the children experiencing trauma bonding with their traffickers.<sup>5</sup> And others do not have a trafficker, but instead find themselves trading sex for a place to stay or a warm meal.

Some estimate that over 100,000 children and youth are commercially sexually exploited annually in the United States, however the precise number of children and youth affected is difficult to measure.<sup>6</sup> This difficulty stems, in part, from the clandestine nature of trafficking. Traffickers go to great lengths to evade law enforcement detection. Children and youth rarely come forward to disclose their own exploitation. They may view themselves as in control and not a victim in need of help or services. They may fear violence from traffickers, lack trust in law enforcement and other system actors, depend on exploitation for safety and basic necessities, or be trauma bonded to their trafficker(s).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the prevalence remains unknown due to a failure to uniformly define commercial sexual exploitation and systematically collect data on children and youth at risk and those who have already been victimized, although recent legislative changes now require states to do so.<sup>8</sup>

The data that are available are alarming. According to the FBI, California contains three of the nation's thirteen High Intensity Child Exploitation Areas—the Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego metropolitan areas.<sup>9</sup> Prior to changes in California law making the crime of prostitution and related crimes inapplicable to minors, between 2009 and 2016, there were over 1500 arrests of youth under 18 for prostitution-related offenses in Los Angeles County alone. Between 2013-2018, there were almost 3,000 child welfare referrals made related to potential victims of CSE in the County.<sup>10</sup> Youth of color are disproportionately represented among victims of CSE in LA County. Of the 361 CSE children and youth identified by the County's law enforcement through a pilot of the Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol<sup>11</sup> between August 2014 and August 2018, approximately 71% were African American, 18% were

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, L., et al. (2009). Shared Hope Int'l, The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children 41-45. Retrieved from [https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SHI\\_National\\_Report\\_on\\_DMST\\_2009.pdf](https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SHI_National_Report_on_DMST_2009.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Estes, R. J., & Weiner, N. A. (2002). Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children In the U.S., Canada and Mexico 4. Univ. of Pa. Sch. of Social Work. Retrieved from <http://www.gems-girls.org/Estes%20Wiener%202001.pdf>.

For a discussion of the challenges of measuring this population, see IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). 2013. Confronting commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States, Ch. 4. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, available at: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/243838.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Smith et al., *supra* note 5.

<sup>8</sup> Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act and SB 794.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Dep't of Justice, The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Efforts to Combat Crimes Against Children, Audit Report 09-08, Ch. 4 (2009) [hereinafter 2009 FBI Report], available at:

<https://oig.justice.gov/reports/FBI/a0908/chapter4.htm>. We note that the 2009 FBI Report refers to these areas as "High Intensity Child Prostitution Areas." Throughout this report, we use the term "exploitation" instead of "prostitution," except with respect to remaining penal code references to crimes related to prostitution.

<sup>10</sup> CWS/CMS Datamart, July 9, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> See Los Angeles Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, available at: <https://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Los-Angeles-County-Law-Enforcement-First-Responder-Protocol.pdf>. The FRP was implemented in a pilot area in 2014, and as of July 31, 2018, is in effect with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, and the Long Beach Police Department.



Hispanic/Latinx, and 10% were White.<sup>12</sup> By comparison, 7.4 % of the overall child population in Los Angeles County is African American, 61.6% is Hispanic/Latinx, and 16.9% is White.<sup>13</sup> Of the youth identified through the First Responder Protocol, all were cis-gender<sup>14</sup> female, except for two cis-gender males.<sup>15</sup> While the number of identified victims appears to be growing in Los Angeles, the reasons for this phenomenon are not clear. Trafficking may be increasing because of the highly lucrative nature of the criminal enterprise. It is also possible that more victims are being identified, in part, due to the extensive training and awareness efforts put in place for professionals and the general public. Better awareness and understanding have created more opportunities to identify children who would have otherwise gone unnoticed and for children and youth to safely disclose exploitation.

## Statewide Legislative Changes

In recent years, there have been a number of statewide policy changes in California aimed at shifting public perceptions of children and youth who have been commercially sexually exploited and developing supportive, multidisciplinary, non-punitive responses to serve their needs. In 2014, the California legislature passed SB 855, which clarified that CSE children and youth are victims of child abuse under the law and thus may be served by the child welfare, rather than the juvenile justice system.<sup>16</sup> SB 855 also established the CSEC Program, which counties elect to participate in by developing multidisciplinary CSE responses. By opting into the CSEC Program and fulfilling its requirements, the counties are eligible for additional funding.<sup>17</sup> In 2015, California codified the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act through SB 794, requiring county child welfare and probation departments to establish protocols to identify, report, document and serve CSE and at-risk youth.<sup>18</sup> SB 794 also requires counties to take steps to locate and identify missing and runaway children and better understand their reasons for leaving.<sup>19</sup> In 2017, California further solidified its commitment to treating CSE

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<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles County Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, What We've Learned: A Four Year Look. Available at: <https://www.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/FRP-4-year-review-191120-FINAL.pdf>. The First Responder Protocol (FRP) was developed through a multidisciplinary collaboration among law enforcement, Probation, child welfare, health, mental health, and community-based advocacy agencies to provide an expedited response to CSEC/Y-identified or at risk youth identified by law enforcement.

<sup>13</sup> KidsData. (2018). Child Population, by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/33/child-population-race/pie#fmt=144&loc=364&tf=88&ch=7,11,726,10,72,9,73,87&pdist=73>.

<sup>14</sup> Cis-gender refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.

<sup>15</sup> Because County efforts have generally focused on identifying CSE girls, it is likely that it is under-identifying male-identifying youth and transgender youth. See Walker, *supra* note 2 at 20-21. The County is developing capacity to better identify, understand, and serve the needs of these two populations.

<sup>16</sup> Senate Bill 855 (SB 855, Chapter 29, Statutes of 2014), codified at Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 300, 16524.6-16524.11.

<sup>17</sup> Cal. Dep't of Social Services, All County Letter (ACL) No. 14-62, Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.chhs.ca.gov/Child%20Welfare/ACL%2014-62%20Announcement%20of%20CSEC%20Program.Pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PL 113-183, Social Security Act Title IV-E); Senate Bill 794 (Chapter 425, Statutes of 2015), codified in Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § § 16501.1(f)(19), 16501.35 and 16501.45, and Cal. Penal Code § 11165.1 11166(j)(2)-(3).

<sup>19</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 16501.35 & 16501.45.

children and youth as victims of abuse, rather than criminals, through the passage of SB 1322, which prohibits the arrest of minors for prostitution and related charges.<sup>20</sup>

### **Recognizing and Addressing the Individual Needs of CSE Children and Youth**

The move away from criminalizing and detaining CSE children and youth, and, instead, serving them using a multidisciplinary approach with leadership from the child welfare system, Probation Department, community partners, and collaborative courts, has highlighted the need for an array of appropriate placements and services to address the varied, complex, and multifaceted needs of all children and youth who have been exploited.

### **Safe and Stable Housing**

The availability of safe, stable housing is of critical importance for both preventing the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, and supporting this population to live full lives outside of exploitation. A recent study found that approximately 71% of CSE children and youth served in one of LA County's specialized courts for youth who had been CSE had been homeless or lived on the streets for at least one day in the prior three months.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, without stable housing, already vulnerable youth are more susceptible to exploitation by a trafficker who is coercing or forcing them to sell sex, or more likely to be in a position where they have to trade sex to meet their basic needs. Many youth who have experienced exploitation need assistance obtaining basic necessities, such as food and clothing. Capitalizing on these needs, traffickers frequently deprive or severely restrict victims' access to these items as a means of control. Additionally, because isolation from friends, family and community is another common method of control, youth leaving exploitation may have few people or places to return to in order to access these resources.

High percentages of victims have a history of involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In LA County, of the 361 CSE children and youth identified by law enforcement first responders during the first four years of implementation between August 2014 and August 2018, more than 85% had prior involvement with the child welfare system, with an average of nine referrals to the child welfare system prior to identifying their exploitation.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, of over 500 identified CSE children and youth who received services through DCFS, 83.5% had prior child welfare system involvement, including 55% who had prior foster care placement.<sup>23</sup> Knowing that young people who are homeless or in out-of-home care (e.g., foster

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<sup>20</sup> Senate Bill 1322 (SB 1322, Chapter 654, Statutes of 2016), amending Cal. Penal Code §§ 647 and 653.22.

<sup>21</sup> UCLA Health, Understanding Health Needs of Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth in Los Angeles County: A Deeper Analysis of Participants in Specialized Juvenile Delinquency Court 35 (2018). Draft report on file with second author.

<sup>22</sup> Prior involvement includes at least one referral to the county child welfare agency for child abuse or neglect, whether the referral was substantiated or unsubstantiated. While the average number of past referrals to the child welfare agency was approximately nine, more than a third of youth identified through the FRP had more than ten prior child welfare referrals; more than 20 youth had 26 or more referrals, with one youth having had 49 child welfare referrals prior to identification as CSE. *Supra* note 12, First Responder Protocol, Four Year Look.

<sup>23</sup> Email from Adela Estrada, Children's Services Administrator III, Department of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Specialized Response Services (July 18, 2018, 7:36pm PST).

care or placement through Probation) are more vulnerable, traffickers focus their recruitment efforts around places where these youth are likely to be, including shelters and group homes.<sup>24</sup>

Because of these and other devastatingly effective recruitment tactics, youth with histories of exploitation often run away from home or placements, sometimes returning to their traffickers out of fear, necessity, or due to attachment to their traffickers arising from trauma bonding. Youth also may be running from an unstable home environment or running from placement to see their families. Many CSE children and youth leave and return to an exploitative situation multiple times before they are able to find stability and be free from exploitation. Adding to the challenge of obtaining stable housing, many shelters and out-of-home placements have strict policies prohibiting youth from being absent without leave (AWOL) and refuse to accept youth back when they return to placement after being AWOL. This cycle of running and rejection from placement can mean that youth have nowhere to turn when they are able to leave their exploitive situations.

### **Medical and Mental Health Care**

Children and youth who have experienced exploitation often have unmet medical and mental health needs. Many children and youth who are commercially sexually exploited have experienced significant trauma prior to and during their exploitation, including sexual, emotional, and physical abuse often beginning in early childhood, family and community violence, and grief and loss. Of the 361 youth identified through the First Responder Protocol in the last four years, nearly two-thirds had prior sexual abuse referrals to the child welfare system.<sup>25</sup> According to a recent study of CSE children and youth in Miami, 97.9% had experienced complex trauma, defined as “exposure to two or more caregiver-related interpersonal trauma experiences,” as compared with approximately 34.5% of youth entering the child welfare system, suggesting that CSE children and youth have an even greater exposure to trauma than other youth in the child welfare system.<sup>26</sup> In addition, many exploited children and youth have needs related to substance use or addiction, and/or mental health.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to mental health needs, many CSE children and youth have both immediate and ongoing medical needs stemming from unaddressed illness, violence, and/or injury. They may also need access to reproductive health care, such as contraception or emergency contraception, STI/STD treatment or prophylaxis, and pre-and post-natal care. Studies suggest that 30-60% of CSE children and youth are pregnant or parenting, and may need supports such as parenting classes and child care.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Smith et al., *supra* note 5 at 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* note 12.

<sup>26</sup> Landers, M., McGrath, K., Johnson, M. H., Armstrong, M. I., & Dollard, N. (2017). Baseline characteristics of dependent youth who have been commercially sexually exploited: findings from a specialized treatment program. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 26(6), 692-709.

<sup>27</sup> UCLA Health, *Understanding Health Needs of Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth in Los Angeles County: A Deeper Analysis of Participants in Specialized Juvenile Delinquency Court 12-16* (2018).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 22.

## Education, Vocational Training, Life Skills, and Recreation

As with many children and youth in foster care, those who have been CSE are more likely to have experienced interruptions in their education or be disconnected from school; thus, assistance with reconnecting with school, accessing special education services, obtaining credit recovery, or finding alternative education options to meet their educational needs are important. Life skills and vocational training, as well as recreational experiences can also be integral in helping children and youth to develop skills, interests, and relationships to support the move beyond exploitation and avoid recidivism.

### Background of the Study

Over the last several years, the County has begun to focus its efforts on building capacity to provide a variety of stable placements and services for children and youth who have been exploited, to develop strategies for expanding that capacity, and to better understand the effectiveness and opportunities for further growth among the County's services and placements for this population. While there are promising practices and programs for serving these children and youth, up until this point there has been little research<sup>29</sup> about which types of placements and services are the most effective, and how youth experience these placements and services in their own words.

Given this need, on May 12, 2015, the Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Probation (Probation), the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Public Social Services, the Public Defender and the Alternate Public Defender to report back on the feasibility of developing placement options for children and youth who have experienced exploitation. In an October 16, 2015 Board Letter, the Chief Executive Officer recommended dedicating funds to evaluate the availability and efficacy of programs for CSE children and youth. In 2016, in response to the Board's directive, Probation conducted an initial review of placement options, which included focus groups with 40 youth being served through Probation regarding their placement preferences, including size and location of the placement. The findings of these focus groups showed that a majority of youth preferred smaller settings, such as six-bed group homes or foster homes, in a local location. The majority of youth interviewed also preferred an integrated setting, not a placement exclusively for CSEC/Y survivors. While these focus groups represented a starting point for evaluating placement options for CSE children and youth, there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of placement options and services for this population in LA County, thus far.

In July 2016, the Board of Supervisors approved a motion directing further research to better understand the impact of different placement options on outcomes for CSE children and youth, including placement stability. Additionally, researchers were tasked with examining

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<sup>29</sup> A landscape analysis was designed and conducted by Northeastern University in collaboration with the Children's Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, and the National Center for Youth Law. The analysis examined the characteristics of residential placements across the nation that are providing specialized services to victims of child trafficking, which includes CSE as well as labor trafficking. Although the study was not able to determine the most effective practices or identify whether certain features of programming led to better outcomes, based on the surveys and in-depth interviews of service providers, the landscape analysis uncovered common features of these placements. Draft report on file with second author.

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whether access to specialized services and supports—including assignment to the specialized CSEC units through Probation and DCFS, referral to a specialized court, and connection to a community-based advocate—had an impact on a youth’s outcomes. This report represents the culmination of this research. Specifically, the current study aims to explore which placement types are associated with greater placement stability and whether specialized CSEC services are associated with placement stability, safety, and wellbeing. Importantly, in addition to the administrative data from Probation and DCFS, the study also considers the subjective experiences of youth through interviews and surveys to better understand their histories, preferences, and the factors they believe contribute to their stability, safety and wellbeing.

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## CHAPTER 2: LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S EFFORTS TO PREVENT EXPLOITATION AND SERVE COMMERCIALY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Because of the staggering numbers of children and youth being commercially sexually exploited or at high risk of exploitation in LA County, and a strong likelihood that many more children were going undetected, in 2010, the County began its efforts to better understand the issue, strategize about how to more effectively prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, and identify and serve those who have been exploited and those at high risk. In response to a growing awareness and increasing recognition that these young people were victims who often had prior interactions with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the County began to implement policies and programs to train county employees about CSEC/Y and provide specialized supports to youth using a collaborative, multidisciplinary model. Over the past eight years, Los Angeles County has become a leader in developing innovative programs and services to prevent the CSE of children and youth and serve those who have been exploited or at risk of exploitation. The current study is focused on three specialized services that are offered to children and youth who have been identified as exploited or are at high risk and have open cases with Probation or DCFS: specialized Social Workers or Probation Officers, specialized collaborative courts, and a community-based CSEC advocate.

### Specialized, Collaborative Courts

The County established two voluntary specialized courts for youth who had experienced exploitation—the Succeeding through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court and the Dedication to Restoration through Empowerment, Advocacy, and Mentoring (DREAM) Court—that address the needs of this population through a collaborative, largely non-adversarial approach.

In 2011, the delinquency court and Probation jointly sought and were awarded grant funding to create a collaborative court for probation-involved youth, the STAR Court, which opened in January 2012. In January 2016, the DREAM Court was established to serve CSE children and youth under DCFS jurisdiction.

These collaborative courts include specialized practices and components such as: a specialized CSEC/Y docket, a dedicated judge who handles all CSEC/Y-related cases to maintain consistency, special training for judicial officers, court staff, and lawyers (e.g., dependency attorneys, district attorneys, public defenders, and county counsel), multidisciplinary case planning, more frequent court visits (once per month in the STAR Court, and at least once every three months in the DREAM Court, as compared to once every six months in other juvenile courts), a stronger emphasis on youth voice, and a strengths-based, rather than deficit-focused, approach.

From January 2012 through August 2018, approximately 550 children and youth have been referred to the STAR Court. Since the DREAM Court opened in January 2016 through September 24, 2018, 350 children and youth have been referred to DREAM Court.

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## Specialized CSEC/Y Units

Los Angeles County created specialized units within Probation—the Child Trafficking Unit (CTU)—and DCFS—the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Section—to provide intensive strengths-based support and case management services. These units have dedicated Probation Officers or Children’s Social Workers, who have been specially selected and trained to work with this population. The Probation Officers and Children’s Social Workers have smaller caseloads, enabling them to devote more time and attention to engagement with youth and families on their caseloads, and to facilitate more frequent interactions in person and via other modes of communication. Specifically, CTU Probation Officers meet with children and youth in person at least twice per month, are required to contact them at least once every three days via phone, text, email, or social media, and are encouraged to attend a variety of other events such as empowerment events, school activities, and birthday parties to help with engagement and support. CTU Probation Officers currently have caseloads of approximately 17. DCFS CSEC Social Workers meet face to face with children and youth a minimum of once per month, and often two to four times per month, plus regular additional phone or text communications. CSEC Social Workers generally have caseloads of approximately 10-15 cases, far smaller than the caseloads of other workers, which are generally 20, which is the lowest it has been in years.

Probation holds a weekly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting for all children and youth involved in Probation who have been identified as CSE in the County. DCFS holds a similar MDT on a weekly basis, but it focuses on youth who are involved in DCFS. Specialized Probation Officers and Children’s Social Workers participate in these weekly MDT meetings with the various professionals and advocates working with young people—including mental health clinicians, educational liaisons, public health representatives, children’s attorneys including public defenders and dependency attorneys, service providers, and community-based advocates—to share information, discuss progress toward goals, and make any necessary referrals to services or other planning.

In addition, there is an effort to ensure continuity of specialized Social Workers and Probation Officers, minimizing transfers between workers whenever possible. Once a young person transfers to Probation’s CTU for supervision, their case remains in the CTU until they exit Probation jurisdiction, and they maintain the same Probation Officer, regardless of placement changes or other transitions. DCFS’ CSEC Section also aims to maintain continuity of workers, though they initially had challenges with staff attrition and turnover. The assignment of Children’s Social Workers also remains the same through placement changes. However, a youth may be transferred to a regional office when the youth is stabilized, and the youth no longer has a need to be served by the CSEC Section. For example, a youth may have reached a level where they would benefit more from being served in AB12 Court, where the focus is on further development and growth and preparing for their future as productive, self-sufficient adults who are fully integrated into the community.

## Referral to a Specialized Court or Unit

While many youth who have been exploited are being served through these courts and specialized units, not all cases involving children and youth with histories of exploitation are referred to specialized services. Multiple factors are considered in determining whether to

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transfer a child or youth to one of the specialized courts or units: age, existing services and service needs, the level of entrenchment in exploitation, logistics such as proximity to the specialized court, relationships with current workers or Probation Officers, which court the youth's case is currently in, and the youth's preference. For the Probation CTU, a Probation Court Liaison or one of the CTU's specialized Probation Officers meets with the youth once they are identified as CSE, discusses their interest in being served through the unit, and assesses their needs and goals. For the DCFS CSEC Section, children and youth who already have open DCFS cases when they are identified may be referred by their social worker, attorney, judge, advocate or county counsel; decisions about whether to transfer the case are made by the MDT. Any child or youth who is identified as CSE at the time of filing of the dependency petition is immediately referred to DREAM Court. Referrals to STAR Court are determined using a case-by-case analysis driven by the assessment and a collective discussion within the Probation MDT.

As of July 26, 2018, DCFS is serving 372 active CSE cases, 83 of which are supervised by the specialized DCFS CSEC Section.<sup>30</sup> As of August 2018, Probation is serving approximately 178 children and youth identified as CSE, 85 of which are served through Probation's specialized CTU.

### **Specialized CSEC/Y Advocacy and Engagement**

The County has also made a commitment to addressing the holistic needs of CSE and at-risk children and youth and ensuring they play an active role in decision making that affects their lives. To further this goal, and to ensure that youth have a trusting relationship with an adult outside of the public agencies, the County has contracted with community-based organizations to provide advocates for all CSE-identified youth. Since 2012, community-based advocates have served nearly 800 children and youth through advocacy services, and more than 150 through prevention groups.

Community-based advocates meet weekly or bi-monthly with youth, along with additional phone/text/social media contacts and support as needed. In addition, advocates provide a range of services, including: delinquency/dependency court advocacy and support; victim/witness testimony support for children who testify against traffickers in criminal court; crisis support and response in the field alongside child welfare or probation agencies; short-term and long-term case management; and assistance with stabilizing youth in placement. Additionally, the community-based advocates are members of the Probation and DCFS MDT, provide updates regarding the youth's progress and challenges to courts and referring agencies, conduct case planning in conjunction with the child's treatment team, and prepare with youth for transitions home or to new placements. The advocates also partner with the County to organize youth development programs, empowerment events, skills development, and recreational opportunities.

### **Additional Services, Practices, and Efforts in Los Angeles County**

The current study focuses specifically on the three services described above; however, there is a larger context and spectrum of services, practices, placements, and programs that are layered with the more targeted efforts to serve this population through specialized services.

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<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from CWS/CMS Datamart on July 26, 2018.



Many of the youth in the current study likely touched these additional services, placements, or programs to some degree in addition to the specialized workers in DCFS or Probation, a collaborative court, or an advocate. However, referrals to and engagement in these additional services are not tracked in a systematic way so they were not included in the study. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the broad efforts occurring in Los Angeles County to support CSE children and youth involved in DCFS and/or Probation.

In February 2012, the County held its first CSEC-focused two-day intensive training. Since then, Probation has facilitated CSEC trainings, with the support of the Board of Supervisors and DCFS, to over 18,000 people, including county employees, community-based organizations, caregivers, and many others. Recognizing that anyone may come into contact with an exploited or at-risk child or youth, every county employee is now required to complete a two hour online CSEC-related training module.<sup>31</sup> Employees who regularly interact with youth, such as judges, probation officers, juvenile hall staff, child welfare workers, and health care providers, are encouraged to take more extensive training to understand the risk factors and vulnerabilities for commercial sexual exploitation, how to appropriately and effectively engage with youth, and how to take a trauma-informed approach with children and youth who are at risk or have been exploited.<sup>32</sup> These advanced trainings have also been made available through the support of the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department.

In addition to the specialized units within Probation and DCFS, other county agencies have also devoted significant resources to serving this population. The Departments of Health Services, Mental Health, and Public Health have developed capacity and expanded programs to more effectively serve CSE-identified children and youth within the community and in placements and juvenile hall. DHS has committed to providing all probation- and DCFS-identified CSE and at-risk youth with immediate medical care at DHS Medical Hubs, typically within 72 hours of identification, along with ongoing care when needed.

The County has also funded community-based organizations to partner with public agencies to provide specialized services, including: mental health treatment such as wraparound/therapeutic behavioral supports, educational advocacy and support, vocational/life skills, domestic violence and sexual abuse counseling, substance use treatment, prenatal care and parenting supports, tattoo removal, and gang reduction services.

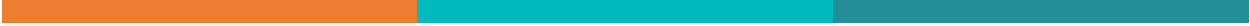
Based on feedback from youth, the County is also working toward providing programming and services that focus on the needs and strengths of the whole youth and not just the needs associated with their exploitation. This approach encourages all individuals working with CSE children and youth—from county agencies, to community-based organizations, to out-of-home care providers—to prioritize relationship building, upfront engagement, and transparency to build trust and to better understand what youth need in a given moment, their interests, and their strengths. Youth-centered decision making is reinforced through training, adoption of Harm Reduction principles,<sup>33</sup> as well as county structures like the specialized multidisciplinary team and child and family team (CFT) meetings.

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<sup>31</sup> L.A. County Board of Supervisor Motion (Nov. 14, 2017). Retrieved from [http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1030978\\_111417.pdf](http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1030978_111417.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Pursuant to WIC 16501.35 and ACL 16-08, Retrieved from <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acl/2016/16-08.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> For more information about Harm Reduction and its application to CSE-identified children and youth, see CDSS ACIN I-59-18; see also Introduction to the Harm Reduction Strategies Series Regarding Commercially Sexually Exploited Children. Available at [http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACIN/2018/I-59\\_18.pdf](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACIN/2018/I-59_18.pdf).



The County is working to develop its capacity to serve and place youth in the least restrictive, non-punitive setting. This may include services while the youth remains at home, as well as short term and long term out-of-home placements, including foster homes, relative care, group homes, short-term residential treatment programs, non-related extended family care, emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs, consistent with the Continuum of Care Reform efforts.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning in 2015, the County began convening a monthly CSEC Foster Care Provider Roundtable workgroup. These convenings provide a space for communication, collaboration, and collective problem solving among foster care providers, community care licensing, and Probation and DCFS with the goal of supporting foster care providers to accept, effectively serve, and retain commercially sexually exploited children and youth in their programs.

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<sup>34</sup> For more information on the Continuum of Care Reform efforts see The Promise of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR). Available at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCR/CCRInfographic.pdf?ver=2017-10-18-161318-400>.

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## CHAPTER 3: AN EVALUATION OF PLACEMENT STABILITY USING ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

The first component of the current study is an analysis of administrative data with a focus on placement stability. These data include a range of variables such as: background characteristics of youth, system involvement and histories, time in care, and placement histories. Comparisons are then made between CSE and non-CSE samples on these variables. Because both Probation and DCFS serve CSE children and youth in unique ways and for different reasons, the data relevant to each agency are presented separately.

### Methodology

Administrative data was requested from both the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department (Probation) following approval of the Petition for Research and a court order from the Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court. For DCFS, the request was submitted through a Research Analyst with the Bureau of Operational Support Services who interfaced with the Bureau of Information Services (BIS) to clarify and submit the data requests. For Probation, the request was submitted to two Deputy Directors and was then facilitated by Michelle Guymon, Director of Probation's Child Trafficking Unit (CTU), who interfaced with a Bureau Chief to clarify and submit data requests. The following list describes an overview of the data files received by each agency.

- Probation and Court History Data: Probation history included the following: arrest history (i.e., date of arrest referral, charge type, and disposition), initial arrest, age at initial arrest, violation hearings, court petitions, court dispositions, and bench warrants.
- Probation Secure Placement Data: Probation youth's detention and incarceration history including entrances, exits, and movements between secure facilities.
- Probation CSE Services Data: Service receipt information for Probation youth was received from the Director of the CTU. This data file included the list of all CSEC/Y identified youth in Probation and whether or not they were assigned to STAR Court, an advocate, and/or a specialized CTU Probation Officer.
- DCFS and Probation Placement History Data: Because community-based placements (e.g., non-secure) are tracked by DCFS/BIS, both Probation and DCFS placement histories were received from BIS. Youth's placement history data included: current living situation, initial placement, placement type for each placement, length of stay for each placement, and reasons for placement changes.
- DCFS Referral Data: Child welfare history information included the following: age at first referral, number of total referrals to child welfare, number of substantiated referrals, allegation of current referral, allegation of initial/first substantiated referral to child welfare, the youth's assigned courtroom, and the youth's caseworker.
- DCFS Referral History of Exploitation: This data included the referral history of CSEC cases that occurred or were substantiated prior to the current open case for all Probation or DCFS youth.

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- DCFS CSE Services Data: Service receipt was gathered from three locations:
    - (1) whether the youth had a specialized CSEC caseworker was determined by matching the list of names in that unit to the youth's caseworker from their referral file;
    - (2) whether the youth was assigned to DREAM court was determined from their assigned courtroom as listed in the referral file; and
    - (3) whether the youth had an advocate was determined by a list compiled by DCFS.

In sum, all DCFS referral data, as well as both Probation and DCFS community placement data (i.e., non-secure placements) came from BIS. All Probation history data came from the Probation Case Management System (PCMS). Service information was drawn from multiple sources including by hand. All data were received by the first author via password protected excel data files.

### **Data Matching and Description of Samples**

Four main samples are included in the current study (N = 979) and described on the next page (see Figure 1). Since the agencies have been providing services for different periods of time, the date ranges used for the cases were chosen in order to ensure: (1) that there was an overlap in time between the DCFS and Probation samples, and (2) a wide enough net was cast to have a sufficient sample size. Thus, for Probation, which has been providing all three specialized CSEC services longer, we looked across three years (i.e., January 2014 – December 2017). For DCFS, we captured the full two years that the agency had been providing all three specialized services (January 2015 – December 2017).

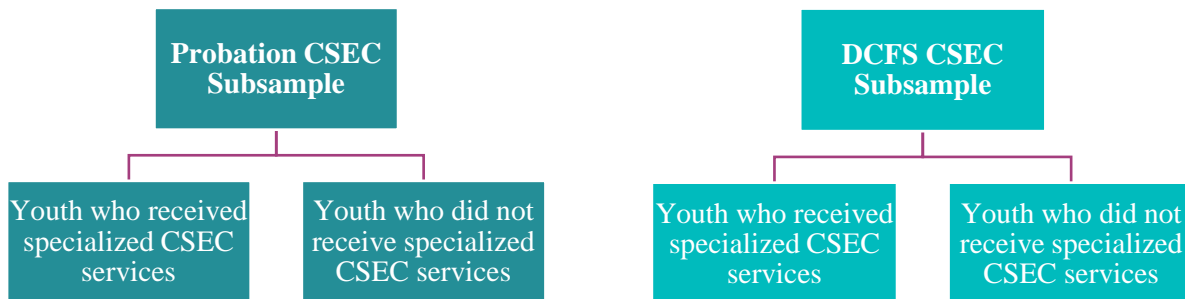
The non-CSE group was then matched to the CSE group by age and race/ethnicity. One standard deviation above and below the average age of the CSE sample was used to match on age. This was particularly important for the DCFS group because the full non-CSE sample included youth as young as seven years old. A stratified sampling technique was then used to match on race/ethnicity. This sampling technique ensured that the sample would be proportionate to the CSE sample in race/ethnicity. This means that the samples are proportionate to each other but not necessarily proportionate to the broader population of youth in each agency. Following the creation of these comparison groups we identified 3 youth in the DCFS sample that were identified as CSE by Probation and non-CSE by DCFS. Conversely, 8 Probation youth were identified as CSE by DCFS and non-CSE by Probation. These youth were then recategorized as CSE in their respective samples (i.e., DCFS or Probation).

**Figure 1. Description of the Probation and DCFS samples.**

<u>Probation CSEC Sample (n = 254)</u>	<u>Probation non-CSEC Sample (n = 237)</u>	<u>DCFS CSEC Sample (n = 246)</u>	<u>DCFS non-CSEC Sample (n = 242)</u>
<p>(1) a female,</p> <p>(2) with a placement history between the timeframe of January 1, 2014 through December 1, 2017, and</p> <p>(3) who was identified as CSEC by Probation’s CTU.</p>	<p>(1) a female,</p> <p>(2) with a placement history between the timeframe of January 1, 2014 through December 1, 2017, and</p> <p>(3) who was not identified as CSEC by the Probation’s CTU or DCFS; and</p> <p>(4) matched on age and race/ethnicity to the Probation CSEC sample.</p>	<p>(1) a female,</p> <p>(2) who had an allegation of exploitation substantiated between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2017, and</p> <p>(3) who had an out of home placement history.</p>	<p>(1) a female,</p> <p>(2) who never had an allegation of exploitation substantiated,</p> <p>(3) who had an out of home placement history, and</p> <p>(4) matched on age and race/ethnicity to the DCFS CSEC sample.</p>

Two CSE subsamples were then created based on the level of services the girls and young women in the CSE samples received. These services are outlined and described in detail in Chapter 2. For each agency this created two subsamples; one CSE subsample that received two or three of the specialized services and one CSE subsample that did not receive any of the three specialized services. These subsamples are listed below (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Description of the Probation and DCFS CSE subsamples.**



## Analytic Plan

As described, for each agency two main samples were created and then two subsamples. The main samples are the CSE sample and the non-CSE sample. These samples or groups of individuals were then compared to identify potential differences between the groups on key variables. This was done separately for both DCFS and Probation. The CSE subsamples of youth who received specialized services or not were then compared based on key variables. For dichotomous variables chi-square analyses were used. For continuous variables, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used. The group difference statistics are provided in the tables when a significant difference was found. We also note difference statistics that reached a p-value between .05 and .10 to indicate potential trends.

### Variable Descriptions

#### Probation-Specific Variables

**Arrests and charges.** The arrests/charges variable includes all arrest referrals to Probation and charges. The total number of arrests and charges includes a sum of all arrest referrals for each youth. In addition, because a referral can include multiple charges, the charges were also summed and included in this frequency count.

A description of the youth's first arrest charge as well as a categorization of the charge as a felony or misdemeanor was also provided. A breakdown of the charge categories for the first arrest is displayed. Those whose first arrest was for "prostitution" or human trafficking were pulled out and included in the background description.

**Court Involvement.** The number of petitions, bench warrants, and violation hearings are all count variables that indicate a frequency of that type of contact with the court system. The number of petitions includes the number of times a petition was filed in Juvenile Court based on an arrest. Each petition may include a single or multiple charges. The number of petitions sustained or dismissed is a count of dispositions related to the youth's petitions. The number of bench warrants is a count of warrants issued for each youth, regardless of the outcome of the warrant.

**Secure Placements and Time Incarcerated.** The number of entrances into any of the three juvenile halls in Los Angeles County (Central, Barry J. Nidorf, and Los Padrinos) is a count of entrances into juvenile halls regardless of how long the youth may have stayed or their disposition. All youth enter secure facilities through juvenile hall and, depending on their disposition, may then move between secure facilities such as camp, or the Dorothy Kirby Center.<sup>35</sup> Thus, youth may move frequently between facilities during their time incarcerated. Time incarcerated was calculated as the time between an entry into juvenile hall and a release from any type of secure facility. If youth entered and were released on the same day it was

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<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Kirby Center is a secure facility operated by the Probation Department but is not considered a camp placement. It is classified as a suitable placement (a term used for community-based placements) despite it being a secure facility. It is meant for youth with higher levels of need, especially those with mental health needs, and it serves both males and females.

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counted as one day. The length of stay at the Dorothy Kirby Center was calculated from this information and constitutes a count of the days from when a youth had a new placement at Dorothy Kirby and the subsequent release date. Stays at the Dorothy Kirby Center are included in the placement tables because it is considered a suitable placement and is used for those with higher levels of need.

### **DCFS-Specific Variables**

The age at first report to the child welfare system, youth's date of birth, and race/ethnicity were included in the referral data file received from BIS. The number of prior reports to child welfare and substantiated reports were also included in that data file and were not coded by the data team. The prior reports and substantiated reports variables refer to reports made before the most recent (or current) substantiated referral. It is important to remember that reports can include multiple allegations; therefore, the first substantiated allegation and the most recent substantiated allegation variables are the *primary allegations* in the report to child welfare. The primary allegation is determined by DCFS and not by the researcher. The most recent (primary) substantiated allegation variable is the current open case for the youth.

### **Placement Variables: DCFS and Probation**

For both the DCFS and Probation samples, files were received which included youth's entire placement history for community placements. Each placement had a start and end date, along with a description of the placement type, and the reason for placement change. From this information, time in care for each placement type in days was coded (i.e., time in care per stay) and then these stays were summed to get the cumulative time in placements. Therefore, the cumulative time in placements only includes the days that youth stayed in placements and not their time absent without leave (AWOL) or otherwise not accounted for.

The total placement types, first placement, and last placement were included in the data file from BIS. The reasons for placement change variable included a significant amount of missingness and required recoding of open-ended responses. Recoding was done based on the options used in CWS/CMS.

**Group Home Type.** Because of the significant variation in group home settings, the placement stays and placement changes were further broken down to assess for any potential differences by group home size and location. These types included small group home (6 bed home), medium group home (7-23 beds), large group home (24 beds and up), out-of-state, and out-of-county. The out-of-county placements were further broken down by size; small out-of-county (6 beds) and large out-of-county (7 beds and up).

Finally, if a placement was out-of-county or out-of-state it was coded as such, and not coded in the group home categories even though they are considered group homes. This means that each category of group homes, out-of-state group homes, and out-of-county group homes are mutually exclusive and that the small, medium, or large group homes are all local (within Los Angeles County) placements.

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## Service Receipt: DCFS and Probation

Service receipt information for the Probation youth was received from the Director of the Probation CTU. This data file is hand coded, and is not part of PCMS data. It included the list of all CSE identified youth in Probation and whether or not they were assigned to STAR Court, an advocate, and/or a specialized CSEC Probation Officer. Service receipt for DCFS was gathered from three locations. First, whether the youth had a specialized CSEC caseworker was determined by matching the list of names in that unit to the youth's caseworker from their referral file. Second, whether the youth was assigned to DREAM court was determined from their assigned courtroom as listed in the referral file. Third, whether the youth had an advocate was determined by a list compiled by hand by DCFS. Each service type (i.e., specialized Social Worker, specialized courtroom, and CSEC advocate) was then summed and coded to differentiate the number of CSEC-specific services youth received.

## Results

### Demographic and System Backgrounds

**Probation Samples.** The youth in the CSE and non-CSE samples were about 14 years old on average when they were first referred to Probation, and approximately 18 ½ years old at the time of the data pull. They are nearly two-thirds African American and nearly one-third Hispanic/Latina (see Table 1). The non-CSE sample was matched on race/ethnicity and purposefully reflects the same distribution of race/ethnicity. The CSE sample was significantly less likely to have their first arrest be a felony (38%) and more likely for it to be a misdemeanor (57.5%) compared to non-CSE sample (felony = 52.3%; misdemeanor = 46.4%). Nearly four percent (3.7%) of the CSE sample's first arrest was a "prostitution" or human trafficking related charge compared to 1.6% of the non-CSE sample. It is possible that these four youth with trafficking or "prostitution" related charges that are not currently identified as CSE were cases where the exploitation charge was not sustained, or the original charge was pled down to another offense. It is also possible that these charges occurred prior to the legal and policy changes aimed at identifying and supporting exploited youth, and, thus, these youth were not flagged as victims of exploitation.



**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the Probation CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group**

	CSE		Non-CSE		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	(n=254)		(n=237)		
	mean	sd	mean	sd	
Age of First Arrest Referral	14.3	1.4	14.2	1.3	--
Age at Data Extraction	18.8	1.8	18.9	1.0	Used to Match
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	$\chi^2$
<b><i>Race/Ethnicity</i></b>					Used to Match
African American	163	64.2	150	63.3	
Hispanic/Latina	73	28.7	71	30.0	
White	14	5.5	14	5.9	
Other	4	1.6	2	0.8	
<b><i>First Arrest Referral Charge</i></b>					12.36**
Felony	97	38.2	124	52.3	
Misdemeanor	146	57.5	110	46.4	
Unknown	11	4.3	3	1.3	
<b><i>First Arrest "Prostitution" or Human Trafficking</i></b>	9	3.7	4	1.6	

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 2 displays the type of contact and depth of involvement into the juvenile justice system for both the CSE and non-CSE Probation samples. The CSE sample had a significantly higher average for arrest referrals (CSE = 3.5; non-CSE = 2.6), petitions filed (CSE = 2.5; non-CSE = 2.1), petitions sustained (CSE = 2.2; non-CSE = 1.9), bench warrants (CSE = 2.7; non-CSE = 1.9), and entrances to secure facilities (CSE = 5; non-CSE = 2.4). Because the CSE sample had more bench warrants and arrest referrals, it is expected that they would also have more entrances to secure facilities as youth can be detained in juvenile hall when they are found with an open bench warrant or when arrested.

**Table 2. Juvenile justice history of the Probation CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE		Non-CSE		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	(n=254)		(n=237)		
	mean	sd	mean	sd	
Arrest Referrals/Charges	3.5	2.8	2.6	1.9	16.68***
Petitions Filed	2.5	1.5	2.1	1.5	7.05**
Petitions Sustained	2.2	1.5	1.9	1.3	6.99**
Petitions Dismissed	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.8	--
Bench Warrants Issued	2.7	2.5	1.5	1.9	35.89***
Violation Hearings	3.2	3.7	2.6	3.2	3.46, p = .063
Entrances to Juvenile Halls	5	2.7	3.9	2.4	22.54***
Cumulative Time Incarcerated (days)	316.3	229.9	271.4	305.8	--

**Note:** \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

There were no significant differences in total time incarcerated between the CSE sample (mean = 316.3 days or 10.5 months) and the non-CSE sample (mean = 271.4 days or 9.1 months) which further indicates that the higher level of entrances to secure facilities is related to the higher number of arrests and bench warrants rather than longer time incarcerated. Finally, there was a trend ( $p = .063$ ) for a higher average number of violation hearings for the CSE sample compared to the non-CSE sample.

**DCFS Samples.** As shown in Table 3, girls in the DCFS CSE and non-CSE samples were about 15 years old on average at the time of data pull. Of note, the DCFS samples are younger compared to the Probation samples. After matching, both samples were about six-and-a-half years old on average at the age of first referral to child welfare. The CSE sample had a significantly higher average number of prior reports to DCFS (CSE = 9.2; non-CSE = 7.2) and a significantly higher average number of prior substantiated reports (CSE = 3.5; non-CSE = 2.4). The CSE sample was disproportionately African American (59.8%) followed by Hispanic/Latina (28.9%), White (9.4%), and Other (2%). Again, the non-CSE sample was matched on race/ethnicity and purposefully reflects the same distribution of race/ethnicity.

**Table 3. Demographic characteristics and child welfare histories of the DCFS CSE sample and the non-CSE matched comparison group.**

	CSE		Non-CSE		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	(n=246)		(n=242)		
	mean	sd	mean	sd	
Age at Data Pull	15.1	1.6	14.9	1.5	Used to Match
Age of First Report	6.8	5.6	6.4	5.3	--
Number of Prior Reports	9.2	5.9	7.2	5.8	3.8***
Number of Substantiated Reports	3.5	2	2.4	1.6	6.17***
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	$\chi^2$
<b><i>Race/Ethnicity</i></b>					Used to Match
African American	147	59.8	145	59.9	
Hispanic/Latina	71	28.9	71	29.8	
White	23	9.4	21	8.7	
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	1.6	4	1.7	
Other	1	0.4	1	0.4	

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 4 displays the breakdown of the primary allegation of the youth’s most recent referral and the primary allegation of the youth’s initial referral to child welfare. Referrals can include multiple allegations; these variables include only the *primary* allegation in the referral. For the CSE sample, if their current open case included an allegation of exploitation, regardless of whether it was the primary allegation, they were included in the study sample. Exploitation was the primary allegation for 72.4% of the CSE sample. For the non-CSE sample, 45% of the cases included neglect as the current primary allegation.

**Table 4. Allegation history of the DCFS CSE sample and the non-CSE matched comparison group.**

	CSE (n=246)		Non-CSE (n=242)		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	n	%	n	%	
<b><i>First Substantiated Allegation Type (Primary)</i></b>					23.67**
Exploitation	4	1.6	0	0	
Sexual Abuse	32	13	13	5.4	
Physical	33	13.4	62	25.6	
Neglect	110	44.7	106	43.7	
Emotional	26	10.6	18	7.4	
At Risk, Sibling Abuse	24	9.8	29	12	
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	17	6.9	14	5.8	
<b><i>Most Recent/Current Substantiated Allegation Type (Primary)</i></b>					315.8***
Exploitation	178	72.4	0	0	
Sexual Abuse	22	8.9	21	8.7	
Physical	0	0	44	18.2	
Neglect	45	18.3	109	45	
Emotional	0	0	7	2.9	
At Risk, Sibling Abuse	0	0	17	7	
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	1	0.4	44	18.2	

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## Placement Histories

**Probation Samples.** Both the CSE and non-CSE samples spent nearly two cumulative years in out-of-home placements (not including secure placements), as shown in Table 5. It is important to keep in mind that out-of-home placements included placements that also occurred through DCFS, prior to their contact with Probation as evidenced by the differences in age at first placement and age at first arrest (see Tables 1 and 5). There were no significant differences between the Probation CSE and non-CSE samples in the cumulative length of time they spent in the more common placements (i.e., group home, family foster agency homes (FFA),<sup>36</sup> foster family home, and relative home). The most cumulative time for a single placement type, for both samples, was spent in foster homes. Both samples tended to be placed in a group home as their first placement (CSE = 57.8%; non-CSE = 56.5%). For the majority of youth, group home was the last placement they were in as well (CSE = 77.8%; non-CSE = 74.7%). The CSE sample had significantly more total placements (mean = 5.2) compared to the non-CSE sample (mean = 4.3).

<sup>36</sup> FFA homes are foster homes independently managed and certified by an external agency to DCFS. The foster agency holds the license and they then certify the foster parents in the home. Youth at these homes also have an extra Social Worker, in addition to their primary Social Worker.

**Table 5. Placement histories of the Probation CSE sample and a matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE (n=254)		Non-CSE (n=237)		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	<i>M(days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M(days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	
Age of First Out-of-Home Placement	12	.37	12	.35	--
<b><i>Cumulative Time in Placements<sup>1</sup></i></b>	650.9	975.6	679.3	927.2	--
Group Home	631.8	982.3	649.9	919.1	--
FFA Certified Home	1286.2	1260.1	1107.1	1147.5	--
Foster Family Home	1365.6	1307.6	1477.8	1446.3	--
Relative Home	1285.9	1147.0	1264.2	1180.7	--
<i>Total Placements</i>	5.2	4.9	4.3	4.0	-2.1*
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
<b><i>First Placement Facility Type</i></b>					--
County Shelter	1	0.4	0	0	
Court Specified Home	0	0	0	0	
FFA Certified Home	48	21.3	56	23.6	
Foster Family Home	21	9.3	13	5.5	
Group Home	130	57.8	134	56.5	
Guardian Home	1	0.4	4	1.7	
Relative Home	22	10.0	30	12.7	
Supervised Independent Living	2	0.9	0	0	
<b><i>Last Placement Facility Type</i></b>					--
FFA Certified Home	14	6.2	16	6.8	
Foster Family Home	8	3.6	7	3.0	
Group Home	175	77.8	177	74.7	
Guardian Home	0	0	1	0.4	
Relative Home	15	6.7	24	10.1	
Supervised Independent Living	13	5.8	12	5.1	

**Note:** \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>1</sup> Only the most common placement types are displayed in this table. This means that the placements displayed have longer average lengths of stay compared to those not displayed. The short-term placement options that are not displayed, thus, bring down the total cumulative average length of stay in placements. This variability is also seen in the large standard deviations.

**DCFS Samples.** Both DCFS CSE and non-CSE samples were similar at their age of first out-of-home placement (CSE = 11.8; non-CSE = 11.7), as shown in Table 6. However, the CSE sample had significantly longer cumulative stays in out-of-home placements (CSE = 2.8 years; non-CSE = 1.7 years). Specifically, the CSE sample had significantly longer stays in group homes, FFA, and relative homes compared to the non-CSE sample. The CSE sample also had significantly more total placements compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 5; non-CSE = 3).

**Table 6. Placement history of the DCFS CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE (n=246)		Non-CSE (n=242)		Group Difference
	<i>All with Placement History</i>				
	mean	sd	m	sd	
Age of First Out-of-home Placement	11.8	5.3	11.7	5.3	--
Total Placements	5.0	4.5	3.0	2.6	6.04***
	<i>M(days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M(days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	
<b><i>Cumulative Time in Placements<sup>1</sup></i></b>	1019.2	1440.0	620.8	932.6	3.62***
Group Home	1120.8	1514.2	812.2	1121.0	1.67**
FFA	1453.0	1709.1	833.9	1055.6	3.44***
Relative Home	1384.3	1536.8	755.2	984.5	3.85***
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
<b><i>First Placement Facility Type</i></b>					<b>47.8***</b>
County Shelter	1	0.4	0	0	
Court Specified Home	0	0	1	0.4	
FFA Certified Home	69	28.1	91	37.6	
Foster Family Home	19	7.7	18	7.4	
Group Home	105	42.7	41	16.9	
Guardian Home	1	0.4	7	2.9	
Relative Home	50	20.3	83	34.3	
Small Family Home	0	0	1	0.4	
Supervised Independent Living Program	1	0.4	0	0	
<b><i>Last Placement Facility Type</i></b>					<b>87.8***</b>
FFA Certified Home	30	12.2	61	25.2	
Foster Family Home	14	5.7	21	8.7	
Group Home	152	61.8	52	21.5	
Guardian Home	5	2.0	8	3.3	
Relative Home	37	15.0	95	39.3	
Supervised Independent Living Program	8	3.3	5	2.1	

**Note:** \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>1</sup> Only the most common placement types are displayed in this table. This means that the placements displayed have the longer average lengths of stay compared to those not displayed. The short-term placement options that

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are not displayed, thus, bring down the total cumulative average length of stay in placements. This variability is also seen in the large standard deviations.

There is variation between samples in their first and last placement types, unlike the Probation samples. The CSE sample's first placement type was more likely to be a group home compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 42.7%; non-CSE = 16.9%). Conversely, the non-CSE sample's first placement was more likely to be an FFA home (CSE = 28.1%; non-CSE = 37.6%) or a relative's home (CSE = 20.3%; non-CSE = 34.3%) compared to the CSE sample. The CSE sample's last placement type was also more likely to be a group home compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 61.8%; non-CSE = 21.5%). Conversely, the non-CSE sample's last placement was more likely to be an FFA home (CSE = 12.2%; non-CSE = 25.2%) or a relative's home (CSE = 15%; non-CSE = 39.3%) compared to the CSE sample. Because these are open cases the last placement type is their current placement.

### **Placement Changes and Stays**

**Probation Samples.** Table 7 displays the average time in care per stay by placement type for the Probation samples as well as reasons for placement changes. Regarding time in care per stay by placement type, there is a significant difference between the CSE Probation sample and the non-CSE Probation sample in the average length of time youth stay at a group home (CSE = 63.8 days; non-CSE = 104.3 days). Specifically, the CSE sample stayed in group homes for about two months at a time, compared to the non-CSE sample that stayed for about three-and-a-half months. There is no significant difference between samples for the other placement types.

Regarding placement changes, the CSE sample had significantly more changes in placements overall compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 1145 total placements; non-CSE = 985 total placements). There are numerous reasons a child's placement would change as shown in Table 7. For the CSE sample, running away from placement was the most common reason (31.9%). For the non-CSE sample, running away was the second most common reason for placement change (22.7%). The CSE sample was about half as likely to be reunified (i.e., return home following a suitable placement order) as a reason for placement change compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 6.6%; non-CSE = 12.7%).

Of these placement changes, CSE youth had significantly more placement changes due to running away compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 365 changes due to runaway; non-CSE = 224 changes due to runaway). For both the CSE and non-CSE samples, of all of the placement changes due to running away, 84.4% of these placement changes were from group homes. Because there were more overall placement changes for the CSE sample, the frequency that the placement changed due to running away from a group home was higher for the CSE sample as compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 308; non-CSE = 189). Thus, while both samples are changing placements due to running from group homes at the same prevalence rate, girls in the CSE sample are changing placements due to running away from group homes much more frequently.

**Table 7. Comparing placements and placement changes among the Probation CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE (n=254)			Non-CSE (n=237)			Group Difference
	n (stays)	M (days)	sd	n (stays)	M (days)	sd	
<b><i>Time in Care per Stay (days)</i></b>							
Small Family Home	3	221.0	206.5	1	35.0	--	
County Shelter	5	102.2	145.5	3	284.3	153.4	
Court Specified Home	1	294.0		1	31		
FFA Certified Home	224	122.9	165.7	196	130.5	232.6	
Foster Family Home	125	139.4	457.8	89	107.2	203.0	
Group Home	641	63.8	90.1	512	104.3	129.4	6.26***
Guardian Home	20	205.4	918.6	27	890.62	168.0	
Relative Home	108	324.6	458.2	143	310.3	377.2	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
<i>Total Times Reason for Placement Change was Runaway in All Placements</i>	365	100		224	100		19.09***
<b><i>Runaways by Facility Type</i></b>							<b>20.5***</b>
FFA Certified Home	15	4.1		10	4.5		
Foster Family Home	25	6.9		11	4.9		
Group Home	308	84.4		189	84.4		
Guardian Home	1	0.3		0	0		
Relative Home	14	3.8		13	5.8		
Small Family Home	1	0.3		0	0		
Supervised Independent Living	1	0.3		1	0.5		
<i>Total Placement Changes</i>	1145	100		985	100		
<b><i>Reasons for Placement Change</i></b>							
AFDC <sup>37</sup> Funds Terminated-Ends	2	0.2		1	0.1		
Adoptive Placement	6	0.5		4	0.4		
Change of Address for Facility	0	0		1	0.1		

<sup>37</sup> Aid to Families with Dependent Children



	n	%		n	%		
Child Adjudged 601/602 <sup>38</sup>	4	0.4		1	0.2		
Child Ran Away from Placement	365	31.9		224	22.7		
Child Refused	3	0.3		3	0.3		
Child Returned Home for Trial Visit/HOP <sup>39</sup>	40	3.5		47	4.8		
Child in Medical	19	1.7		11	1.1		
Child's Behavior	17	1.5		10	1		
Complaint on Foster Home	2	0.2		2	0.2		
Emancipation	8	0.7		3	0.3		
Foster-Adoptive Placement	1	0.1		0	0		
Foster Home/Agency Request	58	5.2		41	4.2		
Higher Level of Care Required	24	2.1		18	1.8		
Incarcerated	67	5.9		73	7.4		
Intercounty Transfer	0	0		1	0.1		
Lower Level of Care Required	6	0.5		1	0.1		
Moved Between Probation & Child Welfare	1	0.1		0	0		
From Emergency Shelter	1	0.1		3	1.3		
Moved to NFC <sup>40</sup> Placement	2	0.2		1	0.1		
Moved to Supervised Independent Living	3	0.3		6	0.6		
Moved to THPP/THP+FC <sup>41</sup>	9	0.8		6	0.6		
NMD <sup>42</sup> Decision	2	0.2		4	0.4		

<sup>38</sup> Child was adjudicated delinquent per Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 601 or 602.

<sup>39</sup> Home on Probation

<sup>40</sup> Non-Foster Care

<sup>41</sup> THP + FC refers to Transitional Housing Program Plus Foster Care. THPP refers to Transitional Housing Placement Program.

<sup>42</sup> Non-Minor Dependent

	n	%		n	%		
NMD Moved to Unapproved Placement	8	0.8		5	0.5		
No Placement Change	2	0.2		2	0.2		
Placed with Guardian	15	1.3		30	3.1		
Placed with Relative	1	0.1		1	0.1		
Placed with Relative/NREFM <sup>43</sup>	54	4.7		66	6.7		
Replacement	307	26.8		244	24.8		
Reunified <sup>1</sup>	76	6.6		125	12.7		
Terminated Jurisdiction	18	1.6		21	2.1		
Unknown	24	2.1		30	3.1		

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>1</sup> For Probation youth, reunification often means returning home following a suitable placement order.

**DCFS Samples.** Table 8 displays the average time in care per stay by placement type for the DCFS samples as well as reasons for placement changes. There were no significant differences in the length of time in care per stay between the CSE and non-CSE samples for the different placement types. This is distinct from the Probation sample, where there was a difference in the average length of stay in group homes. Of note, CSE girls in the DCFS sample had nearly six times the number of stays in group homes compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 973; non-CSE = 168), indicating a heavy reliance on this placement type for the CSE sample.

Regarding placement changes, the total number of placement changes between the two samples is striking, with the CSE sample changing placements 4.3 times more frequently than the non-CSE sample (CSE = 1,711 placement changes; non-CSE = 400 placement changes). Of all reasons for placement change, running away was the second most common reason for placement change for both the CSE sample (22.9%) and the non-CSE sample (14.5%). The CSE sample had significantly more changes in placement due to running away compared to the non-CSE sample (CSE = 392 changes due to runaway; non-CSE = 58 changes due to runaway). Of all the times the placement changed due to the youth running away from the five most common placements (FFA, foster family, group home, guardian home, and relative home), 81.6% were from group homes for the CSE sample and 56.1% were from group homes for the non-CSE sample.

For the DCFS samples, it is noteworthy that the most common reason for placement change was “Other.” While we recoded many of the responses in this Other category the ones that remained in this category were: reasons that were not clear, when there was not a specific category that the reason belonged to, or they did not elaborate on the circumstances in a way that allowed us to recode the response into the given categories. Fortunately, we were able to recode or re-categorize about 20% of the other responses.

<sup>43</sup> Non-Related Extended Family Member

**Table 8. Comparing placements and placement changes among the DCFS CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group.**

		CSE (n=246)			Non-CSE (n=242)			Group Difference
		n (stays)	M (days)	sd	n (stays)	M (days)	sd	
<b><i>Time in Care per Stay (days)</i></b>								
	Small Family Home	0	--	--	2	182.5	239.7	--
	County Shelter	6	1.8	1.5	1	0		--
	Court Specified Home	8	98	37.3	1	65.0		--
	FFA Certified Home	380	138.7	190.1	313	129.7	157.2	--
	Foster Family Home	177	95.7	135.9	101	138.2	251.1	--
	Group Home	973	80.9	133.0	168	67.4	91.7	--
	Guardian Home	35	1340.1	1578.6	19	1402.4	1645.7	--
	Relative Home	235	222.2	268.5	222	254.8	280.6	--
		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
	<i>Total Times Reason for Placement Change was Runaway in All Placements</i>	392	100		58	100		97.4***
<b><i>Runaways by Facility Type</i></b>								
	FFA Certified Home	27	6.8		10	17.2		
	Foster Family Home	16	4.1		3	5.2		
	Group Home	320	81.6		40	69.0		
	Guardian Home	4	1.0		0	0		
	Relative Home	25	6.4		5	8.6		
	<i>Total Placement Changes</i>	1711	100		400	100		
<b><i>Reasons for Placement Change</i></b>								<b>100.8***</b>
	Adoptive Placement	4	0.2		0	0		
	Child Abducted	2	0.1		0	0		
	Child Adjudged 601/602	12	0.7		0	0		

	n	%		n	%		
Child Ran Away from Placement	392	22.9		58	14.5		
Child Refused Services	7	0.4		0	0		
Child Returned Home for Trial Visit	55	3.2		19	4.8		
Child in Medical Facility	26	1.5		0	0		
Child's Behavior	24	1.4		5	1.25		
Foster-Adopt Placement	5	0.3		0	0		
Foster Home/Agency Request	125	7.3		50	12.5		
Higher Level of Care	31	1.8		6	1.5		
Incarcerated	21	1.2		1	0.3		
Lower Level of Care	16	0.9		2	0.5		
Minor Mother Moved to Placement with Child	9	0.5		0	0		
Moved from Emergency Shelter	23	1.3		1	0.3		
Moved to NFC Placement	2	0.1		0	0		
Moved to THP	10	0.6		0	0		
NMD	2	0.1		0	0		
NMD Moved to Unapproved Placement	15	0.9		1	0.3		
Other	844	49.3		200	50.0		
Placed with Guardian	33	1.9		23	5.8		
Placed with Relative/NREFM	53	3.1		34	8.5		

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

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## Group Homes

Again, because of the significant variation in group home settings, the placement stays and placement changes were further broken down to assess for any potential differences by group home size and location. These types included small group home (6 bed home), medium group home (7-23 beds), large group home (24 beds and up), out-of-state, and out-of-county. The out-of-county placements were further broken down by size; small out-of-county placements (6 beds) and large out-of-county placements (7 beds and up). Of note, this is slightly different from the general group home breakdown, which included small, medium, and large group homes.

**Probation Samples.** There were no significant differences in how long each sample stayed in each group home placement type per stay for the Probation samples (see Table 9). The longest average stays for the CSE sample were in small, out-of-county placements; however, there were only 25 stays in this placement type for the CSE sample. If we ignore the difference between the large and small out-of-county group homes, the longest average stays for both the CSE and non-CSE samples were in the medium-sized group homes (CSE = 172.2 days or 5.7 months; non-CSE = 191.7 days or 6.4 months).

Running away was indicated as the reason for placement change most frequently from the small and large group homes for the CSE sample. In addition, girls in the CSE sample ran away from both the small and large group homes significantly more often compared to girls in the non-CSE sample. Thus, medium-sized group homes had the longest average stays among the CSE sample and the fewest placement changes due to running away.

Girls in the CSE sample also changed placement due to running away more frequently from the out-of-county placements compared to the non-CSE sample. In breaking down the out-of-county placements by size, you can see that the large out-of-county placements drove up this frequency and contributed to the difference between the groups. Regarding secure facilities, there were no significant differences between placement stays for the samples; however, the sample size was low for these types of placements indicating less of a reliance on these types of facilities.

**Table 9. Breakdown of group home placements and reasons for placement change for the Probation CSE sample and the matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE (n=254)			Non-CSE (n=237)			Group Difference
	n (stays)	M(days)	sd	n (stays)	M(days)	sd	
<b><i>Time in Care per Group Home Stay (days)</i></b>							
Small Group Home	387	112.1	251.9	320	144.0	321.5	--
Medium Group Home	68	172.2	261.8	66	191.7	293.3	--
Large Group Home	268	105.5	191.1	275	150.2	235.7	--
Out-of-State	34	157.3	200.6	21	163.3	124.1	--
Out-of-County	204	137.3	424.6	145	165.4	286.6	--
<b><i>Out-of-County (OOC)</i></b>							
OOC-small	25	188.2	463.8	19	81.3	73.1	--
OOC-large	179	130.1	419.8	126	178.0	304.4	--
<b><i>Secure Facilities</i></b>							
Level 14 <sup>44</sup>	16	83.4	75.6	17	107.1	151.6	--
Dorothy Kirby Center	36	195.2	542.1	12	102.2	130.0	--
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
<b><i>Runaway as Reason for Placement Change by Group Home Type</i></b>	318	100		202	100		
Small Group Home	109	34.3		68	33.7		5.3*
Medium Group Home	18	.06		20	9.9		--
Large Group Home	103	32.4		79	39.1		5.7*
Out-of-State	8	2.5		4	2.0		--
Out-of-County	80	25.2		31	15.3		12.8***
<b><i>Out-of-County (OOC)</i></b>							
OOC-small	12	15		7	22.6		--
OOC-large	68	85		24	77.4		13.2***

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>44</sup> Level 14 is the highest level placement for youth with severe emotional and psychiatric needs.

**DCFS Samples.** As shown in Table 10, girls in the CSE sample stayed for significantly fewer days in small and large group homes compared to the non-CSE sample. The longest average stays for the CSE sample were in large, out-of-county placements. For both samples, the shortest stays, on average, were in medium-sized group homes (CSE = 68.4 days; non-CSE = 61.9 days), in contrast to the Probation samples.

Running away was indicated as the reason for placement change most frequently from the small group homes and large group homes for both samples. In addition, the CSE sample ran away from both small and large group homes significantly more often compared to the non-CSE sample. However, the non-CSE sample did not change placements due to running away as frequently from the group homes overall (CSE = 109; non-CSE = 19) so comparisons between the n's, rather than the percentages, should be noted and the focus should be on the rates of placement changes due to running away for the CSE sample only.

**Table 10. Breakdown of group home placements and reasons for placement change for the DCFS CSE sample and a matched non-CSE comparison group.**

	CSE (n=246)			Non-CSE (n=242)			Group Difference	
	n (stays)	M (days)	sd	n (stays)	M (days)	sd		
<b><i>Time in Care per Group Home Stay (days)</i></b>								
Small Group Home	686	118.5	198.3	180	182.8	439.5	2.88**	
Medium Group Home	59	68.4	108.6	31	61.9	111.3	--	
Large Group Home	341	116.3	183.6	85	179.4	398.4	2.15*	
Out-of-State	15	111.9	99.7	0	0		--	
Out-of-County	224	166.2	509.6	39	198.0	238.4	--	
<b><i>Out-of-County (OOC)</i></b>								
OOC-small	32	118.1	155.2	0	0		--	
OOC-large	192	174.2	546.6	39	198.0	238.4	--	
<b><i>Secure Facilities</i></b>								
Level 14	100	144.8	396.8	6	81.8	49.7	--	
Dorothy Kirby Center	6	32.3	37.9	--				
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	
<i>Runaway as Reason for Placement Change by Group Home Type</i>	109	100		19	100		29.5****	
Small Group Home	56	51.4		7	36.8		24.2****	
Medium Group Home	7	6.4		3	15.8		--	
Large Group Home	25	22.9		7	36.8		7.7**	
Out-of-State	6	5.5		0	0		--	
Out-of-County	15	13.8		1	5.3		3.8, <i>p</i> = .052	

<i>Out-of-County (OOC)</i>							
	OOC-small	4	25		0	0	--
	OOC-large	11	75		1	100	--

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

### Specialized CSEC Services

To explore whether service receipt impacted the length of time in care, placement changes, or time in care by placement type, two CSE subsamples were created based on the level of services the girls in the sample received. Again, for each agency this created two subsamples: one CSE subsample that received two or three of the specialized services, and one CSE subsample that did not receive any of the specialized services. Differences tests were then conducted between these subsamples for each agency to explore whether receiving two or three services was associated with a significant difference between the groups.

It is important to remember that we do not know what other services youth in these subsamples may have also received. Given that many placements provide services, it is expected that youth received some other services through the placements. In addition, youth may have also participated in other services (see Chapter 2) associated with child welfare and juvenile justice involvement, including through community-based organizations, that may or may not have been specific to CSE issues; this study did not capture that data. Finally, we do not have information on the dosage of services (e.g., how frequently they had contact with their advocate). For the current study we are simply exploring whether or not girls and young women in the subsamples who received some variation of the three specialized services are different on key variables compared to those who did not receive specialized services.

**Probation CSE Subsamples.** As shown in Table 11, youth in the Probation CSE sample received varying levels of specialized services. Nearly two-thirds (63%) received two or more specialized services and 18.4% received no specialized services.

**Table 11. Types of services girls in the Probation CSE sample received (n=217)<sup>1</sup>**

	n	%
<i>Type of Service</i>		
Specialized Probation Officer	124	57.1
Specialized Court	152	70.1
CSEC Advocate	136	62.7
<i>Count of Services</i>		
3 services	98	45.2
2 services	39	18.0
1 service	40	18.4
0 services	40	18.4

<sup>1</sup> The n's are different for this subsample due to missing data.

Table 12 shows the level of court contact, time in care, and length of stay in placements by type comparing the two CSE subsamples. In terms of average length of stay at medium-sized



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group homes, there was a significant difference between the CSE subsample receiving specialized services and the CSE subsample not receiving specialized services (see Table 12). Specifically, girls in the CSE subsample who received specialized services stayed significantly longer at medium-sized group homes (mean per stay = 146.8 days or 4.9 months) compared to those who did not receive specialized services (mean per stay = 114 days or 3.8 months). There were no other significant differences for the length of stay in other placement types between those receiving specialized services and those not receiving specialized services.

Those receiving specialized services had significantly longer cumulative stays in placements, total number of placement changes, and number of sustained petitions compared to those not receiving specialized services. However, some of the placement stays, placement changes, and sustained petitions likely occurred prior to the youth's receipt of services. Thus, these group differences may actually highlight the higher level of need of youth who ultimately receive specialized services. Further discussion on this is included in Chapter 6.

**Table 12. Differences in court contact, time in care, and stays in placements based on service receipt among the Probation CSE subsamples.**

	CSE Sample (n = 217)			CSE no services (n = 40)			CSE 2+ Services (n = 137)		Group Difference
	M (days)	sd		M (days)	sd		M (days)	sd	
Cumulative Time in Placements (total)	650.9	975.6		362.6	545.8		814.2	1166.9	-2.25*
Total Placement Changes	5.3	5.0		4	3.6		5.9	5.4	-2.04*
Violation Hearings	3.2	3.5		3.7	4.0		3.1	3.3	--
Number of Petitions	2.6	1.5		2.3	1.4		2.7	1.6	--
Number of Sustained Petitions	2.3	1.4		1.8	1.1		2.4	1.5	2.51*
Number of Dismissed Petitions	0.3	0.8		0.4	1.0		0.2	0.7	--
Bench Warrants	3.0	2.7		2.5	2.4		3.2	2.7	
<i>Time In Care Per Stay in Placement Types</i>	<i>M (days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n (stays)</i>	<i>M (days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n (stays)</i>	<i>M (days)</i>	<i>sd</i>	
Group Home	91.9	139.7	142	139.0	330.0	732	131.4	307.6	--
FFA Certified Home	115.4	173.4	79	156.7	370.2	558	151.5	352.0	--
Foster Family Home	69.5	101.5	51	147.3	365.2	406	138.7	346.7	--
Relative Home	145.2	214.3	40	145.0	284.2	408	145.0	278.5	--
<i>Time In Care Per Stay in Group Home Types</i>									
Small Group Home	66.2	95.6	50	135.8	291.7	228	123.3	268.4	--
Medium Group Home	246.0	269.0	17	86.6	114.0	28	146.8	201.0	2.8***
Large Group Home	82.3	103.6	34	163.6	450.1	168	149.9	413.6	--
Out-of-State	7.0		1	164.1	207.1	33	159.5		
Out-of-County (OOC)	74.8	83.6	19	114.6	220.0	169	110.6	210.5	--
<i>OOC-small</i>	50.3	42.7	4	253.4	506.7	20	219.5	467.2	--
<i>OOC-large</i>	81.4	91.5	15	95.9	138.0	149	94.6	134.3	--
Level 14	73.5	94.0	2	94.0	157.2	9	90.3	143.9	--
Dorothy Kirby Center	94.2	128.2							

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**DCFS CSE Subsamples.** As shown in Table 13, youth in the DCFS CSE sample received varying levels of specialized services. About one-fifth of youth (20.5%) received two or more specialized services and 43% received no specialized services.

**Table 13. Types of services girls in the DCFS CSE sample received (n=244)<sup>1</sup>**

	n	%
<b><i>Type of Service</i></b>		
Specialized Social Worker	8	3.3
Specialized Court	73	29.9
CSEC Advocate	109	44.7
<b><i>Count of Services</i></b>		
3 services	1	0.4
2 services	49	20.1
1 service	89	36.5
0 services	105	43.0

<sup>1</sup> The n's are different for this subsample due to missing data.

In terms of average length of stay at FFA homes and small out-of-county placements, there was a significant difference between the CSE subsample receiving specialized services compared to the CSE subsample not receiving specialized services (see Table 14). Specifically, girls in the CSE subsample who received specialized services stayed significantly longer at FFA homes (mean per stay = 191.2 days) and small out-of-county placements (mean per stay = 747.2 days) compared to those who didn't receive specialized services (FFA mean per stay = 116.3 days; OOC-small mean per stay = 90.1 days). With regard to out-of-county small placements, there were very few stays at these facilities (total stays = 21) so it would be important to replicate this with a larger sample. There were no other significant differences for the length of stay in other placement types between those receiving specialized services and those not receiving specialized services.

**Table 14. Differences in service receipt and time in care for CSE girls in DCFS.**

	All CSE (n = 244)		CSE no services (n = 105)			CSE 2+ Services (n = 50)			Group Difference
	mean	sd	n	m	sd	n	m	sd	
Cumulative Time in Care (total)	977.0	1524.7	105	1173.0	1408.2	50	1040.2	1486.4	--
Total Placement Changes	4.8	4.5	105	4.7	3.6	50	4.8	4.2	--
<b><i>Time In Care Per Stay in Placement Types</i></b>		<b><i>M</i></b> <b><i>(days)</i></b>	<b><i>sd</i></b>	<b><i>n</i></b> <b><i>(stays)</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b> <b><i>(days)</i></b>	<b><i>sd</i></b>	<b><i>n</i></b> <b><i>(stays)</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b> <b><i>(days)</i></b>	<b><i>sd</i></b>
Group Home	80.9	133.0	318	72.6	157.6	203	85.2	124.0	--
FFA	138.7	190.1	161	116.3	155.6	68	191.2	271.4	-2.63**
Foster Family Home	95.7	135.9	57	96.5	179.7	32	87.0	91.0	--
Relative Home	222.2	268.5	101	216.8	244.4	44	286.7	422.0	--
<b><i>Time In Care Per Stay in Group Home Types</i></b>									
Small Group Home	131.5	296.9	312	126.0	318.4	127	126.9	171.5	--
Medium Group Home	94.0	127.5	26	132.3	173.1	25	85.0	100.0	--
Large Group Home	133.0	303.2	92	158.9	382.3	48	58.1	85.3	--
Out-of-State	183.9	195.2	1			0			
Out-of-County	176.7	476.0	96	238.6	730.0	87	166.2	333.3	--
<i>OOC-small</i>	217.4	454.2	16	90.1	106.4	5	747.2	887.8	-3.1**
<i>OOC-large</i>	172.6	478.8	80	268.4	795.8	82	130.8	238.6	--
Level 14	147.5	317.3	8	42.0	42.6	18	414.2	885.3	--
Dorothy Kirby Center									

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## CHAPTER 4: A SURVEY OF GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON PLACEMENTS AND SERVICES

A survey was developed by Michelle Guymon, Director of the Probation Department's Child Trafficking Unit (CTU) and reviewed by National Center for Youth Law in an effort to gain direct feedback from youth regarding their experiences in placements and with specialized services (i.e., specialized Social Workers, courts, and advocates). All of the survey participants identify as female.<sup>45</sup> Both CSE and non-CSE identified girls and young women were asked to respond to the survey by representatives in either the Probation Department or DCFS. Survey data was received and de-identified by the first author as secondary data, per IRB guidelines. Data were entered into SPSS by research assistants and analyzed by the first author.

### Methodology

#### Survey Administration by Agencies

Youth with open Probation cases were asked by their Probation Officers to complete the survey with them or on their own. Youth were recruited from juvenile hall, Dorothy Kirby Center, out-of-home placement, camp, and the community.

Youth with open DCFS cases were selected from a youth club or from Social Workers' caseloads. The youth participating in the club completed the surveys during a meeting. A DCFS administrator walked them through the questions by reading the questions to them and checking to see if clarifications were needed. Youth selected from caseloads completed the survey during a face-to-face visit or telephone call with their Social Worker. Social workers were instructed to assist the youth with any questions that they may have had while taking the survey either in person or via telephone.

#### Analytic Plan

The survey sought to compare the experiences of CSE and non-CSE girls and young women, and to identify potential differences between their experiences and perceptions of placements. When relevant, differences between CSE and non-CSE girls and young women are differentiated in the results and related tables and figures. Also, when possible, null hypothesis significance tests<sup>46</sup> were performed using ANOVA or chi-square statistics in order to identify whether there were statistically significant differences between the CSE and non-CSE girls and young women in how they responded. When open-ended feedback was solicited, only CSE girls' and young women's responses were analyzed given the focus of the study was on their perceptions and experiences.

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<sup>45</sup> As noted above, the County is working toward expanding its policies and practices to better identify and serve male-identifying and transgender youth, who are also vulnerable to CSEC/Y.

<sup>46</sup> Null hypothesis significance tests indicate whether the difference between the two groups occurred by chance or whether there is a true difference between the groups based on CSE status. For the current section a traditional alpha level of .05 was used.

## Results

Of the 121 girls and young women that responded, 56% were from Probation (n = 68) and 44% were from DCFS (n = 53). Just over half were identified as CSE (60%: n = 73) and 40% (n = 48) were not CSE identified. Ten girls and young women (8%) reported that they were pregnant or parenting (3 non-CSE; 7 CSE). Below is a summary of the youth's responses.

### Placement Histories and Preferences Among all Girls and Young Women

Girls and young women were asked to identify whether they had been placed in any of the following placement types: locked placement, out-of-county or state placement, large group home, small (6-bed) group home, foster home, and other. Nineteen percent of the girls reported having been in a locked placement, 16% had been in an out-of-county or out-of-state placement, 60% had been in a large group home, 63% had been in a small (6-bed) group home, and 33% had been in a foster home placement.

Of those placement types, girls were asked what their favorite type of placement is. Youth reported a range of preferences on placements (see Table 15).

**Table 15. Favorite placements as reported by youth.**

	Total	Non-CSE	CSE
Out-of-County or State	7.8%	2.2%	11.6%
Large group home	26.1%	30.4%	23.2%
Small (6-bed) group home	23.5%	19.6%	26.1%
Foster home	7.8%	6.5%	8.7%
Other	17.4%	17.4%	17.4%
Locked placement	2.9%	0%	2.9%

\*About 25% of non-CSE responded that they preferred a relative or non-relative placement, however, those results are omitted because not all respondents' surveys included those options. Therefore, total will not add to 100%.

Youth were then asked specific questions about their preferences on placements. First, they were asked if they preferred locked or unlocked placements, and why. Next, they were asked to rank their preferences in terms of placement sizes and locations, which included open-ended follow-up questions regarding the pros and cons of each option.

The majority of youth preferred unlocked placements (98% non-CSE; 87% CSE) to locked placements. When asked why they preferred unlocked placements, the most common responses related to having freedom and/or not wanting to feel like they are in jail. For example, youth stated, "*My freedom is important, nobody wants to feel incarcerated,*" "*I don't want to feel like a prisoner,*" and "*I feel that unlocked placements let you have more freedom.*" Other youth appreciated the normalcy and the activities available at unlocked placements. For example, youth stated, "*Because I at least feel at home,*" "*So I can feel like I am actually a part of the community,*" and "*To be able to participate in activities in the community, sports, job, and shopping.*" The few youth who preferred locked placements stated: they would run from an unlocked placement or be tempted to, that they feel safer in a locked placement, or there is less drama in a locked placement.

Youth were asked to rank their top three preferences among large group homes, small group homes, and foster homes. As shown in Table 16, CSE girls and young women ranked small group homes and foster homes nearly equally as their first choice; they most frequently chose small group homes as their second choice, and large group homes as their third choice. For non-CSE girls and young women, the most selected first place option was small group homes, the most selected second place option was also small group homes, and the most selected third place option was large group homes. In addition, there were no statistically significant differences found when assessing how youth ranked these placements based on CSE status, indicating both CSE and non-CSE girls ranked these three placement options similarly.

**Table 16. Placement size preferences in ranked order for CSE and non-CSE girls.**

	1 <sup>st</sup> choice		2 <sup>nd</sup> choice		3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	
	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>
Large Group Home	19%	29%	25%	27%	57%	44%
Small Group Home	42%	39%	44%	57%	14%	4%
Foster Home	41%	36%	29%	16%	30%	49%

When asked to rank their top three preferences for placement location, the response options were local, remote (e.g., out-of-county), or out-of-state. As shown in Table 17, the majority of both non-CSE and CSE youth ranked local placements as their top placement location preference. Both groups also ranked remote most frequently as their second ranked placement location preference, and out-of-state as their most frequent third placement location preference.

Although CSE and non-CSE youth ranked these locations similarly, there were significant differences found between the groups. First, CSE girls and young women were significantly more likely to rank local placements lower ( $F(1, 108) = 6.93, p < .05$ : CSE  $M = 1.39, SD = .75$ ; non-CSE  $M = 1.09, SD = .35$ ). Specifically, 16% of CSE girls ranked local as their third choice and 2% non-CSE girls ranked local as their third choice. In addition, CSE youth were significantly more likely to rank out-of-state placements higher ( $F(1, 101) = 8.29, p < .01$ : CSE  $M = 2.51, SD = .73$ ; non-CSE  $M = 2.89, SD = .41$ ) compared to non-CSE youth. Specifically, 14% of CSE girls and young women ranked out-of-state as their first choice compared to 2% of non-CSE girls and young women.

**Table 17. Placement location preferences in ranked order for CSE and non-CSE girls.**

	1 <sup>st</sup> choice		2 <sup>nd</sup> choice		3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	
	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>
Local*	76%	94%	8%	4%	16%	2%
Remote	12%	4%	71%	84%	17%	11%
Out-of-State*	14%	2%	21%	9%	66%	89%

\*Significant difference based on CSE status ( $p < .05$ ).

## Placement Preferences Among CSE-Girls Only

CSE girls and young women also listed benefits and drawbacks of their top three placement types. The most common responses are listed in Table 18.

**Table 18. Summary of CSE girls' perspectives on the positives and negatives of different size placements.**

	Pros	Cons
<b>Large Group Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More socializing</li> <li>• More activities</li> <li>• More staff to make you feel comfortable</li> <li>• More services</li> <li>• Learn to deal with different personalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drama</li> <li>• No privacy</li> <li>• Fighting (easier to get into one and more around you)</li> <li>• Unclean</li> <li>• Too many girls, causes a range of problems</li> </ul>
<b>Small (6-bed) Group Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less drama because fewer girls</li> <li>• More personal time and attention from staff</li> <li>• Home-like</li> <li>• Quieter and calmer</li> <li>• Can prepare your own meals, watch TV, have your own bed</li> <li>• More personal space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Fewer activities and programming</li> <li>• Drama</li> <li>• Small space</li> </ul>
<b>Foster Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like a real home</li> <li>• More freedom</li> <li>• More family-like</li> <li>• More normalcy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not your real family</li> </ul>

In reference to small group homes, youth most often stated that there is less drama because there are fewer girls. In addition, they are more home-like, there is more attention from staff, and there is more personal space. Conversely, some stated they do not like the staff at small group homes, that they struggled with the small space, and there were fewer activities and opportunities for programming. For foster homes, youth liked that they are more home-like and family-oriented, but they did not like that they were not their own families, which made it hard for them to feel comfortable in a foster home. CSE children and youth also reported feeling out of place since they were not their homes.

When discussing large group homes, some CSE children and youth liked having more girls around to socialize with; some said more people around helped them learn to deal with a variety of personalities. In contrast, however, the most common drawback of a large group home was having more girls there. Many youth reported more drama in these homes because there were more girls, including more fighting, less privacy, and people coming and going a lot. They also reported liking the increased availability of activities as well as more staff members in large group homes. Some indicated that more staff is appealing because there was a greater chance there would be someone they would connect with.



CSE children and youth were then asked about the pros and cons of local, remote, and out-of-state placements (Table 19). There were a lot of commonalities among youth’s responses. Youth reported liking being in local placements because they were near family. Conversely, they also reported it was easier to be absent without leave (AWOL) and easier to get drugs. It is notable that this was the only question in the survey that elicited any response about drugs.

For both remote and out-of-state options, youth had somewhat similar responses. These locations made it harder to AWOL and run away, and they provided new opportunities for activities and people. On the other hand, youth reported that it was hard to be away from family and it was hard for family to visit these locations. For out-of-state locations, youth also reported it was hard to adjust to these placements.

Youth did not discuss traffickers often, but one youth mentioned traffickers in reference to remote placements: that *“it’s still easy for a trafficker to go pick you up.”* For local placements, one youth stated, *“it’s too easy to AWOL and for the trafficker to expect you to return to him.”*

**Table 19. CSE girls’ perspectives on the positives and negatives of placement locations.**

	Pros	Cons
<b>Local</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to AWOL</li> <li>• Easy to get drugs</li> </ul>
<b>Remote</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less likely to AWOL</li> <li>• New people, new environment, new experiences</li> <li>• Better than out-of-state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Away from home</li> <li>• Miss family</li> <li>• Too hard for family to visit</li> </ul>
<b>Out-of-State</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less likely to AWOL</li> <li>• New experiences</li> <li>• Can focus on programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to adjust</li> <li>• Too far from family</li> </ul>

**Preferences on Placement Population.** CSE girls and young women were then asked their opinions on the make-up or population type of youth at placements. Specifically, the survey asked whether they preferred having CSEC-only placements or integrated placement populations. In addition, they were asked what they liked or disliked about the population make-up. The majority of youth did not prefer CSEC-only placements (79%). When youth were asked the pros and cons of a CSEC-only placement, there were mixed responses. Most girls did not list any positive attributes, but those who did most often reported that having people to relate to was helpful.

Girls and young women overwhelmingly reported on the negative attributes of CSEC-only placements. Many youth reported recruitment and being persuaded to AWOL to return to “the life” as problems. For example, one girl reported, *“We will all AWOL together and meet up with each other’s pimps and do bad things together.”* Many girls and young women also stated that they did not want to hear about CSE all the time and that in CSEC-only placements, that is the focus. For example, one youth stated, *“Girls have other needs and focusing only on CSEC won’t help girls enough”* and *“Having to think about it and hear about it all the time”* was a

drawback of CSEC-only placements. Finally, girls also reported concerns over STDs being transmitted in CSEC-only placements.

### Running Among all CSE Girls and Young Women

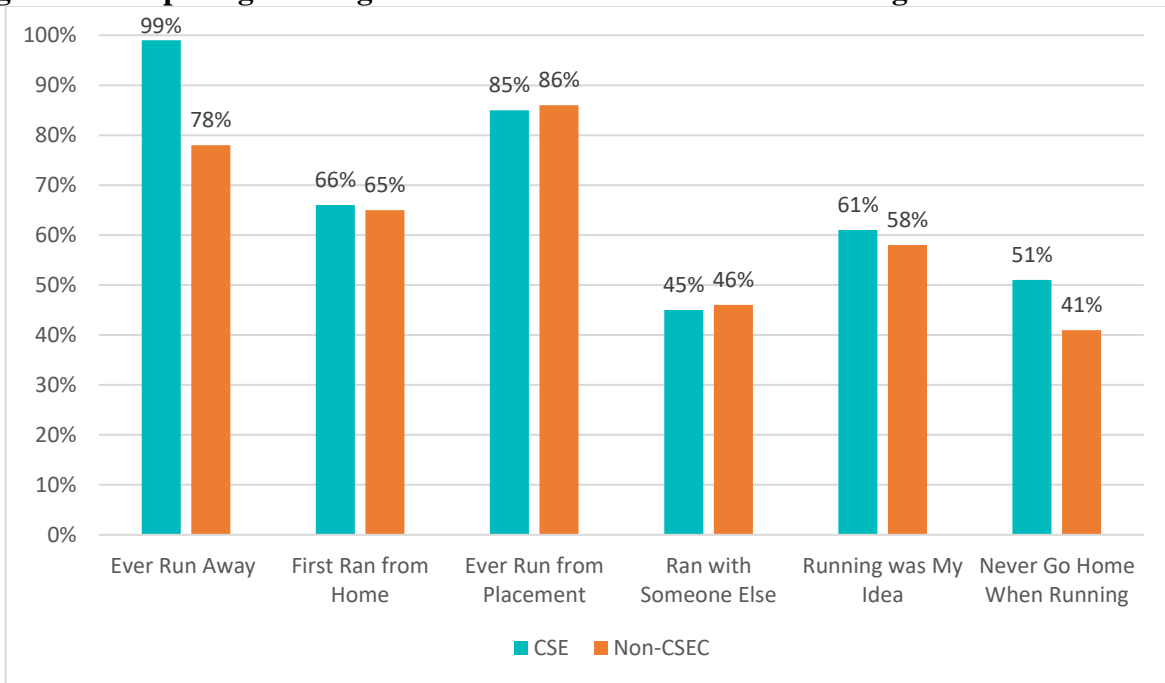
Regarding running away and AWOLs, CSE and non-CSE youth were asked if they had ever run away, how old they were when they first ran, whether they ran from placement or home first, how many times they ran, and details around what they did when they ran.

CSE youth were significantly more likely to have run away at some point ( $X^2 = 13.55, p < .001$ ). Specifically, 99% of CSE youth compared to 78% of non-CSE youth reported having run away at some point. CSE youth also reported running significantly more often than non-CSE youth ( $X^2 = 13.55, p < .001$ ). CSE youth, on average, reported running 2.4 times compared to non-CSE youth who, on average, reported running 1.7 times. There was no significant difference in how old they were when they reported they first ran away (CSEC  $M = 13.6$  years old; non-CSE  $M = 13.4$  years old).

For CSE youth, nearly two-thirds reported that the first place they ran from was home (60%) and 29% first ran from placement (missing data = 11%). However, 85% reported having run from placement at some point. They were equally as likely to run by themselves (44%) or with someone else (45%). If they ran with someone else, the majority of CSE youth reported that running was their idea (61%). When running, 12% reported they always went home, 38% reported they sometimes went home, and 51% reported they never went home when they ran.

Among all youth that reported running, there were no significant differences in running behavior between CSE and non-CSE (Figure 3).

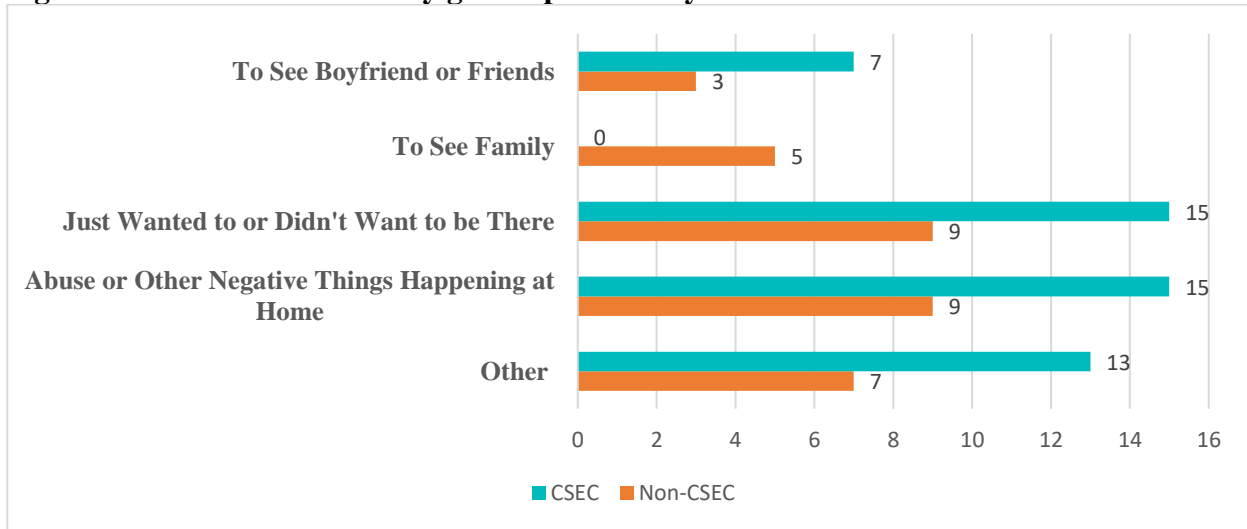
**Figure 3. Comparing running behavior between CSE and non-CSE girls.**



**Note:** Bar chart displays the responses only for those who had reported running away at some point.

When asked why they ran the first time, the youth had a range of responses. The most common responses were because of abuse or another negative thing happening at home, such as arguments with parents, “*family issues,*” “*family problems,*” (n = 24) and because they just wanted to or they did not want to be where they were (n = 24). The breakdown of responses by CSE status is displayed in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Common reasons why girls reported they ran the first time.**

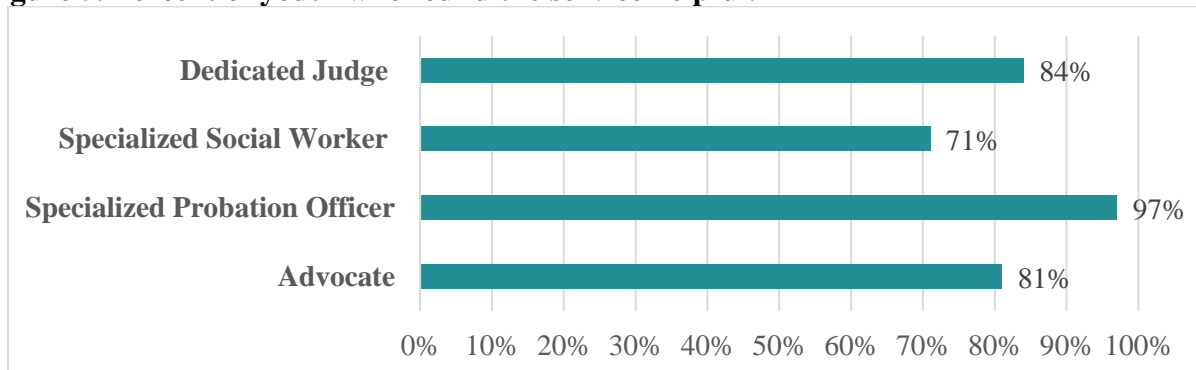


**Note:** Bar chart displays responses only for those who had reporting running away at some point and the numbers represent individuals.

### Perceptions of Services Among CSE Girls and Young Women

CSE girls and young women were asked whether it helped to have a dedicated judge, specialized Social Worker or probation officer, and an advocate (see Chapter 2 for description of these services). Youth overwhelmingly reported that all of these services were helpful (see Figure 5). Youth were then asked why they felt the services were helpful. These responses were thematically coded and are presented below in word clouds, where the more common responses appear larger in the visual, along with example quotes from youth.

**Figure 5. Percent of youth who found the service helpful.**



In response to why a dedicated judge was helpful, of those who responded to the open-ended question (n = 63), most reported it was because the judge understood them or their experience, was helpful to them in some way, or the judge was familiar with their history, case, and/or needs. Two youth said that they did not think the dedicated judge was helpful, and six were not sure or said it did not matter to them. Of those who found it helpful, youth stated: “It helps to have a consistent team that understands what is going on,” “They have an understanding of your history,” and “They seem to help more and pay attention to my needs.”

“  
**It helps to have a consistent team that understands what is going on**  
”



In response to why a specialized DCFS Social Worker was helpful, of those who responded to the open-ended question (n = 21), the majority of them found the specialized Social Worker helpful (n = 17) and four said it did not matter or it was not helpful. For those who found it helpful, it was because the specialized Social Workers were more helpful or understanding. For instance, youth stated: “*yes because we need someone on our case to really help & understand,*” “*yes because they understand us more,*” and “*yes so you won’t have to keep opening up to people.*”

“  
**yes because we need someone on our case to really help & understand**  
”



In response to why a specialized Probation Officer was helpful, all youth who responded to the open-ended question (n = 38) stated that a dedicated or specialized Probation Officer was helpful. Youth emphasized the importance of consistency with their specialized Probation Officers and that they were non-judgmental and trustworthy. For instance:

“

**Because I feel like I can trust the person that has say so over my freedom. That she will look out for my wellbeing**

”

- *“Because I feel like I can trust the person that has say so over my freedom. That she will look out for my wellbeing”*
- *“It’s easier to bond and build trust with them knowing they have your best interest at heart”*
- *“I feel I will always have her [even] if my family gives up on me”*
- *“It’s good to have a PO who knows what you have been through and has watched you grow. It helps to have the same PO: no change and/or transfer”*
- *“They are more helpful than having a regular PO”*
- *“Yes, even though I was not open with [my] PO at first, having the same PO the entire time has given me the chance to develop a relationship of trust.”*



In response to whether a community-based advocate for CSEC was helpful, nearly all youth who responded to the open-ended question (n = 64) stated that a community-based advocate for CSEC was helpful. Three youth stated it was not helpful, though, one of the youth stated it was not helpful at the time because she was not ready to open up. For those who found it helpful, many stated that the advocates were there to advocate or speak up for them, that they understood what the youth have gone through, and that they were always there to talk. For instance:

- *“You can trust that they will fight for you whether it be what you want or need”*
- *“Yes, because there's another voice speaking for you”*
- *“Yes, for emergencies when feeling like AWOLing”*
- *“So I can talk to her about the things that went on in the street that I can't tell my PO or the judge.”*
- *“They are a positive role model and are like a big sister”*
- *“Yes because they understand us more”*

“

**Yes, for emergencies when feeling like AWOLing.**

”



### What is Helpful About Placements

All youth were asked to rank the most important things that help them feel safe and supported in placement based on the following options: staff, location of placement, placement type (e.g., group home, foster, locked, etc.), and services they receive while in placement. There were no significant differences in the way youth ranked these options based on CSE status. As shown in Table 20, CSE youth varied in how they ranked these options. For instance, staff, placement type, and services were nearly equally ranked as the most important. For non-CSE youth, 49% ranked staff as the most important (i.e., top ranked) thing to help them feel safe and supported in placement.

**Table 20. Ranking of most important things to feel safe and supported in placement.**

	1 <sup>st</sup> choice		2 <sup>nd</sup> choice		3 <sup>rd</sup> choice		4 <sup>th</sup> choice	
	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>	<i>CSE</i>	<i>Non-CSE</i>
<b>Staff</b>	31%	49%	33%	12%	28%	22%	8.2%	17%
<b>Location</b>	22%	30%	38%	40%	36%	23%	3%	8%
<b>Placement Type</b>	32%	13%	21%	40%	28%	38%	17%	10%
<b>Services in Placement</b>	30%	28%	22%	19%	28%	31%	18%	19%

**Note:** Percentages are based on the number of youth who responded. However, missing data ranged from 16-31% of total possible respondents (n=73 CSE; n = 48 non-CSE).

**Counseling and CSE Youth.** CSE girls and young women were asked whether they found counseling in placements helpful or unhelpful. A summary of the common responses for CSE youth is listed below in Table 21. CSE youth seemed to find counseling valuable but did not like feeling forced into it or feeling forced to talk when they did not feel ready. In addition, some

CSE youth noted that inconsistency in counseling was unhelpful (because of placement changes or counselor changes). For example:

**Table 21. Helpful and unhelpful things about counseling in placement for CSE girls.**

Helpful Things About Counseling in Placement	Unhelpful Things About Counseling in Placement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family therapy</li> <li>• Someone that listens to you</li> <li>• Good to have someone who doesn't judge you</li> <li>• Learning new coping skills</li> <li>• Being able to talk to someone</li> <li>• Discuss how you are feeling or things that bother you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group counseling</li> <li>• Having to tell my story</li> <li>• Feeling forced to open up when I'm not ready</li> <li>• Feeling like its mandatory</li> <li>• Having to change therapists when the therapist leaves or placement changes</li> <li>• Inconsistent sessions/meetings</li> </ul>

“  
When you change placements you have to start all over with a new therapist.”

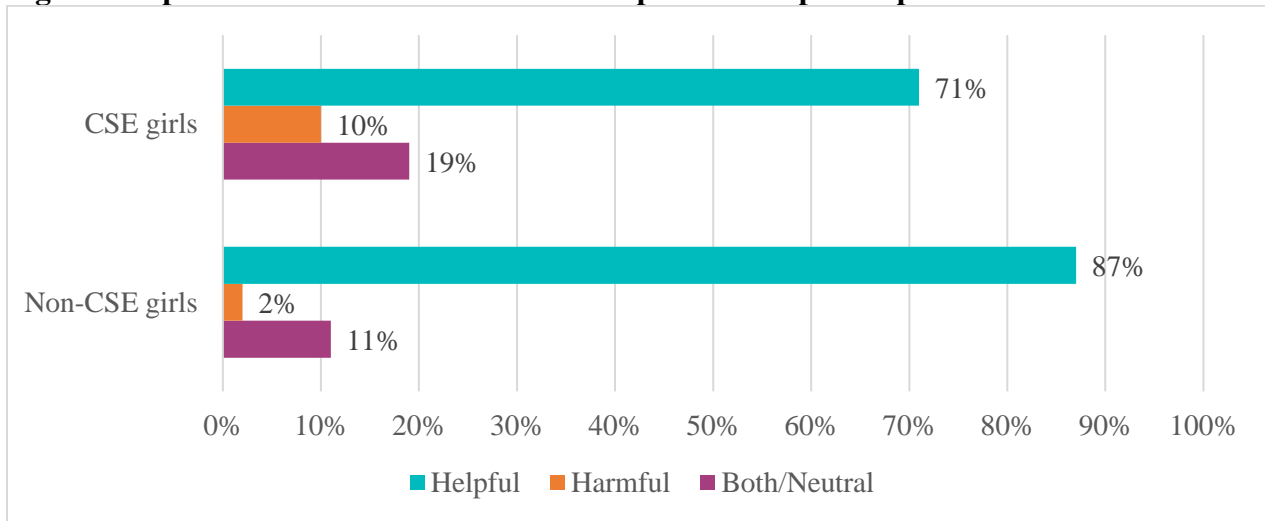
“  
That the therapist leaves and you get a new one. That's happened a lot in placement.”

Some CSE youth reported a preference for one-on-one therapy: *“I feel good with the one-on-one therapy instead of group therapy.”* Others reported liking family therapy: *“It was really helpful. Family therapy gave a comfortable place to talk about difficult topics.”* However, several CSE youth noted that they did not like groups. Reasons included: they were not comfortable, other girls were rude, things said in groups were spread around, other people talked too much, and some girls were not ready to be open in groups.

**Opinions on Cell Phones in Placements Among All Youth.** All youth were asked about whether having a cell phone while in placement would be helpful, harmful, or both/neutral (see Figure 6). There were no significant differences in how youth responded to this question based on CSE status. The most common response among CSE youth was that cell phones were helpful to call family. The other most common response was that cell phones helped them when they were bored or it kept them busy. Some youth, though, stated that phones could lead to a temptation to AWOL.



**Figure 6. Opinions on whether access to a cell phone is helpful in placements.**



### **CSE Girls' and Young Women's Opinions on How to Improve Placements**

CSE youth were asked what type of training they believe group home staff should have to work with CSE youth. The most common response was CSEC training. Youth expressed the desire for staff to understand what they had been through more, and how to not be judgmental. For example, *“Staff need more advice on CSEC issues, sometimes they made me feel bad and ashamed.”* Many youth also reported that staff need training on how to talk to them. For example, *“Good communication skills, understanding and not judgmental.”*

Other responses included training on trauma or mental health and how to recognize the signs of, or how to reduce, AWOL such as, *“Knowing the signs of a person getting ready to AWOL.”* Finally, some youth reported that there is no way that staff could understand what they had been through since they had not been through it themselves. For example, *“No training compares to what we go through or can help work with us if you haven’t went through it.”*

CSE youth were then asked what would make placement better. They recommended better staff, more money, better food, more outings and activities, better and more immediate therapeutic services, more clothes, and more passes. For example, *“Longer home passes, passes to other relatives and more services.”* Another girl recommended, *“Immediate therapeutic services, even the day you get there I need that; more group sessions; longer family passes.”* Other youth discussed the need to have some flexibility for when they are upset, such as being able to go on a walk or listen to music. Some girls described wanting to have access to cell phones. Many girls discussed staff. For example, girls stated they wanted:

- *“Genuine staff”*
- *“People that can be an example”*
- *“Having staff you can talk and confide in”*
- *“More compassionate staff”*
- *“More dedicated and understanding staff”*

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Also, regarding staff, one youth stated that it would be better “if staff were not disrespectful. Once they know you’re in the life they treat you differently. Not all staff, just some.”



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## CHAPTER 5: IN THEIR OWN WORDS: INTERVIEWS AND CASE FILE REVIEWS

The first author interviewed six young women and reviewed their case files in order to capture in-depth perspectives and narrative examples of their trajectories through the system(s), placement experiences, and access to services. In an attempt to capture a range of perspectives, young women who had transitioned out of the system, those still receiving services, and those with experience in both probation and the child welfare systems were recruited.

### Methodology

Probation identified three of the interviewees and the remaining three were identified by DCFS. The court order provided consent for youth who were wards of the court and under 18 to be able to participate in the study. If youth were 18 and their cases were closed, the youth provided consent to participate. Finally, if youth still had an open case and were under the age of 18, assent from their attorney was required before youth assent could be solicited. No youth refused assent or consent, though two youth who were approached and who provided preliminary verbal assent stopped responding to communication from the researcher, and, therefore, an interview was not conducted, and a new subject was identified.

Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the youth. Locations included the youth's home, a public park, a coffee shop, and via Skype. Interviews lasted one hour on average. Youth were offered a \$40 gift card as an incentive and as compensation for their time. Written assent from youth included assent to review their case file. Case files were provided by Probation or DCFS and reviewed in a secure building. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and de-identified. In order to protect youth's identity, names and specific details have been altered.

Interviews and case file reviews are presented below as integrated narratives for each of the six young women. The primary goal of this component of the study was to present the youth's perspective and voice about what they had experienced. Therefore, efforts were made to preserve and highlight that perspective and voice throughout, as distinct from what was included in their case file, which represents the perspective of Probation Officers, Social Workers, law enforcement, teachers, parents and others. However, the authors present these narratives in an integrated form to allow for a clearer chronology, since some events represented in the youth's own telling of her story were not recorded in the case file, and vice versa. It is also useful to view the two components of the narratives in an integrated manner to highlight differences in the way that youth remembered or experienced certain events and how they were perceived by and captured in the case file by system actors or other adults in their lives. In some places, conflicts between the two narratives could not be easily reconciled (for example, ages at the time of certain placements); the authors include both here to allow for a comparison between the youth's perspective and interview responses and what is included in the case file. The portions in turquoise represent either direct quotes from youth or a summary of the youth's retelling of their experiences. The remainder of the text is a summary of the information drawn from the case file review.

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## Results

### *Sasha*

Sasha is a 17-year-old African American girl who was involved in both DCFS and Probation throughout her life. She is currently at an out-of-state placement where she will live until she turns 18.

#### **Early Trauma and System Involvement**

Sasha's interaction with DCFS began when she was three years old. The first referrals were for severe and general neglect and caretaker absence/incapacity. DCFS determined all of the allegations to be unfounded except for caretaker absence. Ultimately the situation stabilized and the case was closed. Around age six, Sasha's school records indicated that she began getting into fights at school. When Sasha was nine years old, there were additional child welfare referrals for general neglect and an at-risk sibling. The DCFS investigation determined that Sasha was not at risk, and that allegations were unfounded or inconclusive. At age 12, a fourth DCFS referral was made for emotional abuse, which DCFS also found to be inconclusive.

That same year, Sasha got into a fight in school, which resulted in an arrest for assault on school grounds and was the impetus for her entry into the juvenile justice system. According to Sasha, the fight started because she was being bullied at school. Shortly after, she began running away from home. Sasha explained that she ran because there was abuse in her household. Her stepfather hit her mother and her mother hit her and her brothers. According to Sasha, her mother was also very paranoid and would not let her and her two brothers out of the house. She felt that her mother was always suspicious of her because she was a girl and she expected her to be "up to no good." When Sasha ran away from home, she would stay at her friend's house. Her mother looked for her, which confused Sasha because she did not feel like she cared about her in the first place.

Four months after her arrest, a fifth DCFS referral was made for physical abuse, an at-risk sibling, general neglect, and emotional abuse. DCFS substantiated the neglect allegation and opened a case. The family engaged in voluntary family maintenance services.

After she missed her initial court date on the school assault charge, a warrant was issued. When Sasha appeared in court, Probation recommended that she be returned home on probation. At that time, there was no known gang involvement or substance use. Sasha's mother reported that Sasha had attempted suicide before, but no mental health evaluation was completed.

Shortly thereafter, Sasha's mother reported to the Probation Officer that Sasha was "out of control," had left the house for six days, and that she did not know where she was. This prompted a return to court, which resulted in a community detention placement (i.e., house arrest) and she was given an ankle monitor.

When Sasha was 13 years old, she was placed on informal probation, at which point the Court discovered there was an open DCFS case for Sasha. Sasha continued to perform poorly in school and was frequently late to school. The Court referred her mother to parenting classes and Sasha to services. Her mother completed the parenting classes, but the record is unclear as to which services Sasha was referred to and whether she engaged in them. Her mother filed a letter with the Court stating that Sasha left the house without permission, smoked marijuana, had a friend she did not approve of, and that she was worried about her safety. The Court requested a

Multi-Systemic Therapy referral, but there is no indication in the case file whether this referral was formally received or if the services were ever offered or utilized.

### First Placement – Large Group Home

That same year, Sasha was sent to her first out-of-home placement in a large group home, which was within LA County but far from her home. According to Sasha, the remote location made it harder for her to run. She stated, *“I just didn’t have the energy to run away.”* Sasha reported that the environment was chaotic because it was large and housed a lot of girls of various ages. She did not get along with many girls and she fought with *“everyone.”* When asked what she fought about, Sasha stated: *“Random, it didn’t even matter, that was the only group home we would go out a lot, but the times we weren’t we would fight because there were so many of us and it was so chaotic, and people would run away, they would cut themselves, they would try to hang themselves. Not a stable environment. It was really stressful.”* Sasha also explained that there was a lot of staff turnover, but that she was able to connect to a few of the staff, primarily the individuals who remained consistent.

**“ ... people would run away, they would cut themselves, they would try to hang themselves. Not a stable environment. It was really stressful. ”**

Sasha explained that she had to switch schools but was still with *“regular people.”* For her, this was a fresh start because she had been bullied in her previous school – the reason for the fight that led to her arrest. Sasha also enjoyed that the placement offered a lot of activities: *“we were normal, we would go to the beaches, we would go out to eat.”*

Sasha reflected on the appropriateness of that first placement for her at that time:

**“ I don’t think I was at that level to be placed there – I wasn’t that high risk yet - but exposing me to all of that stuff just made it worse. ”**

*“I don’t think I was at that level to be placed there – I wasn’t that high risk yet—but exposing me to all of that stuff just made it worse. I wasn’t doing all the stuff that the other girls were doing that were my age, I*

*was just barely, I was scared, I didn’t want to be there, I just wanted to go home, and then you put me in this place with a whole bunch of girls that have all these influences and then I end up running away or like gaining more negative habits.”*

Sasha stated that her PO *“dropped off the face of the earth when I was there– like she was GONE.”* She continued, *“I didn’t have anyone on my caseload. She would see me at the beginning of my stay and towards the middle and the end but there was no progress. I had been in there 6 months and I had never been on a pass and my mom hadn’t come to see me because*

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*she couldn't get a hold of anyone to get that set up. There was nobody handling my case and it was very frustrating, I wasn't making any progress because I didn't have a PO."* Sasha also felt like she did not have a voice with her attorney or in court. She explained: *"I didn't know you could personally speak to the judge yet so it was like this lady speaking for me."*

Sasha found her community-based advocate to be helpful, but only when it was a consistent person, which was not always the case:

*"She [community-based advocate] would see me a lot [at the placement] and that was the motivation for me to continue going because even though I didn't have a PO I had an advocate but then something happened and she disappeared too, and I was like, 'Oh my god,' so I didn't really have anybody so I just like left."*

When Sasha ran from the first placement she was eventually picked up and taken to juvenile hall. Sasha recalled being frustrated and feeling that no one was taking the lead in her case. She thought, *"You guys don't even know who I am, but you are sending me somewhere else."*

When Sasha was re-placed, a 241.1 Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) assessment<sup>47</sup> was ordered along with a specialized advocate and a specialized CSEC Probation Officer was assigned.

### **Small Group Homes—Running Increases and Assessments are Conducted**

Sasha's next placement was a small group home. Mental health records from this placement reported that Sasha had "intense disruptive and behavioral problems" that they were working on. The records also stated that she had previously gotten into a number of fights at school, and had been suspended many times, which put her far behind academically. She also had a chronic suicidal history. Her treatment goal at this placement was getting suicide attempts down from three times per week to once a week. The records indicated that she had trouble with coping skills, and described her as argumentative and aggressive.

This group home was closer to where her family lived. *Sasha ran from this placement as well, returning to her aunt's home nearby. Sasha described how she was on the streets during this period: "I was there and then I left to go back to L.A. to go to stay with one of my friends. By this time I was already very high risk and I was already in the life at this time. So I would just leave and we would just go to like [redacted] and be gone for months at a time."*

Sasha's case file also noted that she was on the streets and was in "the life." According to her file, her Probation Officer was concerned about her mental health, and about unconfirmed reports that Sasha had a child who was living with her aunt. The 241.1 MDT assessment that was ordered and conducted around this time stated that gang activity was indicated since Sasha reported that many of her friends in the gang had been murdered. It also reported that substance

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<sup>47</sup> 241.1 MDT assessments are done for youth who have an open dependency case and are referred to the Probation Department following an arrest or criminal charge. This assessment is dictated by statute (WIC 241.1) that allows counties in California, if they choose, to dually serve youth involved in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The statute allows each jurisdiction to develop a protocol for working with this population. In Los Angeles, that includes the 241.1 MDT assessment which is a comprehensive assessment done by the Department of Mental Health, the Probation Department, the Department of Child and Family Services, and often includes an education liaison and, at times, other stakeholders. This assessment is done in order to identify the service needs of the youth and make recommendations to the court.

abuse with marijuana was indicated, and that she had been diagnosed with Depression Disorder not otherwise specified. The report also indicated concerns about exploitation and possible physical abuse by her brother.

Eventually, Sasha was placed again in another small group home. Sasha reported that the smaller placement was better because there was more one-on-one time with staff. However, she also reported that staff at that placement were “shady”—indicating that they gave tattoos and piercings to the girls, and gave them their phones when they were not allowed to have them. During this time, Sasha changed schools again—to a “regular school”—and lamented that she had changed schools so many times that she “couldn’t even count.”

After running from this placement, too, the court issued a bench warrant. Her case file indicated that she was at high risk of exploitation, and that there were concerns that she was heavily entrenched in gangs. Sasha was missing from placement for approximately three months. When she was found, she ran away again after only two days. Later, when law enforcement picked her up again, she was placed in juvenile hall.

### Last Placement – Large Out-of-State Placement

By this time, Sasha was 14 years old. Sasha reported that when she got to juvenile hall, there was a lot of confusion about who she was, that she was frustrated that no one was taking the lead on her case, and that she felt “lost in the system.”

Also at this time, six additional DCFS referrals were made against Sasha’s mother alleging exploitation, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, at risk sibling, general neglect, and physical abuse. Probation recommended placement at Dorothy Kirby Center (DKC). Sasha agreed, and also was open to camp because she did not want to go home to her mother. She was instead referred to an out-of-state placement. Sasha refused to go and pleaded to go to DKC or camp. She also reported that she actively tried to sabotage the interviews so they would not take her to the placement. She was sent to the out-of-state placement, and remains there as of this writing.

The out-of-state placement is a large facility with multiple placement options, which provides intensive treatment services. Sasha reported that her direct care team is what has kept her stable:

“

**I think that I wouldn’t have made as much progress if I didn’t have my team. My direct team. Everything else I can care less about. My therapist, my case manager, have always stayed the same.**

”

*“I think that I wouldn’t have made as much progress if I didn’t have my team. My direct team. Everything else I can care less about. My therapist, my case manager, have always stayed the same.”* Sasha

described the staff: “I don’t like how...I think that people have different approaches and I personally don’t like it when people yell at me and there is always someone yelling. Staff try to do stuff to escalate people. It’s so all over the place. As far as the staff, we have such a high turnover rate, people never stay here, they always burnout and leave but my team has kept me stable like this and wanting to stay here until I’m 18.”

The case file indicated that through mental health treatment, Sasha has shared her experiences of domestic violence and physical abuse. She has also recognized that her mother is a trigger for her drug use, and she was placed on medication because of her traumatic stress reactions such as problems sleeping and nightmares.

When she was initially placed in the out-of-state placement, the DCFS case plan was reunification with her father, who had recently been released from prison, expressed interest in her life, and began visiting her. According to the case file, he was trying to “make up for lost time.” However, when she was approximately 16 years old, and approaching a discharge date, neither her mother nor father could be found. Eventually, it was discovered that her father had violated his parole and absconded. Although her mother reappeared, the records indicate that she was hostile to Sasha, and accused her of lying about her brother abusing her. Because Sasha had no options to return home to her family, the case plan was changed to planned permanent living arrangement (PPLA), or long-term foster care. Sasha, along with her direct care team, decided it was best for her to stay at the placement because it was stable and safe. Sasha currently plans to stay at the placement until she is 18 years old.

### Sasha’s Reflections

Sasha reflected on her placements, and the benefits and drawbacks of different placement types. She reported preferring placements that are smaller and farther from home, and one-on-one therapy over group work. According to Sasha, where there is a mix of girls of different ages, some girls are ready to handle group therapy and others are not. Sasha also reflected on CSEC-only placements: *“It depends. If you have an all CSEC home you have a higher risk of people leaving but if you have the right people working there and people that can be role models. Because here you have those people who have been in the program longer and can be role models. It just depends, it varies.”*

“

**[My advocate] is like my voice  
when I can’t speak up.**

”

According to Sasha, the most helpful thing for her has been her advocate. She said that everything changed when she got her second specialized advocate who was assigned through STAR Court because she “has her back” and remains in her life to this day. Sasha said, *“She is like my voice when I can’t speak up. She knows how to get my point across without*

*me having to lash out or do anything crazy.”* Sasha reported that her new Probation Officer is also helpful, and that she comes to visit her at the out-of-state placement every month.

Sasha also recommended more oversight over out-of-state placements. She stated:

*“Before sending people out-of-state I would try to research who are the girls because there are a lot of stuff that I do well in this place but there are a lot of messed up things that happen here. Like coming out to investigate when they are not expecting it. Like we have a [redacted] every year and they make it all nice and it’s all pleasant and stuff because they know you are coming but when they least expect it is all the ugly stuff....Because they feel like, not like you guys don’t care about us enough to come out here and investigate, but like you put a lot of trust into*



*the people that are out here so it's like trying to see if this is not just taking people's word for stuff and what's happening."*

### **Sasha's Future Plans**

When Sasha turns 18, she intends to come back to Los Angeles and take advantage of programs and resources that are available to her. Currently, she works part time and is able to participate in sports outside of the facility. These activities keep her busy and give her time outside of placement. She has caught up on her credits for high school and will graduate when she is ready to leave the facility.

When asked where she wants to be in five years Sasha said, *"I want to go to school for psychology, like I hate the system so much so I want to be somebody that has a say in how people handle [sic] so I want to go to school for psychology and see where that takes me."*

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### **Latisha**

Latisha is a 19-year-old African American young woman who spent her life in the system, first in DCFS and then in Probation. Over her 16 years of DCFS involvement, there were 25 child welfare referrals consisting of 50 allegations of abuse and neglect. Her Probation case recently closed and she utilizes extended foster care to access independent living resources and services.

### **Early Trauma and System Involvement**

Latisha was born with drugs in her system and entered foster care the day after she was born. She was taken from her mother at the hospital. At this time, there were already substantiated allegations of emotional abuse and severe physical abuse of her siblings, which led to fractures, bruises and marks on their bodies. *Her father was never a part of her life, as far as she can remember.* According to her case file, Latisha's father had an extensive criminal history including drugs, second degree robbery with a weapon, and several parole violations.

For the next several years, her mother worked to address her substance use issues and get Latisha back. DCFS placed Latisha in three foster homes during her first three years. *Latisha recalls that she and her siblings were in and out of the house because her mother kept "messing up."* She said:

*"[S]o it was like they kept taking us back, putting us back, taking us back, putting us back... We were going back and forth, back and forth. And then um, I was just getting older, you know, I'm sitting here realizing like, you know, what was going on and all of that. And then, my mom, she was still being on drugs but she was also having health problems and having babies at the same time, having my little sister."*

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When Latisha was about four years old, DCFS returned Latisha home after a trial visit and closed her case.

### **Age 13 – Mother Dies and Probation Involvement and Exploitation Begins**

When Latisha was 13 years old, her mother succumbed to her health problems and passed away. Latisha was placed with a relative.

A few months later, Latisha ran away from her relative's home. She was found when she was arrested for "prostitution." The police report indicated that officers saw her and two adults signaling to cars. She told the officers that she had a hotel room to "do what they do." She was referred to a diversion program but did not participate.

Latisha was placed in three group homes through Probation over a short period of time. Latisha remembered that when she was involved in Probation "*I was just putting my hands on people*" and "*I was just angry.*" Latisha explained that she has a bad temper. She also described being frustrated with the placement process because she was rejected from multiple placements. The rejections made her angry, and she did not understand how they could read her case file and make a decision about whether or not to take her in without meeting her. She said, "*I got turned down by a lot of placements and that's why...what makes me become angry because, first off bitch, you ain't met me....You ain't met me. So, don't read what's in this case file and deny me a motherfucking bed.*"

Latisha ran from these placements frequently—she explained that she did not like the placements and did not get along with staff. When describing this time, she referred back to her temper and anger issues, especially in relation to staff. She found it difficult to be around the same people so much, especially when she did not like them. She also described being defensive and this leading to her temper being triggered easily.

At the third group home placement, she got into an altercation with a staff member. According to the case file, the staff member asked her not to close the door to her bedroom while the staff was standing in the doorway. Latisha pushed the staff member with her body and chest out of the way so she could close the door. The staff member was not injured but was adamant about pressing charges and filed a victim impact statement.

In response, Latisha ran from placement and was on the streets for approximately five months, the longest time that she was on her own. A bench warrant was issued for her arrest. Eventually, she was located and detained in juvenile hall.

### **Age 15 – Probation Takes Lead, Specialized Services Begin**

After Latisha was located, Probation took the lead on her case, and she was transferred to STAR Court. She was assigned a specialized Probation Officer, and an advocate.

According to Latisha, having Probation as lead on her case seemed to change things for her. She still ran from placements after that but, in retrospect, she recognized that she was grieving her mother's death at the time. She recalled:

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**... they didn't know I was grieving for my mom. But I didn't understand I was grieving either.**

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*“They [Probation] took the lead second court date because I was fucking around. At the same time I didn't care, but at the same time they didn't know I was grieving for my mom. But I didn't understand I was grieving either.”*

She described the differences between DCFS and Probation placements. She liked DCFS placements *“because you can do whatever you want,”* whereas Probation placements had a lot more rules. On the other hand, she liked Probation placements because she felt the staff was better. She said, *“The staff knew what was up. The staff didn't talk to me like I was some type of child. They knew what was up, they knew I done been through shit, they seen how mature I was, they wasn't stupid.”*

Latisha explained that staff is the main reason that youth stay or leave a placement. Specifically, she said, *“95 percent of the females that don't run away from their placements, it's because of the staff.”* Latisha also believes that having male staff at placements is very important. She believes that girls will stay because they crave the male attention and can't be around all females all the time. She was particularly close to one male staff who, she said, was a reason for her not to run.

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**95 percent of the females that don't run away from their placements, it's because of the staff.**

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A 241.1 MDT assessment was conducted by Probation and DCFS at this time. It noted that Latisha had a history of suicidal ideation. A year earlier, there had been another reported assault on a staff member, during which Latisha ran into traffic to attempt to get hit by a car, reportedly stating that *“since she lost her family she had nothing to live for.”* She was involuntarily hospitalized after this for six days. Latisha was diagnosed with Depression and Mood Disorder and was prescribed numerous psychotropic medications. She also had multiple other contacts with the Department of Mental Health, including three outpatient services and one other hospitalization. In addition, she was referred to drug rehabilitation and the record contains an indication of methamphetamine and MDMA (“molly”) usage, but it is unclear if she ever attended the program.

The report also indicated that she had been sexually exploited for two years, and that her sister was also being exploited. Her Social Worker indicated that she was being exploited and engaging in survival sex. A note from her Probation Officer indicated a history of sexual abuse from her father.

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According to the court report, Latisha had not been attending school for the previous two years, and had a history of school discipline, including two suspensions. Her performance at school was noted to be normal until sixth grade, when her test scores began to drop in all subjects.

Latisha described feeling singled out in school because everyone could tell who the DCFS kids were and who was on probation. She was embarrassed being taken to school by a white woman who was obviously a Social Worker. She said:

*“You gotta be careful where you place us. And I say that because you can’t have –hmm—you can’t have a whole bunch of Black girls from L.A. trying to go to a school...like you know going to school where it’s only two or three black kids because then everybody know that you DCFS, I mean, everybody know you’re on probation, everybody.”*

She also felt singled out by the teachers, principals, and counselors. The teachers would tell her that they would call her case manager when she was acting out, which made her feel targeted. She also believed the teacher was sharing personal information that she should not bring up.

After being assigned to specialized services, she got an education advocate. According to the case file, her education advocate became very involved and eventually got Latisha an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and helped her transfer to a school that reportedly had better services for her. A note in her case file indicated that she still would get frustrated in class and would frequently get up to leave, even when in a special class with only two other students.

Latisha began to stabilize after engaging in individual and group therapy as well as drug treatment. Her case manager at the group home praised her for doing well. According to the case file, Latisha told her case manager *“I am not used to doing this good, not AWOLing is out of character for me.”* Five days later, she ran away from placement and did not come back.

### **Out-of-State Placement**

While she was on the run, a transitional independent living plan and agreement was drafted for Latisha. Shortly after, the judge signed an order for out-of-state placement, stating that the level of care Latisha needed was not available in California. According to the case file, Latisha had a difficult time adjusting to the out-of-state placement, and only minimally participated in her case plan. She attended school and earned some credits, and participated in therapy. By the time she was 17, her case plan became long-term foster care, and transitional/independent living.

### **Return to California with Transitional Services**

When Latisha turned 18 and transitioned to non-minor dependent status, she returned to California and began receiving independent living services for transitional age youth through extended foster care. When Latisha came to independent living about a year ago, it was a hard adjustment for her. She said, *“I wasn’t ready for that independent lifestyle.”* It took her about nine months to find a job and she wished she had more help with that. She felt there was more of a focus on going to school, which she was fine doing, but she really wanted a job.

## Latisha’s Reflections on Specialized Services and Transitional Housing

Latisha described how much she liked her specialized Probation Officer. She felt that her Probation Officer did not judge her and that she was there to listen. She said, *“I still do they events and I still try to like go forward with them because they was really supportive.”*

Latisha also felt supported by STAR Court. She recalled not being sure of the judge at first, but that things changed once she realized she could speak to her. She said:

*“Yeah, because I felt like she wasn’t listening but then I was like can I talk to you? Like, by my second court date I was like, can I talk to you? And the other people was like, she’s cool, like you can talk, like ask to talk.”*

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**Everybody in the courtroom....you feel like a family.**

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She felt everyone was supportive at STAR Court, including her advocate from the Alliance for Children’s Rights, her attorney, the bailiff, and the DA. She said, *“Everybody in the courtroom, they support... you feel like a family.”*

Latisha contrasted her positive experience in STAR Court to her negative experiences in placement. She said, *“I feel like they just need to teach they placements all of that. Because they placements don’t understand, that’s what be fucking us up.”* Latisha felt that if the staff in placements treated the youth the way the people in STAR Court treated her, that youth would run less. She explained that the staff in placements does not have the knowledge and that some of them are just in it for a paycheck. She talked about the need for more training on how to interact with girls like her.

Latisha described being conflicted about Probation’s empowerment events for girls and young women. She described that while the girls were able to share their stories with each other, it was also a way for them to “link” up. She said all they talk about is “ho’ing.” She tried to make the most of it and used what she heard from the other girls’ experiences to figure out ways to avoid what they had gone through.

Latisha also appreciated her community-based advocate. She never wanted her advocate to tell her not to run but appreciated when she told her she was doing well. She explained that for her, being told what to do is unhelpful, and typically motivates her to do the opposite. She wished that people would have told her she was doing well more often. Latisha says, in reference to sexual exploitation:

*“I feel like girls would stop a long time ago if they would’ve stopped telling me to stop. Like, if they would’ve stopped telling us to stop we would’ve stopped a long time ago. Because we would’ve realize like, okay, I’m tired of getting my ass beat...I want a real 9 to 5, I need a W2 coming through that mail.”*

She also described the connection between drugs and exploitation. She explained that her older sister is currently being exploited and is on drugs. Latisha stayed away from drugs because of what her parents went through on drugs and because she was born with drugs in her system.

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She says, *“If I would’ve went to that drug style, I probably would’ve kept doing that [sexual exploitation] so I could support my drug habit.”*

Latisha also talked about feeling out of place in her current living situation because there is not a large Black community there. She said, *“I feel so out of place”* and *“everywhere I go they look at me.”* She explained that she got a job in L.A. so she could feel more comfortable because there are more Black people around. Latisha was stopped by police in her neighborhood one night while walking around with her boyfriend. She said, *“mind you we’re not the only people walking on these streets. But you wanna come pulling us over because I just feel like, personally, it’s because we was Black.”* Even though she struggles with the absence of a Black community in her neighborhood, she likes where she lives because it is quiet and more peaceful than the places she has lived before. She said, *“It’s quiet, I ain’t gotta hear no gun shots, ain’t no fireworks allowed out here.”*

### **Future Plans**

Latisha stays in touch with some of her family. She is particularly close with her younger sister and a cousin. Latisha has a boyfriend. She says he is not from “the life” and he does not know her background. He is supportive and a little older than her. She feels they are getting closer and she will need to tell him her background soon. She believes it’s important to tell him.

She is receiving independent living services, and plans to take advantage of the programs available to her through extended foster care. Her goals are to, *“maintain my placement, go to school, keep doing my job, get these hours, get this money in, and live life.”*

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## **Skylar**

Skylar is a bi-racial (African American and White) 18-year-old young woman who was involved in Probation, and had some DCFS involvement, beginning around age 13 and throughout adolescence. She currently resides with her parents and siblings following her Probation case closing.

### **Initial System Contact**

Skylar’s Probation case opened when she was 13 years old and in middle school. Her parents called the police on her because she was fighting with them, and threw a telephone at her mother. She explained:

*“Pretty much why I went to jail was because me and my mom, we was arguing one day. It was my dad’s birthday, actually. I didn’t go to church with them and they were mad. It was so petty, why I went to jail. They were mad, and to make a long story short, they came back. I was arguing with my mom. She told me do the dishes. I didn’t want to do them. I said something to procrastinate, and to make a long story short, my dad came in. He pushed me. I was like ‘I’m gonna call 911 on you’ or whatever. Then my mom was like ‘I’ll call.’ I think they said, ‘I’ll call*

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*for you.' And I threw the phone. I just threw it. I was trying to break it. Who tell somebody 'I'll call for you?' I was just mad. So, I threw it. My mom said that it hit her. Still, to this day, I don't think it hit her."*

Skylar explained that when the police came to the house, Skylar's parents believed it would not be a big deal, and that the police might take her in, but only for a few days. She said, "Yeah. He [her father] didn't think I was gonna have a tail on me. I have a tail, now, a probation tail, that lingers every time I go back." She said the police seemed to "egg it on" when they got there and encouraged her parents to let them take her. Skylar recalled them saying, "She's not learning. She'll learn after that. She not gonna wanna be with those big girls over there."

Skylar described how she had been labeled "*the problem child.*" Skylar referred to this label as she reflected on her first encounter with law enforcement:

*"When I first went to jail I was 13 or 14. My parents, they used to think I was the worst kid ever. They used to think I was the worst kid. And I swear, we only lived in [redacted]. They thought I was so bad, but I guess they didn't know how bad it can get."*

Around this time, DCFS opened a case on the family. They participated in voluntary family maintenance and her father received counseling through wraparound services. According to the case file, the wraparound provider felt that the children in the home were well cared for.

Skylar's mother reported that Skylar was on informal probation for being "incurable" in school. Skylar was diagnosed with ADHD at age four, and had been prescribed Adderall since then. The case file indicated that she was selling her Adderall. Skylar's mother reported feeling out of options.

This first arrest resulted in community detention (house arrest). Although the record indicated that house arrest was not recommended since the incident occurred at home, Probation released her to her parents.

Skylar continued to have difficulty in school. Because she was now on probation, incidents in school resulting in discipline were also considered probation violations. She received several suspensions from school, and was placed on house arrest multiple times.

She explained:

*"Nothing changed. I was just on house arrest. I was just going to school. Nothing changed. What was that supposed to do? I didn't do nothing. I just had a ankle monitor. What was that? It didn't change nothing, really. I just kept doing. I was in middle school at the time. I was 13, 14. I was in seventh or eighth grade. I was still getting suspended....They told me that if I got suspended for anything I would get—I can get violated for that....They used to suspend me for everything at that school, at that middle school....They was trying to really get me out that school. They didn't even want me there. You know? They used to get me for everything. Even chewing gum. I used to get suspensions and stuff. But I used to do it—they would tell me to take it out and then I'll walk away and then I'll put one [piece of gum] back in. But it was minor stuff I was getting suspended and violated for."*

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After a few months, Skylar was expelled from school, which also resulted in a probation violation. In response to her expulsion, she received wraparound services, which the case file indicated led to improvements in her behavior and ultimately her grades once she was enrolled in another school; she was also urine tested regularly. Around this time, Skylar’s parents reported conflict at home and asked for her to be detained. Skylar ran away from home. Her mother reported that she was using drugs and alcohol.

According to the case file, the Court ordered that Skylar be sent to a Level 14 suitable placement—the highest level placement for youth with severe emotional and psychiatric needs—but an assessment found that a Level 12 placement was more suitable.

### **First Placement – Large Group Home**

Skylar’s first out-of-home placement was a large group home. The placement was far from her home and she had to transfer schools. She explained that it was a “*whole different community, a whole different city.*” Because it was so far from home, she could not run away. Skylar stated: “*The only reason I stayed is because I didn’t have nowhere to—I couldn’t run. I didn’t have nowhere to go.*”

“**The only reason I stayed is because I didn’t have nowhere to – I couldn’t run. I didn’t have nowhere to go.**”

Skylar stayed at this placement for seven months and completed her program.

The case file indicated that while at this placement, she participated in individual, group, and family therapy, as well as life skills classes. The record notes that she had no indication of gang involvement or trauma history. A mental health exam indicated sadness and prior reports of a Dysthymia diagnosis. It was recommended that she attend an alternative school with smaller classes, but the case file is not clear about whether she was transferred to such a school. During this time, Skylar received mostly Ds and Fs; the case file indicated that she was not interested in school. Skylar reported using marijuana to help with her ADHD. A progress report from this period indicated that Skylar received five probation violations for drugs, refusing drug tests, and fights with other girls. Although it was supposed to be a six-month program, because Skylar smoked and failed drug tests, she remained at the placement for an additional month.

### **Second Placement – Large Group Home**

After spending seven months at the first placement, her Probation Officer filed a probation violation for failed drug tests, and she was detained in juvenile hall. The court placed her at another large group home placement. This placement was also far from her home. According to Skylar, it housed three different populations in separate cottages: pregnant or parenting girls, CSEC girls, and “*regular minors.*” Skylar felt that having mixed populations at placement was harmful for her. She stated:



*“I don't know. I just be like, to have so many hos in one setting. I mean, of course they're gonna start talking about what they used to do. Like, come on now. Of course. Why wouldn't they? Like, you know? That's what it is. Everybody talks about what they used to do on the streets. You can't stop somebody from doing that but you can prevent how many or who you have in the same setting. You can prevent that. I didn't have no say so of what placement I went to. They put me in a placement with mothers and prostitutes.”*

Skylar explained how the placement negatively impacted her:

*“Yeah, it did. I got—I felt like, damn, like—like I said, I didn't have nowhere to go at the first placement. Second placement, these hos is like – you know, they – you know, real talk, they're glamorizing it. They're glamorizing all the ho talk. They ho talking over there, like, yeah, woop de woop. This, this, and that....I remember they used to—they were talking about how they—they done did this and that. They done did this without having sex with a trick and they done made this much. And I'm like, 'Yeah?' I'm like, 'Never. Like, you're lying.' Like, you know, he suckled your toes. He gave you money. Like, I never knew shit was happening like that. But, I guess—I don't know—I just got exposed to some shit I didn't know about.”*

### **Running Away – Exploitation Begins**

After learning about sexual exploitation from the other girls at her second placement, Skylar ran away. She was on her own. She explained: *“Yeah, I AWOLed and that's when I got in—I'm like, 'I need some money.’”* Skylar made clear that the money attracted her, but stated, *“not all money is good money.”*

Over the next few months, Skylar ran away from multiple placements. She explained that when she ran she did not go home because she believed her parents would call the police on her. Each time she ran, she was gone for weeks, and sometimes months, at a time. She was picked up by police numerous times throughout this period, and recalls being brought to juvenile hall 15 times.

**“  
Yeah, I AWOLed and that's when I  
got in – I'm like, I need some  
money.  
”**

Eventually, the court issued a 72-hour hold and she was hospitalized. According to the case file, Skylar jumped out of a moving vehicle, saying that she did not want to live. She told hospital staff that she did not want to go home, and would hurt herself if she were sent home.

By this time, Skylar was 15 years old. Her case was transferred to STAR Court. Skylar recalled having a lenient judge in delinquency court. She explained that *“when I got moved to STAR Court, of course, that's even more leeway because they look at you like you're a victim.”* Upon reflection about whether that was positive or negative, Skylar stated:

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*“Either way. I mean, either way it could be like that it's a good or a bad thing. I mean, because half the time these girls is not victims. I mean, they're victims because they are minors. I mean, obviously you're not in the right—you're not all the way—you don't have your whole mind. Like...I don't know what I know now what I knew then. And I wish I would've knew then because I was so gullible. I was very gullible. I was super gullible. Like, you know? You know when you look back at things, you're like, why'd I do that? You know, like, real gullible things....Yeah, it just comes with age, I guess. But, yeah, I guess you can call them victims but at the same time, half these girls they want—they're running to these pimps because they think these pimps love them. Whatever....I mean, I done came across a lot of females that just pay pimps just to pay a pimp. Like, why do you do it? Like, what are you getting out of the—he's mean to you. Like, what are you getting out of this situation? Like, you're not getting anything but hurt. But after, you go give him however much money he take you to McDonald's. Like, how does that even—like, how is that even correct in your brain? Like, that doesn't make sense.”*

The STAR Court judge sent her home on house arrest. She did not stay at home for long. According to the case file, she was seen leaving school and getting into a grey car. Her parents believed this person to be her trafficker and were worried that she was being held against her will. Her Probation Officer went to the location where they believed her trafficker was and detained that person. Probation also identified another girl there who they believed recruited Skylar while at placement. However, Skylar was still missing; her parents frantically tried to find her through social media and also hired a private investigator. At the same time, Skylar's Probation Officer, who had arrested her suspected trafficker, said that they had been too late and that she was already gone. They believed she had been trafficked to Las Vegas. The Probation Officer coordinated a search for a missing person with the Vice Unit at the Las Vegas Police Department.

Approximately two months later, Skylar came home. The case file stated that her parents reported being “exasperated.” They took her to juvenile hall. She was sent to two more placements, and ran away from both of them. She was then released back to the care of her mother.

### **Arrest and Placement at Dorothy Kirby Center**

At age 16, Skylar was arrested for robbery in the second degree. According to the case record, Skylar and two friends attempted to rob a convenience store and assaulted a store employee. Skylar was sent to the Dorothy Kirby Center.

According to Skylar, the judge sent her there because it was a secure placement and she was a flight risk. They considered sending her to out-of-state but she was very adamant about not going out-of-state. She explained that one of the reasons she did not want to go out-of-state was to stay close to her family, especially one of her brothers. She said:

*“I felt like they [her family members] couldn't visit me [out-of-state] and they were telling me all the—when they were telling me how many times they could visit, I'm like, no, hell no. Like, they—if they can't come every other week, that's out. Which they didn't*

*even come every other week when I was in Kirby but you know, I got to see him [her brother] a little bit more than I probably would have.”*

Skylar reported hating being at the Dorothy Kirby Center. She explained that she did not like her DKC Probation Officer, who was on site. Unlike her DKC Probation Officer, Skylar got along well with her field Probation Officer from the Probation CTU. She discusses her CTU Probation Officer below:

*“Yeah. I love [redacted]. Because she like—she more than a PO. She’s like—she—you could talk to her. She could like, I don’t know. How do I say? Like, she’s understanding. Very understanding. She understands realistically like, what a regular PO probably would not understand....Like, I think that her job isn’t just a job. No, she actually cares about her job. Like, she cares about her client. Like, her kids. She cares about that. She cares about them. So, it’s like, it’s not just a—we’re not just her job to her. Like, where she just sends us left and right. Of course, she’s gonna send us if we need to be sent. But, it was like, you know—she—I don’t know. Like, you could talk to her.”*

While at the Dorothy Kirby Center, Skylar was involved in family counseling, Seeking Safety, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, individual and group therapy, substance abuse counseling, anger management, and life skills classes. Skylar recalled feeling conflicted about the group therapy because of the mixed populations, and because she felt judged at times by the other girls, including others who had been exploited. She said:

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**She understands realistically like, what a regular PO probably would not understand.**

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*“I mean, as far as—okay, Kirby. I feel like Kirby was cool. I just felt like at the same time, you should not mix mentally unstable kids with CSEC minors. Like, how does that even go together? Like, I don’t understand. Maybe because they do feel like we need more therapy or more talking. But, I mean, I feel like—how does that mix? Like...this is where you’re sending us but then we got other kids judging you because of what you got going—they know why you’re in here. You go to court on Tuesday. It’s like, come on, you leaving, going to court on Tuesday—like, they know what is going on. And then they wanna judge you off of what you had going on or you don’t feel like you can—you don’t feel like you could speak—like, you know? I don’t know. It’s just all so—I felt like that wasn’t right.”*

Individual therapy was more problematic for her. She explained that her Probation Officer was also her therapist, which she felt was a conflict of interest since the person who would write her up when she was behaving poorly was also the person she was supposed to open up to. Skylar reflected on this Probation Officer/therapist:

*“It was the person that I couldn't open up to. The person didn't care. Like, she was my PO but it's like, she was my therapist too, but it's like, she didn't care about my—how do I say? It's like I was talking to somebody but I was talking to somebody that didn't care. So, it's like, why do I want to talk to you? It's like, why do I even feel like I can open up to you? Isn't that the whole reason why I'm coming to her for a whole year?”*

*Because I actually did want to better myself and actually did want to figure out why I'm going—why I feel a certain way and why—what is the root of certain problems there? You know? What is—you know, I had a whole year to just sit. So, it's like, I had nothing else to do. I wanted to figure out some things and actually did want to get some things off my chest because I did find out that my past hurt me a lot. I would talk about it and I can't even talk about it. And I never knew that because I'd never talked about it but I would start to and then I couldn't. Like, you know?”*

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**I wanted to figure out some things and actually did want to get some things off my chest because I did find out that my past hurt me a lot.**

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Although Skylar was never able to find a good match with a therapist, even after requesting a switch, she appreciated that she was able to catch up on her credits in school while she was at Dorothy Kirby. Skylar had been behind in school credits and earned many of them back while she was there.

Skylar also received several special incident reports while at the placement. These were for getting into fights and failing to follow directions.

### **Last Placement—Small Group Home**

By this time, Skylar was 17 years old. When it came time for her release after about a year at the Dorothy Kirby Center, her Probation Officer recommended a camp program because of her several special incident reports. Skylar described her frustration about this recommendation:

*“It was so much going on in my head. I was going through a lot. I'm like, ‘I haven't even seen my brothers.’ I'm like, that's all I really wanted to see. I'm like, the lady [her Probation Officer], what's her name, not even helping me to—as far—to like, to even go through that route to even try to have them [her family] come. And I was just acting out. But, I can't blame her for everything, for real, because I did have my own actions but I was just frustrated a lot in Kirby. I was*

*very frustrated.”*

The judge went against the Probation Officer’s recommendation, and instead placed Skylar at a small group home in the community, rather than another secure facility. Skylar recalled feeling like this was a test to see if she would stay in placement without running before they sent her home.

This was Skylar’s favorite placement. Skylar explained that she really liked the staff there and connected with one person in particular, the director of the program. She said: “*You could talk to her about anything. She’ll let you know how she feels, too. And she’ll let you know where you wrong.*” She reflected on the smaller placement type:

*“I guess I always told them that I always did want to go to a smaller placement because I mean, why wouldn't you? Like, you want a big ass—you want a big placement full of multiple personalities. Of course, it's gonna be more drama. Of course. All these girls just got out of jail or out of their own situation at home. Like, of course. Or their baby—they got babies or they this or they that. I mean, come on, Christ. That's why I don't like big facilities. But, then those six beds are for sure like—that six bed, I liked that one. I completed that. I didn't leave. And it's crazy. I'm surprised I didn't leave....Everybody thought I was gonna leave because it was so close [to her home], [redacted] that's around the way. I knew where I was at....But, I stayed because it was cool.”*

After three months at the group home, Skylar returned home to her parents. She reported that it was different coming home this time. She said, “*I’m grown now*” and “*I’ve obviously matured.*” She explained that she felt she had more respect and things were not as volatile.

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**That’s why I don’t like big facilities. But, then those six beds are for sure like – that six bed, I liked that one. I completed that. I didn't leave.**

”

### **Skylar’s Reflections on Specialized Services**

Skylar received specialized services, including transfer to the STAR Court, a community-based advocate, and a specialized Probation Officer. Skylar stressed the importance of connecting to someone whom she felt she could talk to. She was assigned an advocate from Saving Innocence who she liked, but never felt she really connected in the way she did with the staff member at the small group home. Skylar also developed a relationship with a survivor through Saving Innocence, whom she felt was easy to talk to and she connected with.

Skylar reflected on her Probation Officer and the team that supported her:

*I’ve had everybody on my team for years, like [redacted] it’s not like she’s [her Probation Officer] going to take me back to jail for something I’ve done—like I’ve just done a whole year in jail [Dorothy Kirby] —you know? Like I can talk*

*to people before they try to send me off to jail. I could talk more I guess now....Now I'm off Probation, but before I was able to voice my opinions and how I felt more without getting into trouble or getting violated or stuff like that."*

## **Future Plans**

After returning home, Skylar moved in with her boyfriend. She has since moved back home and is living with her mother. Her goal is to get a stable job. She hopes to find a job in a medical office. Ultimately, Skylar would like to go to school to become a nurse.

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## **Jasmine**

Jasmine is a 17-year-old African American girl. Her DCFS involvement began at birth, and she has no Probation history. She is currently living with her maternal aunt.

### **Early Trauma and System Involvement**

Jasmine's system involvement began at birth, when a DCFS referral was made because she was born with drugs in her system. DCFS provided family maintenance services to her family. During her early childhood, there were nine DCFS referrals for her family, including three that were sustained. There was also a history of domestic violence in her home. At age five, Jasmine and her siblings witnessed her father pointing a gun at their mother's face. Her father had an extensive criminal record, including for gun possession and cocaine sale and purchase.

When Jasmine was approximately 12 years old, her younger brother was born with drug exposure at which point DCFS removed Jasmine from her home for the first time. Jasmine recalled this experience:

*"[T] the lady came to the house, and my mom was at the hospital. And I remember her telling me, 'Just stay at the house. Someone's gonna come and talk to you,' or whatever. And that night, the lady came, she explained to me what was going on, she told me she was gonna take me and my siblings, but my mom and them had already hid my siblings, so they just took me.*

### **First Two Placements—Foster Home and Kinship Care**

After being removed from her home, DCFS placed Jasmine in a family foster home, where she remained for approximately 1-2 years. Jasmine got along well with the foster family, and recalled feeling lucky to be placed with a good foster family. She recounted that her siblings were not as lucky: *"One of the foster parents made my brother eat off the floor."* Jasmine liked her foster family and still keeps in touch with them. She described feeling included in their family:

*"I actually felt more at home than I did with my family. I don't know. They took me in, and it was just like I was a part of them, like they called me their daughter,*

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*and it wasn't like, 'Oh, she's just a girl who's here for now,' or like being at a placement. This is just the kid we have, one of the girls here. And then for the most part, I was the only child, so it was great. And then I got an annoying little sister. But it was fun for the most part. Their family welcomed me with open arms. I was like a cousin. It's just a great opportunity. I still keep in contact with them from time to time."*

After Jasmine was in the foster home for 1-2 years, Jasmine's paternal aunt gained legal guardianship of her and her siblings. Jasmine liked living with her paternal aunt at first even though she was strict. In retrospect Jasmine reflected, "*My auntie can be a little harsh, but now I feel like she was coming from a good place.*" Jasmine said that side of her family did not like her mother, which is likely why her paternal aunt was harsh on her. This placement was relatively stable, and Jasmine stayed with her aunt for a number of years.

### **Mother and Father Pass Away – Exploitation Begins**

When Jasmine was 16 years old, things changed, however, when both of her parents died within several months of each other. According to Jasmine, her paternal aunt seemed overwhelmed. With both her parents passing, Jasmine felt responsible for her siblings and pressure to be a role model. She said, "*Because now my siblings is really looking at me.*"

On top of the changing responsibilities at home, Jasmine was grieving the loss of her mother, whom she was close to. She said:

*"But for the most part, me and my mom, we had a great relationship. I was a mommy's girl, so I had to always talk to her about everything. She helped me cope with all of the stuff I was going through, like just dealing with my auntie and my dad's side of the family and their crazy ways. And then when she passed, it was just like—'Who am I gonna talk to?'"*

According to her case file, Jasmine reported that she was not happy at home, and that her aunt was emotionally abusive and would tell her "she wasn't worth shit." This led to Jasmine having suicidal and self-harming thoughts. It is not clear from the case file whether Jasmine was receiving any services at this time.

Three months after Jasmine's mother passed, she ran away. Shortly thereafter, she was found soliciting sex from a Vice Officer at a motel as part of a sting operation. Jasmine described how she ended up in that situation:

*"When I was 16-and-a-half-ish, I had run away, and I had met this guy previously that I was talking to, and I don't know, I was just dumb and looking for love. And I mean, in the beginning, I felt it with him. I felt that he really loved me, and I thought he really cared about me, so when he was asking me to do certain things, it was just like....You know, this is what he wants me to do. He loves me. And if I love him, I'll do it for him because this is what he expects of me. So, I did that for a while."*

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According to the case file, Jasmine reported that she had been staying at the motel, that the incident with the Vice Officer was the first time that she had solicited someone for sex, and that a friend had encouraged her to do it.

The Vice Officer did not arrest Jasmine. Instead, she was connected to an advocate from Saving Innocence and a Social Worker that same night. According to Jasmine, when they called her aunt that she was staying with, she would not come pick her up from the police station.

The case file indicated that the Social Worker spoke to Jasmine's paternal aunt, who stated that Jasmine had potential and had been on the honor roll, but that she had also become "secretive." The file stated that her aunt did not want her in the house anymore because she was worried about her negative influence on her younger siblings in the home.

Jasmine recalled:

*"...He [the Vice Officer] told me what was going on, and then when we pulled into the hotel parking lot, the police was behind us, we got out of the car, they asked me my name and all of that, and then they took me down to the station, and they asked me to call my auntie. And my auntie was so mad at me or whatever, she told them to keep me. So, it was just like, Where am I supposed to go? What am I supposed to do at this point?"*

Jasmine's advocate was there for her that night and has stayed connected with her ever since. Jasmine described their relationship: "*I love her to death*" and explained how her advocate supported her that night:

*"They sent me to [placement]. Well, first we went to the clinic, which is a routine thing to get checked out or whatever. Then we went to [placement], and I was just basically there. But the thing is, I felt like how me and my advocate really bonded is even though my family wasn't there to see me, she was.*

*She was there that night with me through the whole process, and then she even came the next morning and talked with me, so it was just having someone there because the first couple of nights, [at placement] I'm just like, 'You know what? Forget it. I'm leaving.' But just having her there and just being able to talk to someone helped. I'm just like.... You know, at least someone's expecting me to do better, knowing I can do better. So, it's like, why not stay for her?"*

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**But just having [my advocate] there and just being able to talk to someone helped. I'm just like.... You know, at least someone's expecting me to do better, knowing I can do better. So, it's like, why not stay for her?**

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## Episodes of Placement Instability

After being identified by Vice, Jasmine went to a large group home. She was only there for a few nights.

Several days later, Jasmine was placed with a different aunt from her mother's side of the family. A permanency plan adoption assessment in the case file indicated that both Jasmine and her maternal aunt preferred legal guardianship over adoption.

According to Jasmine, things seemed to go well there at first, but it did not last. Jasmine said:

*"I don't know. At first, I mean, I thought everything was cool, and I don't know, out of nowhere, she just got upset with me. The day before that, I left with my big brother to go and see my siblings, and I told my cousin—because my auntie wasn't there, I didn't have no phone—so I told my cousin that I was gonna be with my siblings or whatever. My cousin's like, 'That's fine,' or whatever. But the next day while I was at school, my Social Worker texted me, and she was just like, 'Your auntie basically gave me a seven-day notice to place you,' and so, I'm just like, 'Well, I guess I'll just leave then. I'm not about to just wait for y'all to come and get me,' so I left. And then I went back to him. I soon regretted it."*

Jasmine left her aunt's home for about a week with her trafficker. She described this experience:

*"Yeah. And me and him wasn't seeing eye to eye. He hit me, like bad. And I was able to run away, and I got to someone, got to a phone, and I was able to call my other auntie, and she came and got me that night."*

After her aunt got her that night, Jasmine was able to stay with her for a few days until she called Jasmine's Social Worker to come get her. According to the Social Worker's records, Jasmine had been in an altercation with her "boyfriend" and law enforcement had been involved. Jasmine had bruises and cuts on her body. The records indicate that her aunt said that she was no longer willing or able to take care of Jasmine and asked that she be re-placed. The Social Worker indicated that they had seen Jasmine on the street corner and brought her inside to discuss her living situation, but her aunt insisted that Jasmine leave. According to the Social Worker, Jasmine was crying and upset as she collected her things, and left with the Social Worker. She was placed in short-term shelter care until her Social Worker was able to find a longer term placement for her.

## Next Placements – Running Increases

Jasmine's next placement was a small group home, with multiple cottages. Jasmine compared this placement to the previous large group home placement. At both, the staff was what she remembered the most. Jasmine said:

*"[The large placement] is just very rowdy. There's just a lot going on there. The staff cannot control them kids. The kids just feel like they can do whatever they*

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*want. So, I feel like at [the smaller placement], it was somewhat better because it's more of an actual home setting per se, and I did bond with a few of the staff, like I do keep in contact with a few of the staff. But some of the staff, it's just a pain in the ass—excuse my language—and they're not the easiest to deal with.”*

Jasmine often felt judged by people, including her paternal aunt and staff at the group homes. She described feeling frustrated when people expected her to do something wrong, and it seemed to make her want to do it even more. She said:

*“And the rest of the people, they judge you based off things they see in your report. In the beginning, I used to AWOL a lot because I don't even know. I just used to leave because I wanted to. And I mean, even off of that, the staff used to judge me, ‘Oh, she's wearing this,’ or ‘She was doing this, and this, and that.’ And I'm like...I ain't even doing that yet. I'm just chilling right now, but I mean ...since you're saying that, it's nothing for me to do it. So, you saying it, and me not doing it is two different things.”*

Jasmine ran away from this placement frequently, but they took her back. Jasmine reported, and the case file noted, that she frequently ran because the group home did not give her home passes. She explained:

*“I would just go with family. But they didn't know. At first, they didn't know that I was AWOLing to see them. I was just going because they weren't giving me no passes, so I'm just like, hey, why not go and hang out with my family even though they don't come and see me? Don't know where my mindset was. But it was still cool getting to see them even though they didn't call or anything. But after a while, it was just like, okay, let me stop doing this because I'm not getting nowhere doing this. And if I just stay in the house, I can get my passes, and then I'll be able to go out and be able to spend the whole day with them and do it the right way.”*

The case file also indicated that DCFS was working to get visits with Jasmine's paternal aunt so that Jasmine could see her siblings, per a court order. However, the file stated that her aunt was resistant, and did not want much to do with Jasmine or the system.

According to incident reports in her case file, around this time, Jasmine left placement with another girl, and got into a car down the street. The file indicated that she AWOLed because she wanted to break up with her boyfriend. A few days later, she was taken to the hospital for chest pain. Once there, she disclosed that she had been physically assaulted by three men.

Jasmine spoke about her struggle to stop running and the influence of staff on her thinking and behavior. She said:

*“So, after a long talking to with one of the staff, she was just telling me, ‘I don't feel like you're safe.’ One of the times I was kinda targeted by someone I shouldn't have met, so she was just like, ‘I just need you to stay in the house.’ She*

*really talked to me and seeing her cry, I'm just like, what am I doing? This isn't the best for you. You can do better, and this is not what people expect you to be doing, so it's like what are you doing it for? What's your reasoning? And you know there's nothing good coming out of it. The guy obviously doesn't care for you, so it's just like snap out of it.*

*Had to keep telling myself this to get it together because it's just like why are you chase after someone who obviously doesn't care for you? But it's just like I have abandonment issues with my family in general, so it was just him telling me he loved me was just a big thing, so every time I talked to him, 'Oh, I love you. Just come back please. I'll never do this again,' this, and this, and that. So, it was just like....he does care about me. At least he's calling me. My family's not. He is. He's trying. So, that was the thing.*

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**But it's just like I have abandonment issues with my family in general, so it was just him telling me he loved me was just a big thing...**

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*But I was trying so hard to stay away because I know if I go back to him, it's gonna be nothing but the same. I'm gonna be in the same situation, we're gonna go through the same everything, nothing's gonna change. So, it's just like why be with it? And like I said, seeing my staff cry, it was just—I don't know. It hurt my feelings because me not having a mom, and her being there was a big part. She was like a mom figure to me. She was there for me every day, and it was just like, that's my mom. So, it's like my mom's hurting. I'm hurting her because I'm not doing the things I'm supposed to be doing, and the things she know I can do.”*

## **Stabilization in School and Placement**

Jasmine's case file indicated that Jasmine had done well in school, always receiving As and Bs. However, several incident reports from the placement document that Jasmine was refusing to go to school and being written up for truancy. A school report stated that she was refusing to go to school because she felt unsafe getting to school and at school. Specifically, the report noted that her exploiter had come to her school. Eventually, Jasmine was transferred to another school, but still refused to attend.

Her reluctance to go to school eventually shifted, though it is not clear from her case file whether it was because she felt safe at a new school or something else happened. **In her own words**, she described how school became an anchor for her. She explained that even when she ran away and came back to the placement in the middle of the night, she still got up to go to school the next day. She reported that she was praised for this by the staff at placement (though

the case file does not reflect this). For her, going to school helped her take her mind off things because it got her out of the placement, she learned new things, and was able to talk to the teachers. Jasmine stated, *“It was like a big part of my life. If I wasn’t able to go to school, I don’t know what I would do. Probably still be doing the dumb things I was doing.”* She continued:

*“Like, I can go to school. That’s nothing. I like school, so me not going to school is just weird. Education has always been my thing, like I need to get my education. I know I need to go to school. I need to better myself, and I need to be a good role model for my siblings is a big thing. So, me doing all of these things, what am I showing them? Me running away, I’m not showing them the things I should be. I’m showing them this is okay because I’m doing it, y’all should do it, and it’s like that’s not okay. And I feel bad because now, I think my sisters ran away a couple of times. I’m just like, ‘Please stay. It’s not worth it. You don’t understand the things that go on. It’s not worth it. Just be still. Just tough it out.’”*

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**It was like a big part of my life. If I wasn’t able to go to school, I don’t know what I would do. Probably still be doing the dumb things I was doing.**

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### **Jasmine’s Reflections**

Upon reflecting on her placements, Jasmine described the small group home as her favorite. She explained that even though she liked her foster parents, she felt the experience and the schedule at the placement was what she needed. She said:

*“And it was just an experience. I feel like even though being there, in the beginning, it’s like, ‘Ugh, I’m in a placement with all these weird people and all these girls.’ A lot of them clashed because of their personalities and all of that. I’m just like, ‘Ugh, this is a lot going on.’ But I don’t know, just having that life, because we’re on a schedule, and it’s going to sleep at this time, waking up at this time, phones off at this time, it was kind of like a wake-up call, like this is something you need in your life. You need a strict schedule, or you’re not gonna be able to get things done. So, it was kinda helpful.”*

Jasmine also reflected on her placement in a cottage that had a mixed population, rather than a CSEC-only cottage. She felt this was helpful for her and that it was not good to have CSEC-only placements. Jasmine said:

*“No, because I feel like the girls at the CSEC house, they was more getting talked into going back into the life, so maybe it’s best that I’m not there because I notice a lot of them end up going back, and it’s just like. ‘Why? Y’all don’t have to do this. This is by choice now.’ I mean, I could understand in the beginning, like you was going through things, but you have somewhere to stay now. Why are you letting these girls talk you into running away and doing X, Y, Z?”*

In reflecting on all of the services she received and everything she has gone through, Jasmine said the most helpful thing for her was her family relationships:

*“Getting my relationship back with the auntie that I’m staying with because when my mom had passed, it was at the house, and my mom was on the hospice, and it was me, and my auntie, and the lady who was coming to clean my mom there when my mom passed. So, me and her having a relationship was a big thing to me. That’s my main thing. So, just being able to get that relationship back with her is a big thing. And her being proud of me is what makes it all worth it.*

*Besides my siblings seeing me, and them being at my [high school] graduation, it was just like, ‘I can do this.’ They’re seeing their big sister is gonna be somebody in life besides what certain people be telling them, like, ‘Oh, she did this, and this, and that.’ I did this stuff, and I was able to push forward and still be a better person because of it. I’m able to do better things, and I’m able to go back in the right path even though I was detouring a little bit. But everyone has bumps in the roads, and just being able to keep going forward is my main thing.”*

Jasmine had many Social Workers over the years. She described struggling with most of them, but connected with one whom she got along with well.

She also had a few different judges, and connected best with one DREAM Court judge, whom she felt supported her:

*“And I loved her [the judge]. We was cool. I could talk to her. I don’t know, we had a bond. She told me she was proud of me. Even through all the ups and downs I’ve been going through, she was proud that I was able to keep pushing forward, and that was a big help at least to have someone on my team. Other than my lawyer, she was there.”*

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**And I loved her [the judge]. We was cool. I could talk to her. I don’t know, we had a bond. She told me she was proud of me.**

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Jasmine’s attorney has also been supportive. Jasmine described an empowerment retreat they attended together, saying:

*“That was a great experience....It was a great bonding experience just to meet all of the girls and talk to them about their experiences and what they’ve been through. And even some of them shared the same issues with the placement I was at...”*

## **Future Plans**

Jasmine recently graduated from high school and was accepted to multiple colleges. Jasmine plans to utilize resources available to her as a youth aging out of foster care and will be starting college with a major in Biology. Jasmine wants to be an Evolutionary Biologist. She plans to continue to stay with her maternal aunt while she goes to college.

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## **Christal**

Christal is a 19-year-old African American young woman. Her DCFS involvement began when she was two years old, and continued throughout her childhood and adolescence. She has no history of Probation involvement. Christal recently gave birth to a baby, and is receiving independent living resources through extended foster care.

## **Early Trauma and System Involvement**

DCFS first became involved with Christal’s family when she was two years old. Throughout her life, there were multiple child welfare referrals ranging from abuse to sibling at-risk, neglect, and exploitation—totaling 48 allegations by the culmination of her case. These allegations concerned seven different perpetrators, although the majority were against her mother and father. DCFS determined that many of the allegations were unfounded or inconclusive. Christal’s father had a history of domestic violence against her mother, including burning her face with an iron. Her father physically abused his stepdaughter after she resisted his multiple forcible rape attempts. He was charged with aggravated sexual assault against a minor, served prison time, and is now a registered sex offender.

Christal’s mother also had a criminal history and was named as a perpetrator of abuse or neglect against her children. According to the case file, Christal’s mother used drugs and left her children home alone for a week at a time without telling them she was leaving. The record indicated that all of the children in the home had indications of suicidal thoughts when they were young, including Christal. Throughout her childhood, Christal was in and out of foster homes. When Christal was 14 years old, DCFS terminated her case and gave her mother full custody of Christal and her younger sisters.

## **Running Away – Exploitation Begins**

Once she returned to her mother’s custody, Christal began running away regularly. She explained that after she had been away from home for approximately two months, the exploitation began: “[T]he human trafficking came about. And then, that’s when I—I wasn’t

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*living with my mom, like I used to just run the street until I—so, I didn't be at home. And then, I just like, gave up on it and I turned myself in because I was on the run.”*

When she was 16 years old, a Vice officer recovered Christal through a sting operation after responding to her ad on Craigslist, where she was advertising sexual services. The Vice Officer set up a time to meet with her at a motel. When Christal and her cousin arrived, the Officer asked if she knew why she was being picked up. She said that she was caught going on a date with her cousin and that she was hoping to get money for oral sex. Law enforcement detained Christal's cousin because she had an outstanding warrant. DCFS took Christal into temporary protective custody.

The DCFS investigation report indicated that Christal told DCFS that her first date had been four weeks prior to being identified by Vice. She reported having had sex for money eight times, and that she did not have an exploiter. She reported keeping the money for her and her sisters. When a DCFS Social Worker interviewed her mother, her mother said that she knew Christal was “*prostituting,*” that Christal did not listen to her, and that she needed help with Christal. Her mother reported that seven months before, Christal had started hanging out with people who were a bad influence on her. Her mother also stated that she knew the system well, “*because my two daughters who are adult now were bad and I had DCFS here all the time.*” The Social Worker also observed and interviewed the two young children still in the home, who were one and seven years old. The worker found that both seemed fine, and noted that there were no open referrals or DCFS cases involving the young children.

### **Placement – Small Group Home**

When Christal was 17 years old, DCFS placed her in a small group home. Christal described the placement: “*It was six girls. Three rooms, two to a room. I had a roommate. She was cool until she started doing weird, freaky stuff. And then, she started stealing from me. So, I had to change roommates. And the second roommate I had, we were very close. Like, we got along very well. We still talk.*”

Christal reported liking the placement and felt that she did well there. She said:

*“At first, I didn't like it. I didn't like being there and stuff. Like, it was hard being with people I didn't know. But, then I got used to it. And then, it got better. The staff—some of the staff were very nice. . . . To me, that placement—they gave you special privileges. Because certain placements, you can't have your phone. You can't stay out overnight. Like, you're on lockdown, basically. And that one, they'll let me stay out. I could keep my phone. We didn't have to go to sleep; we just had to be in our rooms. It was cool.”*

The small group home had a mixed population, serving both youth who had experienced exploitation, like Christal, and other youth who had difficulty at home. When asked if she thought this is why she liked the placement, Christal said:

*“No, I think it was—maybe because they weren't as strict. And they couldn't say, 'Oh, you couldn't go anywhere.' Because they let us go anywhere. They'll take us*

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*to movies, take us to concerts. So, it's like we weren't on lockdown. So, I think that's why."*

Christal also explained that her mother lived down the street from the placement and how that helped her. She said:

*"Yeah. And not only that, I got passes early. Because I guess you have to wait like a week or so before you get passes. But, it was so hard for me to just sit around and stay. I had asked the lady like, 'Can I leave?' and she let me leave. She told me just to come back. But, every time I would leave, I would come back. Or, if I would spend the night out, I would make sure I called and come back the next day."*

Christal never ran from the small group home. She was aware of other girls that ran away, but usually returned within a day or two. She explained that she was never tempted or asked to run with them.

Christal became pregnant while at the small group home. She explained that her pregnancy did not factor into her decision not to run from placement: *"No, because I mean, I could have before that. I had the opportunity to but I just didn't. It was like—it wasn't in my head. I didn't think of running away."*

Christal did not expect or plan to get pregnant. She described her decision to have the baby:

*"It was unexpected. It wasn't planned. When I first got pregnant, I already knew. Because like, I just felt my body changing, like, whole different. And then, it was like, kinda hard to make a decision because I didn't know if I wanted to keep it or not. I talked to people about it and they told me stuff and you know, everybody has a different opinion. Then, I talked to my mom. She told me like, I mean, babies are a blessing. Abortions are not good. And I thought about it. I mean, when I thought about it, I cried. Like, because I really didn't know what to do. And then, I just was like, I want to keep it. And then, going to all the doctor's appointments and hearing his heartbeat. I just got so excited and stuff. And then, I was just like, I want to keep it. And I wanted a boy and I got a boy."*

Christal explained the reasons that she wanted a boy:

*"Because girls, I feel like it's too much to handle. It's too much to do. You have you worry about hair, periods, people looking at your daughter. It's just a lot...And like, when you experience stuff, you already know. So, it's like, I would have to look out for her, tell her this, that. The only thing I have to worry about with my son is just girls."*



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## Return Home and Transition to Independent Living

While Christal was pregnant, she moved back in with her mother. Christal explained that she got very busy when she was pregnant, and it was difficult for her to balance school, therapy and her other obligations:

*“I had a therapist there but we really didn’t talk like that. I mean, she would come and talk to me about stuff but she wouldn’t come see me like that. Because it was to the point where I would get so busy. When I got pregnant, I was working, back and forth to the doctor. From working to back and forth to the doctor to school, I didn’t have time.”*

When she turned 18, Christal began to receive independent living services and food stamps. She was also referred to transitional housing, where she can remain for three years. She returned to school, and was assigned a youth advocate and an education/employment specialist. One month before her son was born, she moved into her own apartment. Christal stated she was in contact with the father of her son, but it was unclear how involved they were or her relationship to him.

## Christal’s Reflections on Specialized Services

Christal received a specialized Social Worker and specialized community-based advocate, but was never referred to DREAM Court. Christal described her relationship with her Social Worker: *“The Social Worker I had, she’s fine. We’re cool. She was nice.”* Because she is now a non-minor dependent, she will have to change Social Workers. Christal also had an advocate from Saving Innocence, but her advocate changed several times because one advocate left for college and another went on maternity leave. She said:

*“It was good. She [her advocate] would come see me and they used to do activities for the girls. And then, they would go—like, they had did something for Christmas. Last year, for Christmas. And I had went. They had gave out bags for the girls and stuff. It was nice....They just made sure everything was okay, made sure you needed everything. If you needed to talk about anything. The little get-togethers they would put together and stuff, you know, was fun.”*

## Future Plans

Christal is close with her mother, who lives in Los Angeles with her two younger sisters; she does not speak to her father. When her son gets older, Christal would like to go to cosmetology school. In five years, she sees herself with a good job and in her own house somewhere outside of Los Angeles. When asked if she had any final thoughts she said, *“I wouldn’t recommend anyone to go through what I’ve been through. It’s not fun. It doesn’t feel good. I mean, it’s just you looking for a fast way to live life, I guess.”*

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**I wouldn't recommend anyone to go through what I've been through. It's not fun. It doesn't feel good. I mean, it's just you looking for a fast way to live life, I guess.**

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## *Jada*

Jada is a 17-year-old African American girl who has been dually involved in Probation and DCFS since her early teens.

### **Initial Placements Following Exploitation**

When Jada was 15 years old, there was a DCFS referral for exploitation and sexual abuse against an unknown person, which was substantiated; there was also a DCFS referral against her mother for physical abuse and neglect, which were found to be inconclusive. According to the case file, Jada's mother found her “prostituting” on a street corner and forced her into her car. Jada's mother and aunt took her to a police station, where Jada appeared to be in a manic episode and was on drugs. She complained of head pain due to her mother and aunt forcibly getting her in the car. The file also indicated that someone at the station reported seeing Jada pull her own hair out. Jada was taken to the hospital and put on a psychiatric hold.

When a DCFS Social Worker interviewed Jada at the hospital, Jada reported that her mother and her aunt had beaten her up to get her into the car when they found her, but there were no visible injuries. Jada told the Social Worker that she did not want to go home because her mother just wanted to hurt her. She also reported having four “johns” and that she gave her money to her boyfriend, but that she did not have a pimp.

According to the Social Worker's report, Jada's mother had become concerned when Jada did not come home from school one day. Jada's mother went to her school, and the home of Jada's friend, Samantha, whom she had told Jada not to spend time with. No one was home, but a neighbor told her that the people in that home “weren't good people.” When Samantha's mother got home, Jada's mother felt that she was not being honest with her about Jada's whereabouts, and she believed that Samantha's mother was involved in a prostitution ring. Samantha's mother told her that Jada might be at her other daughter's house.

When Jada's mother and her son arrived at that house, Jada's mother recognized the living room as a house on Jada's social media. At that point, Jada's mother realized that the house was essentially a brothel. The people inside refused to let her in, and insisted that they had not seen Jada, though someone identified as “Samantha's sister” said that Jada had been there earlier to shower. A man who Jada's mother believed was the exploiter came out of the house

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and tried to get them to leave. At the same time, Jada's brother kicked in a backdoor to look for Jada. The police were called, and they arrested Jada's brother for forcible entry.

Once at the police station, Jada's mother and brother told the officers what was going on. Jada's brother remained in detention. Later that night, restless and concerned, Jada's mother drove around the streets with her sister looking for Jada. They found her on a street corner known for prostitution. According to Jada's mother, she never hit Jada, but brought her to the police station because Jada was under the influence and did not seem to be herself. Jada's mother expressed that she was relieved to have found Jada, but that when she went back to the hospital the next day, everyone was "looking at her funny" because they thought she abused Jada. She told the Social Worker: "I did everything I could to get her back."

The Social Worker determined that Jada could not return home. Jada's mother offered to get an emergency voucher to move so Jada would be safe. Instead, Jada was released to her maternal aunt.

According to the case file, when the Social Worker returned to speak to Jada, Jada had no recollection of him and could not recall much that had happened to her. All she reported remembering was being taken by Samantha's mother and her other daughter to a motel with eight or nine men. She remembered she "started to feel weird" and then did not remember much after that. She told her Social Worker that Samantha's mother seemed to be calling the shots and that she initially went willingly but then they would not let her leave and she got scared. Jada said she did not remember what happened when her mother found her.

A later report indicated that Jada was kidnapped, taken to Las Vegas, and woke up in a hotel room with two men she did not know. The report indicated that the girl who recruited her stole her purse, drove her around, and said that they were taking her home. When they did not stop at her house, Jada realized that they wanted to see where she lived so that they could threaten her. Soon thereafter, Jada's mother began receiving threatening calls and was verbally harassed.

Initially, Jada's case was assigned to DREAM Court. It was eventually removed, though the case file does not elaborate on why. About three months after the initial report of exploitation and sexual abuse, DCFS determined that her mother was "unable to provide appropriate parental supervision, putting Jada at serious risk." The court declared Jada a dependent, removed her from her mother and stepfather, and put her in out-of-home placement.

## **DCFS Placements and Running**

Jada recalled coming home to find sheriffs and a Social Worker waiting. They told her that her home was not safe. Jada was upset and told them that she did not want to leave. They took her for medical clearance, and then to a shelter to await long-term placement. She recalled:

*"They're like, 'Nah. You going.' They had sheriffs and a Social Worker that I never met before....I'm going up in the car. I'm like, 'Who are you? I don't know you like that. What is you doing?' And then, that's when I went to [get medically cleared].... And then, I went to [placement]. When I was there—it was far away—I'm thinking up plots, how I'm gonna leave. 'I'm not staying here.' So, I was there for a cold minute—three weeks. Ain't no Social Worker came to check on me. I'm just left there."*

Three weeks after she was placed, she ran away. She explained:

*“I’m calling my mom, and she like, ‘Where you at?’ Like, ‘In placement.’ She’s like, ‘What placement?’ I’m like, [redacted].’ She’s like, ‘Why are you so far,’ and this, and this, and that. I’m like, ‘I’m not staying.’ And then, I met some girls – a lot of girls there, and we just AWOLed. I called somebody I knew, and they came to pick all of us up. So, we left with them, and then, I was just gone. I was gone.”*

Jada ran frequently, and was re-placed in shelter care multiple times after running from there or other placements. She said, *“in the beginning it was cool”* but expressed that she really just wanted to go home. She reported that it was hard for her in placement and felt that she needed to be *“mentally prepared”* to manage living with other girls. She explained:

*“...I have my own personality and they have their own personality. It’s just, our personalities probably was not clicking with everybody, you know? But, it was more so—it was a lot of girls, so it was like—girls is gonna argue, girls is gonna fight over stupid stuff, and that’s what you have to be prepared for, mentally and physically.”*

When Jada ran from placement, she went home to see her mother or hang out with her friends. She noted that later, when she was on Probation, she did not stay at home long because the consequences were more severe than when she was in DCFS placement, since she could get arrested for running away. She explained: *“But, first, I was just DCFS. Pure DCFS. You not fixing to get arrested for being on the run. You not fixing to do none of that. All they gonna do is put you back in another placement. So, I’m like, ‘Alright, just don’t lie.’”*

Jada described how challenging it was for her to be away from her family and feel isolated while she was in placement:

*“For me, it was being away from my mom. That’s the only bad thing, was being away from my mom, and being away from my family, and not getting to see everything. I’m just in placement. And, it wasn’t even no close places, either. It was far off places, and I always found my way back.”*

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**That’s the only bad thing, was being away from my mom, and being away from my family, and not getting to see everything. I’m just in placement. And, it wasn’t even no close places, either. It was far off places, and I always found my way back.**

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A mental health report from one of the placements indicated that she had been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, and cocaine and methamphetamine abuse. The report stated that during bouts of mania, Jada would stay up for days, followed by bouts of oversleeping. It also stated that she could be aggressive with family and peers and she was high risk for drug use. Jada reported that she had these symptoms for as long as she could remember, but that her mood swings and temper tantrums had gotten so bad at one point that Jada's mother had her live with her maternal grandmother. Jada reported traumatic stress symptoms and substance abuse starting at 13 years old. When she was 14 years old, her traumatic stress symptoms and substance abuse intensified after her maternal grandmother died. She reported using drugs to numb her grief and trauma reactions. The report also stated that she would trade sex for drugs or steal when needed.

Jada did not participate in services. Although DCFS recommended Intensive Field Capable Clinical Services (IFCCS), she was unable to access the services because of a Medi-Cal lockout provision related to her placement.

### Probation Involvement Begins

While at placement, Jada got into a fight with another resident. She was arrested and charged with battery, and a Probation case was opened. *Jada explained: "Yeah, I got in a fight, and I got a ticket, and I didn't go to court for my ticket. And then, they locked me up for a year-and-a-half."*

After the fight, Jada was removed from the placement and taken back to shelter care. Jada ran away from the shelter and returned to her mother. According to the Social Worker's report, her mother took her to the police station, but the police said they did not want to be

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**Yeah, I got in a fight, and I got a ticket, and I didn't go to court for my ticket. And then, they locked me up for a year and a half.**

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involved. The Social Worker met Jada and her mother at the police station, where they did a CSEC exam. The Social Worker took Jada back to the shelter to await placement. She was screened for a Level 14 placement (the highest level placement for youth with severe emotional and

psychiatric needs).

When Jada was re-placed, she was involved in another fight, and then ran away to her aunt's house. According to the case file, when she returned to shelter care, she was highly distressed and paranoid. She threatened staff and stated that she would die soon. Staff conducted a mental health assessment, but she was not hospitalized. She told her Social Worker the next day that her trafficker had taken her to "tracks" in two counties outside of Los Angeles. Jada continued to run away, and she was reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Her mother pleaded with her to return.

One month later, she was recovered by LAPD in a sting operation focused on recovering commercially sexually exploited children and youth. She was taken to juvenile hall, and was assigned a specialized Probation Officer and an advocate.

Jada expressed frustration with DCFS and for being locked up for such a long period of time, though she felt supported by her advocate. She explained:

*“Yeah, [my advocate] still working with me....But, she came to see me. She was just saying things like, ‘Everything gonna be okay,’ and, ‘How you doing?’ And, I’m like, ‘I don’t wanna hear no sob stories because y’all was wrong for locking me up. I don’t care. I’m blaming everybody for everything. They locked me up for no reason, and I’m done. I can’t do it no more.’ She’s just like, ‘Well, your case is fixing to get closed with DCFS.’ I was like, ‘What does that mean? I don’t want y’all hanging around me, none of you. Y’all just another headache to me.’ But, [my advocate], she a good person. She helped me do a lot of stuff—get my ID, help me with cooking classes. She did a lot of stuff.”*

Around this time, Jada was also transferred to the STAR Court. She expressed feeling frustrated with STAR Court because she felt that it took too long to give her a disposition. She described her experience with the specialized court and judge:

*“Yeah. I feel like she just don’t like me. Like, ‘You don’t even know me. You sentenced me. First of all, it took you four months to sentence me for a fight, and then, y’all lied and said I pled guilty. And then, y’all had me signing papers when I first went to jail.’ When they first caught me, I was high as a kite....And, I was writing letters to the judge—all that. Talking to them, I tell you, they would not help me. They literally let me sit there. And, it took them so long....I was literally waiting for, like, seven months, just to go to placement. I don’t understand how people can treat somebody this way, just for being in the streets. I didn’t ask to be in the streets.”*

Jada also expressed her frustration about her experience in dependency court, reporting that she was upset with the Judge for not trying to get her out of juvenile hall: *“He was asking me questions like, ‘Am I okay?’*

*‘Do it look like I’m okay to you? I look sick. Do it look like I’m okay to you?’ They like, ‘Well, why do you have an attitude? We’re just trying to see how you’re doing.’ ‘Y’all wasn’t worried about how y’all was not trying to get me out. Y’all was not trying to bring back my family—none of that.’”*

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**And, it took them so long ...I was literally waiting for, like, seven months, just to go to placement. I don't understand how people can treat somebody this way, just for being in the streets.**

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## **Out-of-State Placement**

Several months later, Jada was sent to an out-of-state placement. Jada was upset about leaving the state, particularly because she had already spent time in juvenile hall. In addition, she

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expressed feeling frustrated with her Social Worker, who she felt was not active enough on her case and did not visit her enough when she was in juvenile hall. She described how her Social Worker came to see her a couple days before she left for the out-of-state placement. She explained that she reached a “*breaking point*” when her Social Worker asked her, “*Why you look so upset? Are you excited about going out-of-state?*” Jada believed that she should have known that she did not want to go. Jada became so upset that they had to remove her from the room.

Once at the out-of-state placement, Jada had a difficult time adjusting. The case file showed that within the first six weeks, she had 30 documented incidents. She explained that it was hard for her to leave her mother. When she first arrived, the staff kept her in observation because she refused to speak to anyone. She said, “*I was not doing good.*” Jada was frustrated that she could not go home, and that she had to go home on home passes in an effort to transition back home. She said she did not want her mother to come visit because it was too hard when her mother left. Her mother and brother came to visit for a family session, but her brother was not interested in engaging in treatment and her mother appeared to be struggling with her own depression.

Jada reported that her mother, her aunt, and therapy helped her. She reflected on a conversation with her aunt that seemed to be a turning point for her:

*“Yeah. I was so mad. I was so mad. I was really mad. And, she [her aunt]—because, they let me talk to her. They like, ‘Can you please talk to her? She’s walking out the unit. She’s walking on the yard, three or four o’clock in the morning. She just won’t listen. She fighting. She just don’t care.’ Called my auntie, talked with my auntie. We had a long talk. She was like, ‘Do you wanna come home?’ And, I just broke down like, ‘I’m tired of this.’ I’m like, ‘I can’t do this no more.’ I’m like, ‘It’s bad enough that I just did a whole year, and now I gotta do a whole nine months.’ She was like, ‘You don’t wanna come home and see the baby [Jada’s cousin]? You don’t wanna come home and see the baby? She gonna miss you.’ And, I’m like, ‘I do.’ And, that was my motivation—the baby.”*

Eventually, Jada began participating in services including individual and family therapy, substance abuse treatment, Seeking Safety, ART, and other programming. She also participated in physical activities. Her mother engaged in family therapy, as well as her own individual therapy to manage her clinical depression. Jada’s grades and behavior in school improved. During this time, she was assigned a new Social Worker. Jada reported that she was doing so well by the end that she was able to stop taking her psychotropic medications. She said, “*Yeah. So, when I first got there, I was really traumatized, and then, when I was fixing to come home, I stopped them [medications], like, a month before I came home.*”

Jada reflected on the impact of her out-of-state placement:

*“I mean, now that I look back at it, I’m like, ‘Yeah, I’ve finished something in life.’ You feel me? I’ve started writing my book. I’ve started a lot of stuff. I was writing every day in jail. I’m doing, actually, pretty good. I’ve got a lot of [school] credit. But, in the beginning, I was mad too, but I got to the end, and I was like, ‘Yeah, I did it.’ I have home passes....I was doing good. I had visits—all that. But, all I have on my mind is, ‘Why did y’all do this to me? What did I do to*

*y'all that y'all can pick me to stay in jail so long? And, y'all took me away from my family, and I never got to live a teenage life.' That was always on my mind, in placement. I would never stay anywhere. I was moving around."*

## **Return Home and Running Away**

Nine months later, Jada returned home. At first, the transition appeared to go smoothly, although Jada reported that she has continued to run away from home after returning. She expressed that she was surprised that she still ran because all she wanted to do was come home. She explained that when she leaves home, she hangs out and gets high with her boyfriend.

Jada shared that she left home several months ago with her boyfriend and went to a party with him at a hotel for two days. The party was eventually shut down by the police; Jada noted that she was scared because she knew that she could get arrested for being there and she was high. She and her boyfriend ran and she decided she wanted to go home. She said:

*"Next thing you know, I started tweaking. He [her boyfriend] like, 'What's wrong?' I'm like, 'I need to go home for a couple hours.' He like, 'We fixing to go home.' I'm like, 'No, I wanna go home.' I picked a argument. I'm like, 'I need to go home. I don't wanna be here with you right now,' like, 'I'm sorry, I cannot do it.' So, I called my mom up. I'm like, 'Mama, come get me.' She's like, 'What's the matter? Why you sound like that?' I'm like, 'Mama, come get me. I'm tripping. Come get me.'"*

Jada's mother picked her up and took her to the hospital. She had ecstasy, cocaine, marijuana, and codeine in her system. According to the case file, Jada's mother had filed a missing person's report after Jada left. When she returned home, Jada's mother expressed to the Social Worker that she was frustrated because Jada was defiant and hanging out with old friends, and that she did not want Jada in her care anymore. The IFCCS team was able to stabilize the relationship and things seemed to get better. Jada's mother reported loving the IFCCS team and that she felt very supported by them.

A few days later, Jada ran again. She said, *"that's the only bad thing about me. That's all people can say about me is I'm running...I will run until I can't run....I mean, who care where I wanna be? I mean, I'll just end up leaving, and not understand why."*

Two months later, a team meeting was conducted at Jada's home, which included Jada's parents, Social Worker, Probation Officer, clinician, clinical supervisor and a facilitator. The team determined that Jada's case plan was to close the case, since she was close to turning 18.

The case file indicated that one month after the team meeting, Jada was lured into a vehicle by a "friend" and was raped by three men.

She said she knew the identity of at least one of the men, but she would not disclose because she

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**I will run until I can't run....I mean, who care where I wanna be? I mean, I'll just end up leaving, and not understand why.**

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was concerned for her family’s safety. Jada admitted to having multiple pimps and told the officer that “*none of this matters*” and “*I’m a prostitute and this type of thing happens to me all the time.*” A Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) exam was conducted, and the officer called a rape victim advocate. When the officer called Jada’s mother, she told him not to bring her home because she would run away and that she had open warrants. After consulting with the Special Victim’s Unit and based on her runaway history, the officer booked Jada on the open warrant and took her to juvenile hall.

Jada was sent home on community detention (house arrest). Probation and DCFS developed a court report around this time, which indicated that Jada was seeing a mental health clinician at a community-based clinic that specializes in trauma treatment. Her current diagnosis is PTSD, Adjustment Disorder, and Cocaine Abuse in remission. The family is also receiving services through the IFCCS team, which supported them through the SART process, investigation, and aftermath of the recent rapes. Jada’s mother quit her job so that she could watch out for Jada as much as possible.

### **Jada’s Reflections on Placements and Specialized Services**

Jada described her recommendations for placements. She said:

*“You have to treat them as your own child. How’ll you’ll treat your child, that what you have to—You have to be there for them, mentally and physically. Because, I heard a lot of girls’ stories, I talked to a lot of girls, I did speeches for a lot of girls and stuff, and I know it’s hard for them. Being raped, and just being in the streets, and having nobody, so they just go to the streets. It’s hard....Some people judged them off the bat because what they did, you know? But, if you sit down and talk to them, you’ll really understand. They just need, probably, somebody to talk to, and somebody to be there for them, and to give them somewhere to stay, without them having to go out there and do something just to—a pair of shoes, or a pair of outfit, or something, you know? And DCFS don’t do nothing to basically help them. And, that’s just how I feel. DCFS don’t do nothing, because they obviously don’t do nothing for me, and I had to do it [be in DCFS] for almost two years.”*

Jada recommends that youth be placed in homes, rather than group placements. She suggested: “*It should be like, houses with multiple bedrooms, or foster families that would know how to deal with CSEC kids.*” She believes that knowing how to work with children and youth who have been sexually exploited is very important because, “*When you say something that’s gonna offend them, they’re gonna get mad, and they’re gonna leave. Next thing, they end up—something bad happened to them.*”

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**How’ll you’ll treat your child, that what you have to – You have to be there for them, mentally and physically.**

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She also cautioned against overmedicating:

*“And, I feel like y’all should give the girls hope, like they have something to live for. And, don’t just instantly, ‘Oh, let me put you on some meds because I feel like you need it because of what you been through now.’ Meds would mess you up worse than what you messed up about. It’ll make you a whole other person.”*

### **Future Plans**

Jada remains on house arrest, and as of the date of the interview, had not run for three weeks. Jada recently turned 18, and her DCFS was closed. She is unsure when she will get off Probation. Jada said that when she gets older she wants to be a writer and move out of the state.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Los Angeles County has devoted significant resources, energy, and effort to serving children and youth who have been CSE, yet little is known about what works for the population. The data collected through this study offer a significant opportunity to address gaps in research, hear directly from youth about benefits and drawbacks of certain placements and services, and make recommendations as to how systems and their partners can improve practice to meet the needs of this population.

### Integrated Discussion and Summary of Administrative Data Findings

#### Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality

Racial and ethnic disproportionality is strikingly pronounced in the current study, where African American girls and young women were disproportionately represented among those who were identified as CSE, and Hispanic/Latinx girls and young women were underrepresented in both the Probation and DCFS samples. In both the Probation and DCFS CSE samples, about two-thirds of the children and youth were African American. This is about double the rate of African American children who were placed in out-of-home care (i.e., suitable placements) as a result of Probation involvement, based on previous research<sup>48</sup> and double the rate of African American children in the foster care population in Los Angeles.<sup>49</sup> Even more stark, in 2016, African Americans only accounted for 7.4% of the child population in Los Angeles County.<sup>50</sup>

Although there is no research directly addressing the question of why African American youth are overrepresented in the population of youth identified as CSE, this finding is consistent with other jurisdictions around the country.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that the phenomenon is at least partially explained by the fact that African American youth experience other systemic disparities, such as higher rates of exposure to community violence, poverty, disciplinary actions in school, child welfare system involvement, juvenile justice system involvement, and out-of-home placement, all of which are risk factors for exploitation.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the findings in this study regarding overrepresentation of youth of color in the identified CSEC/Y population align with extensive research that show that at each level of child welfare and juvenile justice system involvement,

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<sup>48</sup> Herz, D. & Chan, K. (2017). The Los Angeles County Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study Part II. California State University, Los Angeles. Retrieved from: <http://www.juvenilejusticersearch.com/node/12>.

<sup>49</sup> Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., . . . Lee, H. (2018). Child Welfare Services Reports For California, U.C. Berkeley Center for Social Services Research.

<sup>50</sup> KidsData. (2018). Child Population, by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/33/child-population-race/pie#fmt=144&loc=364&tf=88&ch=7,11,726,10,72,9,73,87&pdist=73>.

<sup>51</sup> Rights 4 Girls. Racial and Gender Disparities in the Sex Trade. Retrieved from: <http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2016/08/Racial-Disparities-Fact-Sheet-11.2017.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Rights 4 Girls. The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls Story. Retrieved from: [https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf). See also Nanda, J. (2011). Blind discretion: Girls of color & delinquency in the juvenile justice system. *UCLA L. Rev.*, 59, 1502.

the racial disparities multiply, both nationally<sup>53</sup> and in Los Angeles County.<sup>54</sup> These disproportionalities are rooted in deep, historical and institutionalized racism, including laws and policies that surveil and criminalize communities of color at higher rates,<sup>55</sup> as well as individual factors, including both explicit and implicit race, ethnic, and gender-based biases.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, approaches to understanding who is more vulnerable to exploitation, how systems have identified and responded historically to that exploitation, and the appropriate responses entail must consider the intersection of race and gender. Research suggests that ideas of “sexual availability and sexual consent are informed by race,” including because of distorted historical views about African American women’s and girls’ bodies as property, their perceived lack of morality, and the fact that African American girls are typically viewed as older and imputed with more control over their decisions.<sup>57</sup> Combining these historical attitudes toward African American girls and young women, what we know about African American youth’s heightened exposure to these risk factors, and increased law enforcement presence in communities of color, it is unsurprising that African American youth are preyed on at higher rates, identified more by law enforcement, and often treated differently when they are recovered.

In contrast, the study found that approximately 30% of the youth identified as CSEC/Y were Hispanic/Latina. This is compared with data from Los Angeles County, which indicates that 61% of the child population is Hispanic/Latinx, as are nearly 60% of youth in foster care.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that girls and young women who have been identified as CSE and placed in out-of-home care are less likely to be Hispanic/Latina than in the general population and foster care population in Los Angeles. However, this roughly aligns with national statistics, which indicate that 20% of identified cases of sex trafficking are Latinx.<sup>59</sup> Given that Hispanic/Latinx youth experience many of the same systemic disparities as African American youth, such as disproportionately high rates of school discipline and school-based arrests,<sup>60</sup> and

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<sup>53</sup> Bell, Z., & Rasquiza, A. (2014). *Implicit Bias and Juvenile Justice: A Review of the Literature*. National Center for Youth Law. Retrieved from <https://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Implicit-Bias-Juvenile-Justice-Lit-Review-for-ncyl-web3.pdf>; Lee, K., Bell, Z., & Ackerman-Brimberg, M. *Implicit Bias in the Child Welfare, Education and Mental Health Systems*. (2014). Michael Harris & Hannah Benton (Eds.). National Center for Youth Law. Retrieved from [https://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Implicit-Bias-in-Child-Welfare-Education-and-Mental-Health-Systems-Literature-Review\\_061915.pdf](https://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Implicit-Bias-in-Child-Welfare-Education-and-Mental-Health-Systems-Literature-Review_061915.pdf); Wong, A., & Ridolfi, L. (2018). *Unlocking Opportunity: How Race, Ethnicity and Place Affect the Use of Institutional Placements in California*. Haywood Burns Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Unlocking-Opportunity.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Dierkhising, C. B., Herz, D., Hirsch, R., & Abbott, S. (2018). System backgrounds, psychosocial characteristics, and service access among dually-involved youth: A Los Angeles case study. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 1-21. DOI: 10.1177/1541204018790647.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness*. The New Press: New York.

<sup>56</sup> See *supra* notes 51, 52, and 53.

<sup>57</sup> See Phillips, *supra* note 1, at 1656, 1658.

<sup>58</sup> KidsData. (2018). Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/22/fostercare-race/table#fmt=2495&loc=364&tf=84&ch=7,11,8,10,9,44&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

<sup>59</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2011). *Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010*, p.6.

<sup>60</sup> Sallo, M. (2011). *School to Prison Pipeline: Zero Tolerance for Latino Youth*. National Council of La Raza & Models for Change. Retrieved from: [https://www.sccgov.org/sites/pdo/ppw/pubs/documents/zerotolerance\\_factsheet22011.pdf](https://www.sccgov.org/sites/pdo/ppw/pubs/documents/zerotolerance_factsheet22011.pdf).

overrepresentation and disparate treatment in the juvenile justice system,<sup>61</sup> it is unclear why Hispanic/Latinx youth are underrepresented in the sample identified as CSE. According to a national report, one possible explanation for this data is where the exploitation occurs, which for Hispanic/Latinx victims appears to be residential brothels and establishments posing as cantinas, bars, restaurants, or nightclubs, as opposed to in more visible places, like on the streets or online.<sup>62</sup> In that report, 62% of identified victims indicated that they were physically isolated and confined, which may account for the lower rates of Hispanic/Latinx youth being identified in Los Angeles.<sup>63</sup> Additional explanations may include the differing levels and types of law enforcement contact in Hispanic/Latinx communities; that law enforcement, DCFS and Probation strategies for identifying and/or engaging with CSE children and youth may not be as effective for Hispanic/Latinx youth; or differing trends in Hispanic/Latinx communities with respect to disclosing CSE or sexual abuse and seeking formal help.<sup>64</sup> In addition, it is possible that data collection methods are not accurately capturing representation of Hispanic/Latinx youth in other systems, which are feeders into exploitation.<sup>65</sup> Further exploration in these areas are necessary to better understand whether Hispanic/Latinx children and youth are exploited at lower rates in Los Angeles, whether the systems are failing to identify and engage them effectively, or if there are other drivers for the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latinx youth among the CSE sample.

Any services and placements for CSE children and youth should consider these racial/ethnic disproportionalities, both in order to fully understand the vulnerabilities for exploitation that youth are experiencing, and to ensure that any responses are tailored to meet the needs of the populations and communities most affected by exploitation. As noted by one youth interviewed in this study, the interwoven dynamics of race and system involvement can have a detrimental impact: Latisha noted the challenges of being sent to a predominantly White school while in out-of-home care, which signified to the other students that she was child welfare or Probation-involved; later, she discussed discomfort with her independent living placement being in a primarily White community. Another youth, Skylar, did not explicitly connect her school discipline to her race/ethnicity, but her case shows the impact of school discipline on her system involvement and exploitation. Once she was on Probation, minor school infractions led to Probation violations, further entrenching her in the juvenile justice system and contributing to her exploitation.

Given the unavoidable fact that youth of color experience more exposure to risk factors for exploitation, and appear to be exploited at higher rates, to truly eliminate exploitation and support those who have been exploited, we must take a preventive approach by seeking to reduce

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<sup>61</sup> National Center for State Courts. (2014). Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System. Retrieved from [https://www.ncsc.org/~media/Microsites/Files/Future%20Trends%202014/Reducing%20Racial%20and%20Ethnic%20Disparities\\_Soler.ashx](https://www.ncsc.org/~media/Microsites/Files/Future%20Trends%202014/Reducing%20Racial%20and%20Ethnic%20Disparities_Soler.ashx).

<sup>62</sup> Polaris Project. (2016). More Than Drinks For Sale: Exposing Sex Trafficking in Cantinas & Bars in the U.S. Retrieved from <http://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Cantinas-SexTrafficking-EN.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> Cuevas, C. & Sabrina, C. (2010). Final Report: Sexual Assault Among Latinas (SALAS). U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/230445.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Rights4Girls, *supra* note 52; Nat'l Council on Crime & Delinquency, Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the US Criminal Justice System, available at <http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication.pdf/created-equal.pdf> (last visited May 31, 2015); see also Reform Trends: Counting Latino Youth, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, Retrieved from <http://jjie.org/hub/racial-ethnic-fairness/reform-trends/> (last visited Oct. 5, 2018).

the disproportionate impact of these related systems on youth of color, and build strategies for providing culturally appropriate services if and when youth are identified as exploited. For example, approaches to reducing disruptions in education for children and youth who have been exploited should consider both factors that tend to lead exploited youth out of school (such as bullying when other youth find out they are exploited, tardiness or absences related to being up all night on the streets, or frequent placement changes after incidents of AWOL), as well as broader systemic trends which push youth of color out of school at disproportionality higher rates, such as administrative discretion about the types of behaviors that can lead to school discipline. In addition, given the high level of early childhood trauma and related child welfare system and juvenile justice involvement prior to exploitation, approaches to addressing exploitation must consider racial/ethnic disproportionalities in treatment of the families these youth come from, including whether prevention and early intervention services are culturally informed and appropriate, and whether how race/ethnicity factors into judgments about whether to open a case, or remove or reunify a child. Given the critical importance of services for many families and youth, efforts to decrease racial disproportionality in system involvement, however, must be careful not to “clos[e] the door to a needed resource just because of the color of someone’s skin in either direction.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Deep Involvement and Histories with the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems**

The data show that many children and youth have significant juvenile justice and child welfare involvement prior to being identified as CSE. The girls and young women identified as CSE through Probation were significantly more likely to become involved in Probation initially for lower level offenses like misdemeanors than the non-CSE sample (CSE = 38% felonies, 57.5% misdemeanors; non-CSE = 52.3% felonies, 46.4% misdemeanors). This finding aligns with the interviews, which presented examples of low-level behaviors, such as fighting in school, at placement, or with parents, which led to arrests and the initiation of Probation cases. We know that these early arrests and Probation involvement may result in out-of-home placement and other disruptions to a youth’s life, which can actually increase, rather than decrease, their risk of future exploitation. These include disruptions to education or exposure to school discipline, separation from family or other positive supports, and contact with youth in placement that are involved in escalating behaviors, which for at least two of the young women interviewed—Sasha and Jasmine—resulted in exposure to and eventual exploitation. Because placement may be correlated with exposure to riskier and potentially criminal behaviors, the County should consider what sort of diversionary supports and services could be provided to the youth and their families to avoid placement. In addition, the use of diversion, particularly to avoid out-of-home placements, is often used in order to address racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice systems.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, only a small percentage of both CSE and non-CSE youth’s first arrests were for a prostitution or human trafficking related charge. These low numbers may be the result of

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<sup>66</sup> Blalock, B., quoted in Veale, L. (Reporter). “One State is Disrupting the Pipeline from Foster Care to Jail.” 70 Million Podcast, Lantigua Williams & Co, September 24, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.70millionpod.com>.

<sup>67</sup> Wong, A. & Ridolfi, L. (2018): *Unlocking Opportunity: How Race, Ethnicity, and Place Affect the Use of Institutional Placements in California*. The W. Haywood Burns Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Unlocking-Opportunity.pdf>.

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recent legislation, SB 1322, which went into effect in January 2017, which no longer allows minors to be arrested for prostitution offenses. It may also be the result of Los Angeles County policy which, beginning in approximately 2014 with implementation of the First Responder Protocol, discouraged law enforcement from arresting and detaining youth identified as exploited, and instead provides that law enforcement connect them promptly with advocacy and specialized services.<sup>68</sup> The low rates of prostitution-related arrests also demonstrate that many youth who are exploited are coming into contact with the system for other offenses, both before and after they have experienced exploitation. This presents an opportunity for intervention to prevent exploitation. Further, because exploitation may not be as clear when it is not tied to a legal charge, there are likely other young people we have failed to identify as exploited, which means they may not gain access to specialized services and other supports.

The youth in the Probation CSE sample had significantly more arrests/charges, petitions filed, petitions sustained, bench warrants, and entrances to juvenile hall overall. Although this is a disturbing finding given that these young people have been victims of crime themselves, it is unfortunately unsurprising. From what we know about youth who are exploited, they likely have some of the highest unmet needs, which can manifest in escalating behaviors, homelessness, or other problems that lead to increased interaction with the law enforcement and the justice system.

The higher prevalence of bench warrants issued to CSE children and youth is most likely due to the increased incidence of running away by girls and young women who are identified as CSE, as compared to those non-CSE identified youth. Each time a youth supervised by Probation runs away or is AWOL, by law, the court must issue a bench warrant. When a bench warrant is issued and a youth is found by law enforcement, it often leads to an entrance into juvenile hall based on the open warrant. Although the data show that those in the CSE sample had significantly more bench warrants issued and entrances to juvenile hall, there is no difference in length of time spent incarcerated between the CSE sample and the non-CSE sample (10.5 months vs. 9.1 months). This indicates that although CSE youth enter secure facilities at higher rates, they likely do so because of the higher incidence of bench warrants, which result in short stays, and do not add significantly to the total time incarcerated. This suggests a growing recognition by the systems that criminalization of exploited youth is inappropriate as well as implementation of changes in the law related to decriminalization. It also highlights the increased disruptions in placement and begs the question about why the youth are running from care or otherwise changing placements more often, and whether issuing bench warrants and bringing youth to juvenile hall is an appropriate response.

As noted, the study found higher rates of petitions filed, sustained, and arrests/charges for the CSE sample compared to the non-CSE sample. It is possible that the increased numbers of petitions and arrests are related to the higher likelihood that the CSE sample are in group homes, where fights, running away, and other risky behavior are more common, potentially increasing their exposure to unlawful activity and law enforcement. However, this deeper penetration in the system, as stated, is also likely indicative of a need for more intensive services, which may be what drove the decision to assign some of them to the specialized services in the first place. Indeed, this explanation is partially supported by the finding that those who received specialized services had a higher average number of petitions. Because we were not able to temporally sequence these events in the current study, we could not determine whether the petitions and

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<sup>68</sup> Supra note 11 & 12.

arrests came before or after service receipt, or both. This is an important area of potential follow-up research because, currently, there is not a systematic approach to assigning youth to specialized services. Instead, there are a confluence of factors that may or may not lead to a youth's referral to these services for both Probation and DCFS (see Chapter 2). It would be beneficial to the agencies to design a systematic referral system that is based on an assessment of needs, and then to conduct pre- and post-evaluation tests to determine the broader impact of the specialized services.

In terms of DCFS system contact, the data indicate that the DCFS CSE sample had significantly more prior reports (9.2 vs. 7.2) and substantiated reports (3.5 vs. 2.4) than the non-CSE sample. Both CSE and non-CSE samples were about six-and-a-half years old at the time of first referral to DCFS. The age of first referral (which includes both inconclusive and substantiated referrals) is somewhat surprising given anecdotal information from youth and informal studies over the years, which have indicated that a majority of youth identified as CSE had contact with DCFS prior to the age of five.<sup>69</sup>

However, it is important to remember that the DCFS history findings relate only to the DCFS sample because the DCFS history for the Probation sample was not included in this study. Given what we know about the extensive and early involvement many youth involved in the juvenile justice system have had with the child welfare system in Los Angeles County,<sup>70</sup> the DCFS histories of those youth who are dually-involved or dual contact youth would likely be more extensive, and may drive down the overall average age of first referral, which may explain the discrepancy in age at first referral. There are some indicators in our data that support the conclusion that most of the Probation youth had dual contact or are dually-involved.<sup>71</sup> First, the Probation youth's first out-of-home placement, for both CSE and non-CSE, was at age 12, on average, even though their first arrest was at 14, on average. In addition, youth in the Probation sample, both CSE and non-CSE, spent long periods of time in Foster Family Agencies (between 3 and 3.5 years) and Foster Family Homes (between 3.7 and 4 years). These placements are not typically used by Probation and are more common for youth involved in DCFS, which indicates significant DCFS involvement before being supervised by Probation. Further exploration into the histories of children and youth who have been commercially sexually exploited and are also dually-involved may be of interest to the agencies as they explore ways to maximize resources and work collaboratively for those youth who are supervised by both agencies.

Additionally, for both the DCFS CSE and non-CSE samples, approximately five years passed between the age of first report to child welfare and removal from the home. Child welfare involvement beginning in early childhood represents an opportunity to provide services to the youth and family prior to exposure to the risk of exploitation. The system is designed to offer varying levels of involvement or services based on the frequency and severity of the allegations against the caretakers, such as voluntary services, family maintenance, removal, family reunification, and termination of parental rights. Given that many children are interacting with the system at early ages, there are opportunities for increased focus, attention, and resources for

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<sup>69</sup> Studies on file with Michelle Guymon.

<sup>70</sup> Dierkhising, C. B., Herz, D., Hirsch, R., & Abbott, S. (2018). System backgrounds, psychosocial characteristics, and service access among dually-involved youth: A Los Angeles case study. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 1-21. DOI: 10.1177/1541204018790647.

<sup>71</sup> "Dually-involved" refers to youth who have concurrent involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. "Dual contact" refers to youth who have had involvement with both systems, but not necessarily at the same time.



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the family and youth at first contact to try to prevent further allegations of abuse and neglect and subsequent exploitation. Importantly, the services should focus both on supporting the youth and addressing early trauma exposure, and also supporting the family and/or caregiver to ensure they have adequate services, training, and resources to care for their children.

### **Out-of-home Placement Histories**

All youth in the study spent long periods of time in out-of-home placements. For Probation, both the CSE and non-CSE samples spent nearly two years in out-of-home placements. If secure facilities are counted in addition to unlocked placements, the average time in out-of-home care jumped to nearly three years. There were no significant differences between the CSE and non-CSE groups. In contrast, in DCFS, the CSE sample, on average, spent significantly longer cumulative time in out-of-home placements (2.8 years vs. 1.7 years). Since these youth were about eleven-and-a-half years old when they were first placed, and 15 years old at the time of the data pull, the girls and young women who are identified as exploited tended to stay in out-of-home care once they were placed there.

There are a number of reasons that CSE children and youth may remain in out-of-home care for longer periods of time across placement type. One reason may be that the homes of the girls and young women in the CSE samples may be more unsafe, unstable, or unable to meet their basic needs. The surveys indicated that for many youth, the first place that they ran away from was their home. As youth in both the surveys and interviews explained, many are fleeing years of abuse and violence, or are seeking a way to meet their basic needs, which were not met in the home. Another reason CSE children and youth spend longer in care may be that DCFS is less comfortable returning children and youth who have been exploited to their homes because they are concerned about their parents' ability to protect them from exploitation, such as in Jada's case. Systems may also view this population as particularly vulnerable or difficult to support at home. Also, as evidenced by the interviews, some parents and family members have negative views of their kids and do not want them at home once they have been on the streets because they view them as out of control, or a negative influence on other children in the home. This was the case for Jasmine, Jada, Sasha, and Christal. Unsurprisingly, the system may want to have more supervision over girls and young women who have been exploited because they do not want them to continue to be harmed through exploitation, and view out-of-home placement as the safest option. Whether or not out-of-home placement is safer is dependent on a variety of factors; however, even if it is safer, it may not lead to other desirable and important outcomes like stability and well-being. And given the high rates that youth run away from placement, exploration into why they are running should be the focus of a subsequent study.

In both the Probation and DCFS samples, youth identified as CSE had more placements overall than the non-CSE sample. For Probation, the CSE sample had, on average, 5.2 placements, as compared to 4.3 for the non-CSE sample. The same is true for the DCFS sample, where the CSE sample had approximately 5 placements, and the non-CSE sample had an average of 3 placements. The higher number of placements may be due to placements asking CSE children and youth to leave when they are perceived as "more difficult." This may also be due to the fact that CSE girls and young women run away more frequently and, as a result, must be replaced more often than their non-CSE counterparts.

In examining placement stability, the key indicator used was length of stay in a single placement type. This length of stay measure is used as a proxy for stability because we know that

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when youth are in one place for longer periods of time, they, ideally, will form trusting relationships with peers and adults, enroll in and attend school, develop a connection to a community, and establish rapport with their providers. While longer lengths of stay in care are not always considered positive because the youth are separated from family, this proxy for placement stability should be considered in conjunction with the reasons for placement change. There are many reasons for placement disruption or placement changes: some negative (such as running away or incarceration) and some positive (such as reunification or adoption). When we look at the current samples, one of the most common reasons for placement change is running away—particularly for the CSE samples. Taken together, longer placement stays, in the current study, appear to reflect placement stability, but not necessarily safety or well-being.

For both the Probation and DCFS samples, group homes had the least placement stability, as indicated by having the shortest average length of stay and the most placement changes due to running away. For the Probation sample, this was the only placement type where there was a significant difference between the CSE and non-CSE samples: the CSE sample stayed for significantly less time on average in group homes compared to the non-CSE sample (64 days vs. 104 days). While there was no significant difference in length of stay in group homes between the DCFS samples, the DCFS CSE sample, which consisted of 246 youth, were placed in group homes 973 times, nearly six times the number of group home placements compared to the non-CSE group. This instability is even more troubling when we learn that group homes were the first placement type for 43% of the DCFS CSE sample and 58% of the Probation CSE sample. In contrast, almost 80% of the non-CSE DCFS sample's first placement was a foster home (FFA or regular) or relative home, compared to 56% of the CSE group. This heavy reliance on group homes for youth with histories of CSE, especially as a first placement, raises several concerns and warrants further exploration.

One concern is that placing these youth in group homes, especially at such young ages (DCFS youth entered out-of-home care at approximately 11.5 years old), may be precipitating exploitation. Although we cannot show a causal connection, there is some correlation between youth who are placed in group homes first and eventual exploitation. One reason for this correlation may be that children and youth placed in group homes have higher needs which make it harder to place them in more home-like settings. These complex needs, in turn, put the youth at increased risk of exploitation to begin with. Additionally, we know traffickers are familiar with the location of group homes and actively recruit from these places. Children and youth also may be exposed to risk-taking and other dangerous behaviors in placement, which may increase their likelihood of being exploited. In their interviews, Sasha and Skylar explicitly described how they felt their group home placements spurred their involvement in exploitation. In addition, disconnection from families and communities while in placement may contribute to risk for exploitation as well as the risk that they will rely on exploitation for survival if and when they leave placement.

Given the racial disparities between the CSE population and the general child welfare and juvenile justice populations, higher rates of group home placement may also be due to implicit or explicit biases in decision making about appropriate placements or the appropriateness of returning a youth home. Further, the labeling of a child or youth as CSEC may make it more difficult to place them. This is due to perceptions about young people who are exploited, such as fears about the safety risks related to traffickers, concerns about peer recruitment, and beliefs that youth who have experienced CSE are more difficult to manage or do not want to change. By labeling children and youth as "CSEC", we may be reducing the placement options for our most

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high needs youth, making it more likely that placement decisions will be based on the availability of a bed rather than the appropriateness of a particular placement for an individual.

### **Placement Changes and Instability**

Children and youth identified as CSE in both the Probation and DCFS samples had significantly more placements, on average, than the non-CSE samples (Probation: 5.2 vs. 4.3; DCFS: 5 vs. 3). This is because children and youth who have been CSE change placements more often overall, and more often due to running away specifically.

For both Probation and DCFS, the CSE samples had significantly more changes in placement due to running away compared to the non-CSE samples. For Probation, the CSE sample changed placement due to running away 365 times compared to 224 times for the non-CSE sample. For DCFS the difference is much more stark—girls and young women identified as CSE changed placement due to running away 392 times compared to 58 times for the non-CSE sample.

It is important to keep in mind that these figures are conservative because they do not account for the total number of runaway episodes or AWOLs; instead this variable only captures those instances of running away that resulted in a recorded change in placement. Oftentimes, youth will run away or be AWOL for brief periods of time, which do not always lead to a change in placement. For example, the case file reviews contain several examples of youth incident reports stating they had been AWOL, but no placement change occurred. Thus, the total number of running away or AWOL episodes is likely higher.

The majority of placement changes due to running away are from group homes for both the Probation and DCFS samples. In the Probation sample, of all the times that placement changed due to the youth running away, 84.4% of these placement changes were from group homes for both the CSE and non-CSE samples. The frequency that the placement changed due to running away from a group home was 308 for the CSE sample and 189 for the non-CSE sample. Thus, while both samples are changing placements due to running from group homes at the same proportional rate (84.4%), children and youth who have been exploited are placed in group homes at higher rates, and thus have run from those placements many more times.

Consistent with the Probation findings, the majority of the instances of placement change due to running away for the DCFS samples occurred from group homes (CSE = 81.6%; non-CSE = 69.1%). Although the non-CSE sample also had a high percentage of running away as the reason for placement change from group homes as compared to the other placement types (69%), there were still far fewer instances of runaways from group homes for the non-CSE sample (CSE = 320; non-CSE = 40). This aligns with what we learned from the surveys and the interviews, and further warrants exploration as to why these children and youth are running.

### **Group Home Types and Placement Changes**

Given the reliance on group homes and the significant variation in group home settings, the placement stays and placement changes were further broken down to assess for any potential differences by the size of the group home, namely: small (6 beds or fewer), medium (7-23 beds), large (24 beds and up), out-of-state, and out-of-county. The out-of-county placements were further broken down by size: small (6 beds or fewer) and large (7 beds and up). Of note, although placements are authorized to hold a certain capacity (i.e. number of beds), they may not always

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be filled to capacity, which means there may be open beds. This is more often the case in larger group homes.

The longest average stays for the Probation CSE sample were in small out-of-county placements; however, there were only 25 stays in this placement type. More importantly, when examining the local group home placements alone, the longest average stays for both the CSE and non-CSE Probation samples were in medium-sized group homes (CSE = 172.2 days or 5.7 months; non-CSE = 191.7 days or 6.4 months). Relatedly, youth ran the least from the medium-sized group homes. Specifically, of all the placement changes due to running away for the CSE sample, among the group homes, *less than one percent* of them were from medium-sized group homes. In addition, the CSE sample was significantly more likely to experience a placement change due to running away from large and small group homes compared to the non-CSE sample. Overall, two-thirds of the placement changes due to running away for the Probation CSE sample were from large and small group homes.

Because medium-sized group homes had the longest lengths of stay and were least likely to have a placement change due to running away among Probation youth, it is worth examining the characteristics of these placements to better understand what they are doing right when working with children and youth who have been CSE. It is possible that medium-sized group homes have struck the right balance between the small and large homes. For example, youth surveyed described the small group homes as having too few activities and services, but the small size allowed them to foster strong relationships with staff. The surveyed youth reported liking large group homes' range of activities, but connections were less common, and drama was abundant. Perhaps the medium-sized group homes provide sufficient resources, staff and activities, while also being intimate enough to develop a community, rapport between the staff and, and strong relationships.

The out-of-county placements for the Probation CSE sample also seem to provide some stability. Specifically, youth tended to have longer placement stays in small out-of-county placements, even compared to medium-sized group homes, and had fewer placement changes due to running away. In contrast, 85% (n = 68) of the placement changes due to running away from an out-of-county placement were from the large out-of-county placements. The CSE sample also changed placement due to running significantly more from the large out-of-county placements compared to the non-CSE sample.

These findings may be influenced by the fact that Probation places a large number of girls and young women who have been CSE in a large group home in Orange County, right across the county border. Youth may feel that, given the proximity, they are more confident running away to return home or to Los Angeles. This may be less true if they are placed in an unfamiliar or remote location where they feel less confident about getting back to where they want to go. Indeed, the large out-of-county placement options proved to be more stable for the DCFS sample. These findings are consistent with the surveys, in which youth noted that it was harder to run away from remote placements, and with the interviews, which showed several youth running away from placement and returning to family or friends nearby.

The findings for group homes with the DCFS samples do not directly parallel the Probation findings. Girls and young women in the DCFS CSE sample stayed for significantly fewer days in small and large group homes compared to the non-CSE sample. They are placed in those placement types at high rates. In small group homes, there were 686 placements of CSE children and youth, as compared to 180 in the non-CSE sample; there were 341 placements of CSE children and youth in large group homes, compared to 85 in the non-CSE sample. Running

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away was listed as the reason for a placement change significantly more frequently for the CSE sample, as compared to the non-CSE sample (109 vs. 19). Girls and young women in the CSE sample are experiencing placement changes as the result of running away at significantly higher rates in the small and large group homes as compared to the non-CSE sample.

The County has relied on out-of-county placements more for youth in the DCFS CSE sample than for the non-CSE sample (239 placements vs. 39 placements). That said, the longest average stays for the DCFS CSE sample were in out-of-county placements, specifically large out-of-county placements, in contrast to Probation. The shortest stays, on average, for both DCFS samples were in medium-sized group homes, also in contrast to the Probation data where medium group homes had the longest lengths of stay. Similar to the Probation sample, the DCFS CSE sample did not run as frequently from medium-sized group homes, despite their placement being shorter in these placements, and they ran more frequently from the small and large group homes.

The results of the group home data for DCFS youth are not as straightforward as the Probation sample findings. For DCFS, it is clear that small and large group homes are contributing to placement instability. However, what is less clear is what the most appropriate placement option is. The administrative data suggest that the out-of-county placements have more placement stability. Yet, in the survey results, youth expressed strong preferences against being placed in remote locations; they also expressed strong preferences for smaller, more home-like settings and tended to rank large group homes the lowest. Youth reported one of the most significant drawbacks of being placed out-of-county or out-of-state is disconnection from community and family. That said, some youth reported that the structure, programming, and staff available at larger facilities gave them the support they needed to get back on track. We also learned from two of the interviews that out-of-county placement can lead to less running and more stability; however, this may also be due to the fact that youth do not have anywhere to run or do not have family to return to, which was the case for Sasha. It is possible that longer stays in out-of-county or out-of-state placements result in increased programming for the youth and greater likelihood of developing relationships. That said, the surveys and interviews suggest that longer stays may be the result of youth feeling less comfortable or able to run away from a remote placement. Further exploring the positive aspects of the out-of-county and out-of-state options and their impact and whether they could be incorporated into local placements may be worthwhile.

## **Specialized Services**

The number of placements and lengths of stay only tell us part of the story—youth in their interviews and through the surveys have indicated that one of the most important factors in their stability and well-being was connection to a supportive, consistent, non-judgmental adult, whether staff in placement, or an outside advocate, attorney, Probation Officer, Social Worker, clinician, or other caring adult. Thus, if a youth maintains consistent contact with a trusted adult, the placement changes indicator alone may not be as indicative of the youth's well-being. One way the County has tried to cultivate such continuity and strong relationships is through connection to specialized services such as the specialized units within Probation and DCFS, specialized courts, and specialized community-based advocates.

To explore the potential impact of these specialized services, this study compared youth identified as CSE who received services to those who did not. It is important to remember that

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we do not know what other services youth in these subsamples may have also received in addition to, or instead of, the specialized services. Many placements provide services as part of their programs. In addition, youth may have been offered or participated in other services as a result of child welfare and juvenile justice involvement, which may or may not be designed to address their exploitation. Finally, we do not have information on the dosage of services (e.g., how frequently youth had contact with their advocate). For the administrative data component, we are simply exploring whether or not girls and young women in the samples who received some variation of the three specialized services have different outcomes related to placement stability. We also asked about youth's experiences with these services in the surveys and interviews.

The Probation CSE sample, included service information for 217 girls and young women. Of the 217, 57.1% had been assigned a specialized Probation Officer, 70.1% were seen in the specialized STAR Court, and 62.7% had a specialized advocate. A majority of Probation-involved CSE youth received one or more services: 45.2% had all three services, 18% had two services, 18.4% had one service, and the remaining 18.4% received no specialized services.

There was a significant difference in cumulative time in out-of-home placement between the Probation CSE subsample receiving specialized services compared to the CSE subsample who did not receive specialized services. Interestingly, the youth in the subsample who received no specialized services spent significantly less cumulative time in care (no specialized services = 1 year; specialized services = 2.2 years) and had fewer total placement changes (4 vs. 6). It is important to remember that we do not have information about the temporal sequence of these events, which may account for the difference. In other words, many of these additional placements may have occurred prior to their involvement in Probation.

Rather than interpreting these group differences as outcomes of the specialized services, we believe they are more indicative of a group that has higher needs and, thus, a higher likelihood of being assigned to the specialized services. In other words, without the services, this same group of youth may have had even more significant instability than youth who are not receiving services; the services, therefore, may be bringing these youth closer to a baseline level more similar to other youth. Again, specialized services are not systematically assigned based on a standardized assessment or referral process (see Chapter 2). Therefore, we have no objective data about the needs of the population that received specialized services before they received the services, and how their outcomes might have changed afterwards. In addition, it is possible that youth who were engaged in specialized services remained in care longer because of collective decisions among the specialized workers, court, youth, and other services providers that they were benefiting from services and the relationships that they had developed, and thus wished to remain in care. This was the case for one of the interviewed youth—Sasha—who decided to stay in placement until she turned 18 because she felt safe there and had no family to return to.

Girls in the Probation CSE subsample who received specialized services remained significantly longer per stay at medium-sized group homes—about 5 months—compared to those who did not receive specialized services, who stayed an average of 3.8 months per stay. There were no other significant differences for the length of stay in other placement types between those receiving specialized services and those who did not receive specialized services among the Probation CSE sample. The earlier finding that medium-sized group homes provide more stability must be viewed in conjunction with this finding: the effect of medium-sized group homes on placement stability appears to be moderated, or partly dependent, on whether youth are

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receiving services. Therefore, the use of specialized services for those in medium-sized group homes, in particular, seems to be most highly associated with placement stability.

There were 244 girls and young women in the DCFS CSE sample with varying levels of access to specialized services. Of the 244, 3.3% had a specialized Social Worker, 29.9% were seen in the specialized DREAM Court, and 44.7% percent had a specialized advocate. As compared to the Probation sample, fewer youth in the DCFS sample had access to one or more specialized services: 0.4% had all three services, 20.1% had two services, 36.5% had one service, and the remaining 43% received no specialized services.

Of note, the percentage of children and youth in the CSE sample without services is much higher than in the Probation CSE sample. This is likely due to the fact that DCFS has been providing these specialized services for much less time—Probation established its specialized unit and the STAR Court in 2012, while DCFS opened its specialized unit and DREAM Court in 2016. As with Probation, all three of these specialized services had relatively limited capacity early on and have slowly expanded over the years. The specialized advocates had been serving youth through Probation for several years, but then had to quickly ramp up and expand to meet the needs of youth in DCFS in addition to Probation.

There were no significant differences in the cumulative time in placements or the number of placement changes for the DCFS CSE subsamples with specialized services and without services. There was a significant difference between the CSE subsample receiving specialized services compared to the CSE subsample who did not receive specialized services in the length of stay, on average, at Foster Family Agency (FFA) homes. Specifically, the CSE subsample who received specialized services stayed significantly longer at FFA homes (mean per stay = 191 days or 6.4 months) compared to those who did not receive specialized services (mean per stay = 116 days or 3.9 months). As noted, FFA homes are family foster homes; youth at these homes also have an extra Social Worker, in addition to their primary Social Worker. This is particularly interesting given what we know about the preference for youth being in the most home-like environment. It demonstrates that if we can place youth in a foster family home through an FFA, where there are additional supports already in place, and DCFS provides specialized services, CSE children and youth are staying for significantly longer. There were no other significant differences for the length of stay in other placement types between those receiving specialized services and those not receiving specialized services.

Finally, youth in the surveys and interviews indicated that specialized services and the connections they are able to make with their advocates, Probation Officers and judicial officers made a tremendous impact. They felt cared for, heard, and also believed they had potential. Some youth expressed that they wished the placement staff had training and treated them more like the specialized service providers. Although progress is made through the specialized services, it may be undone by the placements and staff. Thus, the positive attributes of these specialized services should be expanded and replicated, while at the same time combatting the damage that inappropriate or unstable placements can have.

### **Integrated Discussion and Summary of Survey Results**

In relation to placements, the survey results indicate that all girls and young women tend to prefer unlocked placements (98% non-CSE; 87% CSE). Youth also reported preferring local placements that were closer to home. Still, CSE children and youth were more likely to rank out-of-state placements higher in preference compared to non-CSE girls and young women. CSE

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girls and young women stated a benefit of out-of-state placements was that they were less likely to AWOL. In contrast, they also stated it was harder to adjust to out-of-state placements and hard to be far from family. To contextualize these responses, it is important to recall that only 16% of youth reported ever having been in an out-of-state or out-of-county placement; thus, some girls' responses, both CSE and non-CSE, were not based on experience with being at an out-of-state placement.

The majority of CSE girls and young women also reported not liking CSEC-only placements. While some found them useful because it made it easier to relate to others at placement, youth reported that they focused too heavily on issues related to CSE, rather than other needs and interests of the youth; in addition, youth reported challenges with recruitment and pressure to AWOL in CSEC-only placements. However, not all youth experienced living in CSEC-only placements so their opinions reflect perceptions of what these placements might be like rather than actual experience.

Coupled with the interviews, youth seemed to benefit from integrated placements; however, for Skylar, an integrated placement precipitated her exploitation. It is likely that integrated placements allow for the youth to feel less labeled and be seen more holistically. It may also provide more prosocial opportunities or relationships that can encourage a youth to, as Jasmine said, "be still" and not run. The systems must weigh whether to place a youth in an integrated or CSE-only placement given the various positive and negative attributes of each placement, including the risk involved in potential recruitment efforts. It is incumbent on the agencies to ensure that wherever youth are placed, the staff are trained and prepared to work with CSE children and youth, a point highlighted by the girls and young women in the interviews and surveys.

CSE girls had variable responses about their preferred placement types. When asked their favorite placement type, they nearly equally chose small (26%) and large (23%) group homes, which is interesting given these are the types of group homes they are most frequently running from. Yet, when asked to rank small group homes, large group homes, and foster homes in order of preference, they equally ranked small group homes and foster homes. This apparent discrepancy seems to be due to the fact that their response options were different for these two questions and this impacted how they ranked their options.

The girls and young women surveyed who have been CSE reported running significantly more often than youth without histories of exploitation. Yet for those CSE and non-CSE girls who reported running, their behaviors were similar, including from where they first ran, whether they ran from a placement, and whether they ran with someone else or alone. It is possible that youth who were not identified as CSE, but had similar running behaviors, are at-risk for exploitation or have been exploited but never identified and may need CSE prevention services. Also of note, the most common reasons for running away the first time was because of something going on at home (e.g., abuse, not getting along with family) or not wanting to be there (29% and 29% respectively). This indicates that although CSE children and youth run more, all girls who run may need similar supports or interventions.

When asked what is most important about placements, children and youth who have experienced CSE found all response options (i.e., staff, location, placement type, and services) to be nearly equally important. With regard to what might make placements better, those girls and young women discussed the need to increase staff training and improve their empathy. For instance, many girls stated that staff need training on CSE issues in order to be less judgmental and increase rapport and engagement. Girls also reported needing more money, better food, more



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outings and activities, better and more immediate therapeutic services, more clothes, and more home passes.

CSE girls and young women found counseling in placements helpful but its usefulness was diminished when the counselors were inconsistent or changed around too much. In addition, youth found groups to be difficult to engage in and most seemed to prefer individual therapy. This paralleled the findings in the interviews—young women recognized and noted the value in the consistency of their community-based advocates and specialized Probation Officers. Unfortunately, many counselors are specific to certain placements, which means that when youth run or experience a change in placement, they also leave behind that counselor and any trust and rapport that may have been established. The County should consider ways in which counselors, similar to advocates, Social Workers, and Probation Officers, can remain consistent in youth's lives despite placement changes.

Most CSE children and youth surveyed found the specialized services provided by both Probation and DCFS helpful. For each service, girls discussed different ways in which that service supported them. While their positive responses may be somewhat inflated because some youth responded to the survey with their specialized Social Worker, Probation Officer, or advocate nearby, the consistently positive responses to this question indicate that youth feel they are benefitting from these services. It is important to note that youth had a more positive response to specialized courts and Probation Officers than to the specialized DCFS Social Workers. This may be due to the fact that DCFS has not been providing these services for as long and are still scaling them up. Given these findings, it may be in DCFS's best interest to continue to work with Probation to replicate and adapt their practices for the DCFS population. For example, CTU Probation Officers are required to be in contact with their clients more frequently than the specialized Social Workers. Overall, though, these findings are extremely encouraging and indicate a need to continue and, perhaps, broaden these services for all CSE children and youth as well as a need to consider an outcome evaluation of service receipt.

### **Integrated Discussion and Summary of Case Narratives**

The case narratives reveal significant trauma histories among all youth as well as significant experiences with grief and loss. It is notable that for some youth, their entry into the system and/or exploitation was directly preceded by an especially traumatic event—such as a loss of a parent. For others, it was the culmination of a lifetime of trauma. For two of the youth interviewed, it was both. For instance, Jasmine and Latisha both experienced abuse and neglect from birth and throughout their childhoods; then, in early adolescence, they each became involved in exploitation just months after losing parents. Latisha, in retrospect, noted that she was angry, but that she now recognizes that she was actually grieving her mother's death.

All of the young women interviewed shared significant involvement in the child welfare system prior to their exploitation, one with 48 allegations of child abuse or neglect, and another with 50 allegations, to DCFS. The comparisons between the case files and the interviews also highlighted that DCFS found many allegations of abuse or neglect to be unsubstantiated even though the youth interviewed described violence, neglect, and other issues in their homes. The case files did, at points, note when voluntary services were offered, but there was little follow-up indicated in the records. Research has shown that those who are referred for abuse or neglect, regardless of whether the allegation is substantiated, have the same risk factors for future

maltreatment.<sup>72</sup> This is one reason that services can be put in place even when an allegation is not substantiated. Some scholars have even gone so far as suggesting abandoning the use of substantiated allegations, since all youth who are reported have similar risk for future maltreatment.<sup>73</sup> In addition, for several of the youth interviewed in this study (Skylar, Jasmine, and Jada), parents and caregivers reported not knowing how to handle their children or not wanting them in their homes, which led to out-of-home placement either through DCFS or Probation. We recommend, rather, that prevention services become a larger focus for DCFS, particularly in cases where a youth has other risk factors for exploitation. And in addition to offering these services, it may be helpful to explore ways to encourage parents and caregivers to seek out, participate in, and engage in these services before seeking law enforcement intervention or out-of-home placement for their children, even when the services are voluntary. This may require an analysis of the level of engagement services, and why, if they are low, families choose not to engage (e.g. not culturally appropriate, fear or distrust of the system, not available at needed times etc.). It may be prudent for DCFS to begin using a standardized risk assessment for CSE as several now exist and, at least two, have been validated.<sup>74</sup>

These experiences, highlighted in the interviews, point to the need to better understand the root of youth behavior by using a trauma lens. Specifically, there is a need for trauma-specific assessment measures in order for agencies to better recognize trauma reactions and refer to specialized trauma services. The need for earlier referrals to trauma-specific services is highlighted in Sasha's case and interview. It was not until Sasha was in an out-of-state placement that she was able to receive evidence-based trauma services and begin to process and recover from her victimization and trauma.

All the interviews highlight the need to identify and support strengths and resiliencies within and around each youth. For many youth, these supports came from the specialized services. Nearly all youth spoke fondly of their advocates and other youth relied on their specialized Probation Officers. For instance, Skylar talked about how important her specialized Probation Officer was and how she felt truly cared for by her; Sasha found support from her community-based advocate appointed through the STAR Court; and Latisha felt STAR Court was like a family. Having these specialized services and individuals in the youths' lives is particularly important given the profound impact of abandonment many youth experienced prior to exploitation. Jasmine described these feelings of abandonment and how her trafficker preyed on those vulnerabilities. Because all youth require supportive adults in their lives, it is important that our systems integrate those people and make them available to youth. These individuals may include advocates, specialized Social Workers, specialized Probation Officers, and other caring adults, to buffer against the vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.

In addition to the specialized supports, many of the young women interviewed described the importance of maintaining connections to their families. For some, there was significant resistance to being placed far away—one youth, Sasha, indicated that she sabotaged interviews

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<sup>72</sup> Kohl, P. L., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2009). Time to leave substantiation behind: Findings from a national probability study. *Child Maltreatment*, 14, 17–26. DOI:10.1177/1077559508326030

<sup>73</sup> Id.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., Basson, D. (2017). Validation of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT). West Coast Children's Clinic; and Dank, M. et al. (2017). Pretesting a Human Trafficking Screening Tool in the Child Welfare and Runaway and Homeless Youth Systems. Urban Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/93596/pretesting\\_tool\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/93596/pretesting_tool_1.pdf).

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so that she would not be placed out-of-state, as she wanted to be closer to her family members. This was further evidenced by the importance that youth placed on having cell phones and home passes, which allowed them to maintain connections to family, especially when phones and passes were up front and did not have to be earned with good behavior.

The case narratives also highlight the varying experiences and perceptions of different placements for youth. All youth are different and perceive and experience placements based on a range of variables. The interviews show the importance of making placement decisions based on the unique needs and risk levels of each youth. For instance, Skylar and Sasha both clearly expressed that they were placed in homes with higher-risk youth that negatively influenced them. It is important that agencies use risk and needs assessments when placing youth, similar to how Probation youth are placed in camps.

Other youth described the role of education in their lives and how it can be affected by placement decisions. For Latisha, changing schools to a place she felt “singled out” was difficult and was ultimately detrimental to her connectedness and ability to thrive in an educational setting. Latisha even needed the help of an educational advocate to secure a more appropriate school. And for Jasmine, school was an anchor—something that helped ground her and take her mind off the challenges she faced. Ensuring that youth have continued access to education if and when they transition from home or between placements, and that they have educational services and supports throughout their system involvement, are critical components of attending to the whole youth. These and other supports can be instrumental in helping children and youth move beyond their exploitation and to thrive.

Importantly, the interviews also uncover how some of the legislative changes—namely decriminalization of “prostitution” for minors—are being implemented locally. Jasmine’s story illustrates the true impact of the decriminalization in California. When Jasmine described being picked up by Vice, she was adamant with the interviewer that she had never been arrested and wanted to be clear that she had never been involved in Probation. Rather, she experienced an alternative response—meeting her advocate and Social Worker the night she was identified, and being connected with services and supports rather than being put in juvenile hall. In contrast, after Jada was the victim of multiple rapes, the responding officer had nowhere to take her because she was not welcome at home and had a history of running away from placement. The officers ended up bringing her to juvenile hall, where she was detained based on an open bench warrant. Jada’s case illustrates that there is still significant work to be done to support victims of sexual violence.

### **Running in Context: Lessons to Learn**

Much of the data in this study focuses on the prevalence of children and youth, especially those who have been CSE, running away from home and care. When interpreting the findings related to running away and being AWOL, it is important to avoid attributing change in placement or running away to a child’s desire to return to exploitation; rather, we should consider whether a particular placement was a good fit for the youth. For example, short stays at multiple placements may be due to the lack of specific services to address the needs of an individual youth, which may lead to re-placement. Additionally, as the interview and survey data tell us, many youth experience group homes, especially large group homes, as chaotic and unsafe, or feel judged by the staff or other youth, making them less likely to engage and remain for long periods. Others crave the connection to their families and communities from which they

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have been removed, and may leave placement to return to those relationships. Running may also be a coping mechanism or may be something a youth chooses to do because it brings some sense of control to a life in which they have limited control. More emphasis ought to be placed on how to tailor placements and services to meet youths' needs so that they do not feel like they have to, or want to, run. This can be done by identifying youths' self-determined needs and interests, which may reduce their desire to run as a way to exert control or agency over their own lives.

Youth surveyed in this study shared that they like that larger group homes have more activities and programming, but they also lack more intensive involvement and the ability to develop relationships. As noted, it is possible that medium-sized group homes have struck the right balance between these various components, accounting for the longer length of stay and lower prevalence of running away among Probation youth. Given the insight provided by the youth in the interviews and surveys, it is evident that more training is needed, especially for placement staff, and a greater emphasis should be placed on relationship building and continuity in care.

The youth narratives presented here also demonstrated that youth may run away because they view it as a means of survival or a way to reduce their own risk and exposure to harm. Youth report that traffickers threaten them and their families if they do not return when they are able. And traffickers expect them to return if they are not in locked facilities. Additionally, traffickers often require youth to bring additional youth with them when they run to make more money. This may mean that a youth engaged in recruiting is faced with an impossible choice: recruit another youth to stay in favor with the trafficker and obtain the benefit of a lower quota, therefore facing less exposure to violent purchasers and sexually transmitted infections, or decline to recruit and face more violence and exploitation from traffickers and buyers.

Another important consideration is what happens to youth when they do run. Beyond running to their traffickers, youth also reported running from placement to go home. Of girls and young women surveyed, 38% reported they at least sometimes ran home, and 12% reported they always went home. This finding is further grounded in youth survey and interview responses indicating they ran because they wanted to maintain familial connections. Some even commented on their like and dislike of group homes based on whether they got passes to see family.

Additionally, the higher rate of re-placements due to running may be due to the fact that many placements do not accept a youth back once they have run, precluding the maintenance of potentially positive relationships between staff at placement and youth. In other words, even if a youth runs, they may return in the hopes of reconnecting with services or people with whom they related; if placements do not accept them back, we miss an opportunity to support and re-engage the youth. Caregivers in smaller settings, like foster homes or foster family agency homes, may be more likely to welcome youth back when they run away because they may have had the opportunity to build trusting relationships with the youth. This may explain the far lower number of placement changes due to running away from these settings.

Girls and young women who have been exploited are changing placements due to running away at a proportionally similar rate in both Probation and DCFS (Probation: 84.4% vs. DCFS: 81.6%). Many feared that decriminalization would result in less control over the youth. But the data demonstrate that even with the restrictions and consequences that Probation can impose, youth are still frequently running. In other words, the perceived benefits of Probation's supervision in keeping a youth safe and in a placement—more consequences and the threat of detention—are not borne out in the data. And further emphasis may need to be placed on how we

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can encourage youth to stay, or in Jasmine’s words “be still,” by fostering connections and supports, while also safeguarding against threats from traffickers. If the systems and providers are unable to fill the role the traffickers are playing, youth will continue to run away.

Public agencies and services providers often blame youth for running away and label them hard to place. The systems and providers less frequently analyze what they might have done differently to make placements more comfortable or inviting for youth. Changes in the law through the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act require systems to gather information about what might have caused a youth to leave a placement, and to use that information to inform subsequent placement decisions. Systems and agencies are encouraged to think creatively about how to engage youth to obtain the feedback, and how to integrate it into services and placement decisions. For example, input from youth in this study suggested that AWOLs might be decreased by allowing more home passes, and developing other ways to connect birth or guardian families to youth in placement such that the youth do not feel a need to runaway to see their families.

Additionally, asking youth prior to, or at entrance to, placement what they need, and then seeking ongoing feedback about how they are doing once in placement, may help to reduce the likelihood a youth will run. Recent legislation and some of the practices employed by the specialized courts and specialized Probation Officers and Social Workers encourage youth to be involved in decision making. These efforts have been well-received by the girls and young women we interviewed and surveyed; they regularly reported the importance of being heard and being able to provide feedback and input during decision making processes, especially regarding placement.

Further, labeling youth who have been CSE as “CSEC” or other labels may result in differential treatment by agencies and staff. For example, staff may expect a young girl who has been exploited to run or may believe that she wants to return to her trafficker so they refrain from making an effort to establish a relationship. Alternatively, staff may impose added restrictions on youth who have been exploited. The absence of strong relationships or inconsistency in application of rules may contribute to a youth’s desire to run away.

Ultimately these are kids. They have goals, aspirations, interests, and hobbies. They also have families, both birth and chosen, and friends. As we think about how to support youth and their families and/or caregivers, we must hold all of these parts of them at the forefront of our minds rather than solely focusing on the fact that they have been commercially sexually exploited. The girls and young women communicated that they are more than their exploitation. To effectively serve them we must ensure that all of the decisions regarding services, placements, and supports take the whole youth into account. The youth expressed frustration when staff and public agency staff did not expect more of them and instead assumed the worst. All of the youth we interviewed clearly articulated their hopes, goals and dreams. It is the responsibility of systems and community supports to help youth achieve them.

### **Future Directions and Limitations**

There are several limitations to the current study and areas that call for a deeper investigation and analysis. We have highlighted many of these points and ideas throughout the discussion sections. Here we expand briefly on a few of those points.

First and foremost, this study is Los Angeles-based, which limits our ability to generalize to other jurisdictions or localities. However, Los Angeles is a hub for commercial sexual

exploitation of children and youth and, thus, allows for a deeper and more comprehensive look at the problem. In addition, the study is specific only to those who are involved in either the child welfare or juvenile justice systems *and* who have been placed in out-of-home care. This was the directive by the Board given their interest in placement stability, but this is a very specific population. There are exploited youth or youth at-risk for exploitation who are at home and have never experienced placement. Given that many CSE children and youth are at home, it would be interesting to further explore the impact of specialized services on this broader population, especially given the preference to keep youth at home with their families.

The service receipt data should be interpreted with caution, as youth are not systematically assigned to services. This may be one reason that the specialized services may not appear to affect the length of stay or reduce the number of placement changes for more youth. Rather, it may be that youth assigned to the services have greater overall need. In addition, we did not have true outcome data as no standardized tools are in place to assess the youth both before and after receipt of services to understand the impact of services. Instead, we worked with what was available – time in care per stay – which is an imperfect variable, as described above. This may also mean that without the services this group would have fared even worse. County agencies would benefit from including outcome variables into their data collection processes or pursuing a formal outcome evaluation that would include a range of indicators related to the hypothesized impact of services. The current study was limited by only being able to look at tangentially related variables rather than outcomes variables that were measured longitudinally.

Additionally, this study has focused exclusively on girls and young women because that is the majority of young people who have been identified as CSE to date in Los Angeles County. That said, boys and young men, transgender youth, and gender non-conforming youth, are also victims of sexual exploitation; these young people may be falling through the cracks because of the focus on girls. More needs to be done to learn more about ways to effectively identify and serve these subpopulations of youth.

In expanding on the current study, agencies may be interested in following up on the DCFS sample once they begin aging out of the system to see if their situations stabilize and whether their cases close, or whether they continue to receive extended foster care. The DCFS sample is, on average, 15 years old, which leaves a follow-up window of at least three years. Additionally, it might be of interest to look at the level of crossover or dual involvement and contact among the Probation sample. This would be relatively simple by exploring the child welfare history of the Probation youth. Further, since the Probation youth are 18 on average at the time of the data pull, there may be ways to explore whether these youth accessed extended foster care and/or had contact with the adult criminal justice system.

Another future direction for research is to look at the level of dual-involvement among CSE children and youth in order to identify ways to reduce crossover, racial disparities, and ways to maximize resources when youth are serviced by two agencies. The 241.1 Protocol used in Los Angeles County<sup>75</sup> has been effective in bringing numerous stakeholders together in the best interest of the youth. As seen in the case file reviews, the 241.1 MDT assessments provided the most robust information on the youth's needs. This type of assessment protocol may be adapted and replicated for children and youth who have experienced CSE.

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<sup>75</sup> See Herz, D. (2016). A Summary of Findings for the Los Angeles County 241.1 Multidisciplinary Team: Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. California State University, Los Angeles. Retrieved from <http://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/node/9>.

## CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The recommendations below are based on the results of our three sources of data: surveys of DCFS and Probation-involved youth, in-depth interviews and case file reviews of six youth, and analyses of Probation and DCFS administrative data.

It is important to recognize that the state of California, Los Angeles County, and other jurisdictions, have already taken significant steps toward the goals that these recommendations aim to achieve. Specifically, understanding the complex histories, characteristics, needs and strengths of children and youth that have been or are at high risk of being commercially sexually exploited, and providing them with supports and services to help them live full, safe, and healthy lives. Some of these recommendations draw from what Los Angeles is already doing that we know is working well and should be expanded; others align with recent state and local initiatives, such as implementation of the Core Practice Model for child welfare and mental health systems,<sup>76</sup> and the Harm Reduction Series in development by the California Department of Social Services' Child Trafficking Response Unit.<sup>77</sup> However, the data in this study tell us, as do the youth themselves, that there is more that we, as individuals and as collective state and local systems and communities, can and should be doing to more effectively connect with and serve those who experience CSE.

1. **Recognize and Address the Impact of Trauma:** As the findings of this study indicate, many girls and young women who have been CSE in Los Angeles County have experienced significant trauma, including childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and traumatic loss, prior to their exploitation. These traumatic events increase youths' vulnerabilities to exploitation, decrease their ability to cope with other life stressors in healthy ways, and impact their behavior, placement stability, and willingness or ability to engage with providers and services. However, there are no standardized assessments or measures for traumatic stress integrated into DCFS's or Probation's data systems. It is possible that an assessment or screening tool is used at some level of each agency's practice, but it is not standard practice, even for sexually exploited youth. Screening and assessment for traumatic stress is essential in identifying the service needs of youth and, specifically, referring youth to evidence-based trauma-focused treatment.<sup>78</sup> Agencies must remember that being "trauma-informed" does not mean simply understanding trauma or being trained on trauma. While that is a major component of a trauma-informed system or agency, agencies must also have specific practices and policies in place that promote and support the use of evidence-based, trauma-specific treatment.

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<sup>76</sup> See Core Practice Model Guide, available at <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/res/pdf/CorePracticeModelGuide.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> Supra note 32, see CDSS ACIN I-59-18, Introduction to the Harm Reduction Strategies Series Regarding Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, available at [http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACIN/2018/I-59\\_18.pdf](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACIN/2018/I-59_18.pdf).

<sup>78</sup> Dierkhising, C. B. & Branson, C. E. (2016). Looking forward: A research and policy agenda for creating trauma-informed juvenile justice systems. *Journal of Juvenile Justice*, 5(1), 14-30.

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Providing trauma-informed services to children and youth who have experienced CSE also means addressing the whole youth and the multi-faceted needs associated with trauma exposure and traumatic stress reactions, which can mean providing health and mental health services, education support, substance use treatment, and assistance with pregnancy and/or parenting, among other supports. It also requires identifying and fostering youths' strengths, interests and sources of resilience to help them to move through and beyond their trauma. Trauma-informed practices should be employed throughout all programs and services, especially in placements, for children and youth who are CSE, and should incorporate:

- The recognition that exploitation is one piece of a child or youth's trauma history and experiences, and that they may not consider it their primary area of concern or need;
- An understanding that system involvement can exacerbate trauma symptoms among children, youth, and their families;
- Trauma-specific screening and assessment tools to identify trauma triggers, traumatic stress reactions, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in order to refer to appropriate treatment and increase the use of adaptive coping strategies;
- Utilization of, and referral to, evidence-based trauma-specific interventions that include psychoeducation, self-regulation skills, adaptive coping skills, safety skills, and, when appropriate, trauma processing;
- Safety planning at regular intervals and upon a triggering event (ideally at each placement) with youth in order to identify and understand trauma triggers and brainstorm adaptive coping skills for when youth are triggered;
- Recognition of additional sources of historical and systemic trauma, such as racial inequities and discrimination, that disproportionately impact girls and young women who are exploited and are otherwise system-involved, which may include training on implicit biases;
- Understanding of birth-parent trauma and intergenerational trauma that may impact the family system and caregiving, which often means that the youth's family needs services as much as the youth;
- Understanding of the manifestations of trauma when responding to behaviors and making decisions about service needs and placements. In other words, being able to recognize trauma reaction as distinct from behavioral outbursts or "acting out" in order to respond appropriately and in a way that promotes self-regulation;
- Designing systems, policies, and practices to reduce potential re-traumatization (e.g., information sharing so youth do not have to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences, creating soft rooms for interviews, not labeling or "otherizing" children and youth who have been exploited, separating youth from peers in placement who may be triggering, and designing protocols to support youth through traumatic events, like testifying against their traffickers)
- Supporting staff and providers to reduce the impact of vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress, and to decrease compassion fatigue while increasing compassion satisfaction. It cannot be overemphasized that this is extremely taxing



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and overwhelming work, and those who work with children and youth who are at risk of or who have been CSE should receive regular and intensive support from their agencies/administrators to ensure that they are professionally ready and psychologically, spiritually, and physically healthy to serve this population.

**2. Promote Consistent, Healthy Relationships: Both Through an Expansion of Services and Connection to Other Caring Adults and Peers:**

Steady, healthy, supportive relationships with trusting adults and peers are critical components of effective programs and services with children and youth who have been CSE. The children and youth in this study routinely reported that their close, consistent relationship with at least one caring adult—often a member of their specialized team—was the primary factor that helped them to move from exploitation to safety and stability. They also reported being more likely to leave a placement when they had no connections to staff there. At the core, children and youth want to feel genuinely cared for and loved. Because many children and youth who have been CSE are bonded to their traffickers and depend on them for love and care, or are engaging in survival sex to meet their needs, adults working with these children and youth have an opportunity to demonstrate that those needs can be fulfilled in healthy, safe ways. Ensuring consistency in those relationships, especially through transitions and challenges, also shows that that love and care is not temporary or conditional. Additionally, while adolescence is typically a time when peer relationships are especially important, it is also the period in which many youth are exposed to CSE for the first time. Thus, peer relationships can be detrimental if they include exposure or recruitment to exploitation, but can also provide a source of positive support and community. Some examples of ways to promote positive, healthy, consistent relationships include, but are not limited to:

- Expanding the capacity of the specialized services to serve all children and youth who have been CSE, specifically:
  - i. Specialized case management/supervision/social work services, that involve consistent staffing from case filing to closure, more frequent and meaningful interactions with children and youth, and lower caseloads to allow for more engagement;
  - ii. Specialized, community-based advocacy, including survivor advocates, that provides around-the-clock support that supplements the public agency support;
  - iii. Specialized courts, with dedicated and specially trained judges and other court personnel (e.g., attorneys, court reports, bailiffs), so that children and youth who are interested in accessing a specialized calendar are able, when appropriate;
- Improving consistency in staffing assignments (i.e., Probation Officers, case managers, Social Workers) and communication between team members working with a youth to ensure continuity when a youth moves in and out of care, or between placements and services;

- Sharing lessons Probation’s CTU has learned and encouraging the replication of practices with DCFS and other community partners regarding:
  - i. Supervision practices with the youth, including requirements to be in more regular contact with the youth on their caseloads and maintain consistency throughout the youth’s open case;
  - ii. Supervision practices for staff, including holding a weekly supervision meeting with all staff to build team rapport and support one another in this difficult work;
- Maintaining connection to family, broadly defined (e.g., non-relative extended family members), and other natural supports, when appropriate, even when the youth is not placed with them, such as by promoting visitation and passes;
- Facilitating connection to adults and activities to build community and mentoring opportunities around shared recreational, spiritual, or career goals and interests;
- Promoting healthy relationships among peers that do not exclusively center on their shared experience of exploitation; and
- Recognizing that anyone interacting with youth may become the trusted adult that a child chooses, and that that person should be prepared to maintain consistency and support while the youth needs it.

3. **Center and Promote the Child and Youth’s Perspective:** Many children and youth involved in public systems, especially those who have been CSE, feel disempowered and that they lack agency. They may have been told, either implicitly or explicitly, that they are not important, that what they want or need does not matter, and that someone else is in control of what happens to them, their bodies, and their lives. They are also frequently made to feel that they have done something wrong, even when they have been victimized. The young people in our study routinely reported the benefit of being included and feeling heard in decisions that affect their lives. Balanced, honest, and developmentally-appropriate discussions with children and youth will promote transparency and trust between adults and children and youth, and help restore agency and a sense of self. Specific strategies should include:

- Facilitating inclusion of youth voice, choice, and meaningful participation in multi-disciplinary team meetings, court proceedings, and other decision-making points, such as creating opportunities for youth to directly share their perspectives (i.e., talking to the judge directly in court or writing a letter to be read aloud), or identifying an individual, such as a community-based advocate, whose clearly-defined role is to represent the youth’s perspectives;
- Explaining to children and youth the reasoning behind decisions that do not align with their expressed preferences. This may include discussions about risk and safety issues using the lens of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard<sup>79</sup> and

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<sup>79</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 362.05(c)(1): A state standard that defines the basic goals a parental entity or guardian should have for a child in order to make decisions and provide a living environment that is in the best interest of the child.

harm reduction, and seeking to identify alternative ways in which their preferences can be honored;

- Conducting focus groups on an ongoing basis with children and youth to understand current needs and trends related to CSE, and problems or unaddressed needs related to specific placements, service providers, and staff;
- Establishing a mechanism to gather feedback from individual children and youth on an ongoing and/or real-time basis about what services, placements, and individual providers/staff are helpful, what other services and supports they may need, and how the adults and systems working with them can better support them to achieve their goals and interests; and
- Providing access to privileges (e.g. cell phone usage, home passes) up front. This approach, rather than a prolonged, rewards-based system where a youth has to earn privileges, demonstrates an initial trust of the youth and can go a long way in building rapport. This initial trust should be coupled with appropriate and clear parameters and rule-setting. For example, placements can provide home passes on the first day of placement and set conditions of the home passes, including hours youth can be gone, where they can go, and individuals they should avoid associating with. Under this approach, if the rules are not adhered to, then the home pass privilege is taken away until trust is earned.

4. **Require Comprehensive Training and Staff Supports:** A main finding of our research is that children and youth respond more positively and are more engaged with public agency workers, service providers, families and caregivers, community partners and other individuals who understand the dynamics of CSE and common issues facing children and youth who have been CSE, while at the same time recognizing and supporting the whole youth beyond their experiences with exploitation and without judgment. All individuals working with these children and youth should be trained on these topics, as well as promising practices and approaches for engaging this population. Recognizing that this may require a dramatic shift in mindsets and approaches to working with children and youth who have been exploited, and to ensure that training translates into positive, sustainable practices, trainings should be provided on a regular basis, in a variety of modalities, with an emphasis on interactive experiences and real-life examples. To reduce staff turnover, staff must also be supported and provided with regular, comprehensive coaching and supervision, as well as self-care opportunities. At a minimum, staff should receive training and support around the following:

- Understanding risk factors for and forms of CSE;
- Reducing “otherizing,” labeling, and judgment of children and youth who have experienced exploitation by dispelling common myths and misconceptions about CSE and those who have been exploited, and broadening staff focus to the whole youth instead of exclusively their exploitation;
- Understanding the prevalence and impact of trauma on children and youth, including the manifestations of trauma in their behavior, stability, wellbeing, coping, and ability or desire to engage in services;

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- Utilizing appropriate ways of assessing and responding to trauma-related symptoms and behaviors;
  - Methods for preventing CSE and counteracting recruitment strategies, such as understanding traffickers' pressure on exploited youth to recruit others within placements;
  - Supporting youth to remain in placement or at home, and decreasing runaway episodes or AWOLs by understanding and addressing underlying needs that lead children and youth to run from home or placement, consistent with federal requirements from the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act;
  - Employing harm reduction strategies, which prioritize long-term safety through ongoing safety planning; recognizing lasting change is not immediate, trust building takes time, and returning to exploitive situations is a part of the recovery process; and
  - Vicarious trauma, self care, and ways to reduce burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and attrition.

- 5. Establish Multidisciplinary Collaboration:** This study showed that many children and youth who have been CSE have interacted with multiple systems—including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, education and school discipline—often both before and after their exploitation. They are also whole people, of which exploitation may be one part. Effectively addressing their holistic needs and supporting them to achieve their goals, then, requires collaboration among those multiple systems, agencies, community partners, caregivers and families, when appropriate, and, most importantly, youth themselves. Children and youth must be able to share their perspectives on decisions impacting their lives. The collaboration should ensure that all perspectives, including the child's or youth's, have been considered, and also that the child or youth has a team of adults upon whom they can call and rely. Specific strategies should include:
- Involving public agencies beyond child welfare and Probation, recognizing that the other public system and partners, such as mental health, public health, and education, play an integral role in fulfilling the myriad of needs of children and youth who have been exploited;
  - Collaboration across agencies to establish a common philosophical approach to serving and supporting children and youth who have experienced CSE;
  - Establishing multidisciplinary teams to (1) monitor broader trends and establish cross-disciplinary collaboration and coordination on a larger scale, and (2) conduct case planning and monitoring of an individual child's or youth's case, which may be held in a Child and Family Team (CFT) setting; and
  - Utilizing multidisciplinary assessment structures, like the 241.1 assessment, to understand the totality of a youth's needs and strengths and make decisions on services and supports based on those findings.

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**6. Build Capacity in the Placement Types That Provide More Stability for Youth with an Emphasis on the Elements Preferred by Youth:**

Placement decisions should be based on an individual child's needs and preferences, as well as which placement types are associated with more stability for youth with certain types of needs. While this study identified a number of trends, both with respect to what types of placements and services youth tended to prefer and dislike, it also highlighted that there are benefits and drawbacks to each type of placement for both the Probation and DCFS samples. Given the nuance, some of the key findings are restated below for ease in reference.

- For Probation-involved youth who have been sexually exploited, the medium-sized group homes seem to provide the most stability, especially when coupled with specialized services. These placement options seem to strike a balance between the benefits and challenges of the small and large group homes.
- For DCFS-involved youth who have been sexually exploited, FFA certified homes seem to provide more stability, especially when coupled with specialized services. For DCFS youth, there was also less placement stability associated with large and small group homes in terms of placement changes.
- Further exploration of DCFS-involved youth's experience of medium-sized group homes is needed because this placement type was used less frequently among the DCFS sample. For DCFS youth, this placement option had low rates of placement changes due to running away but had short lengths of stay, about two months.

Based on these findings and to meet these varied needs, resources should be devoted to:

- Developing an array of placement and service options for youth that have experienced exploitation, which can address their holistic needs;
- Prioritizing the most home-like setting possible when removal from the home is required;
- Reducing reliance on large group homes, in favor of an array of placement options of different sizes with more small (6 bed) and medium (7-23 bed) options and locations;
- Establishing safe, physical settings and coupling them with consistent, supported, and well-trained staff;
- Offering a range of services and activities internally that complement the services children and youth receive from public agencies and community-based organizations;
- Collecting additional information about placements that appear, based on the findings, to provide more stability for children and youth, such as medium group homes, and apply lessons learned to other placements; and
- Developing policies and practices for safety planning when youth run from care, including encouraging placements to hold beds open and/or accept youth back into the placement if and when they return from running away.

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## 7. **Address Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality and Provide Culturally Appropriate Services:**

The findings of this study starkly present the severe racial disproportionality of African American youth in the population of young people who have been CSE, which is higher than both the general population, as well as the population of young people involved in the foster care system. It also highlights the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latinx youth in the CSE sample, as compared to the general and foster care populations. Because of the complex interaction of exploitation and other systemic racial and ethnic disparities, we recommend that agencies hold a summit with researchers and academics with expertise on this topic, as well as other key stakeholders, such as youth, families, and community-based service and placement providers, and schools, to discuss existing County strategies for addressing racial disparities and providing culturally appropriate services, their effectiveness, and potential opportunities for expansion to address CSE specifically. Issues to consider include:

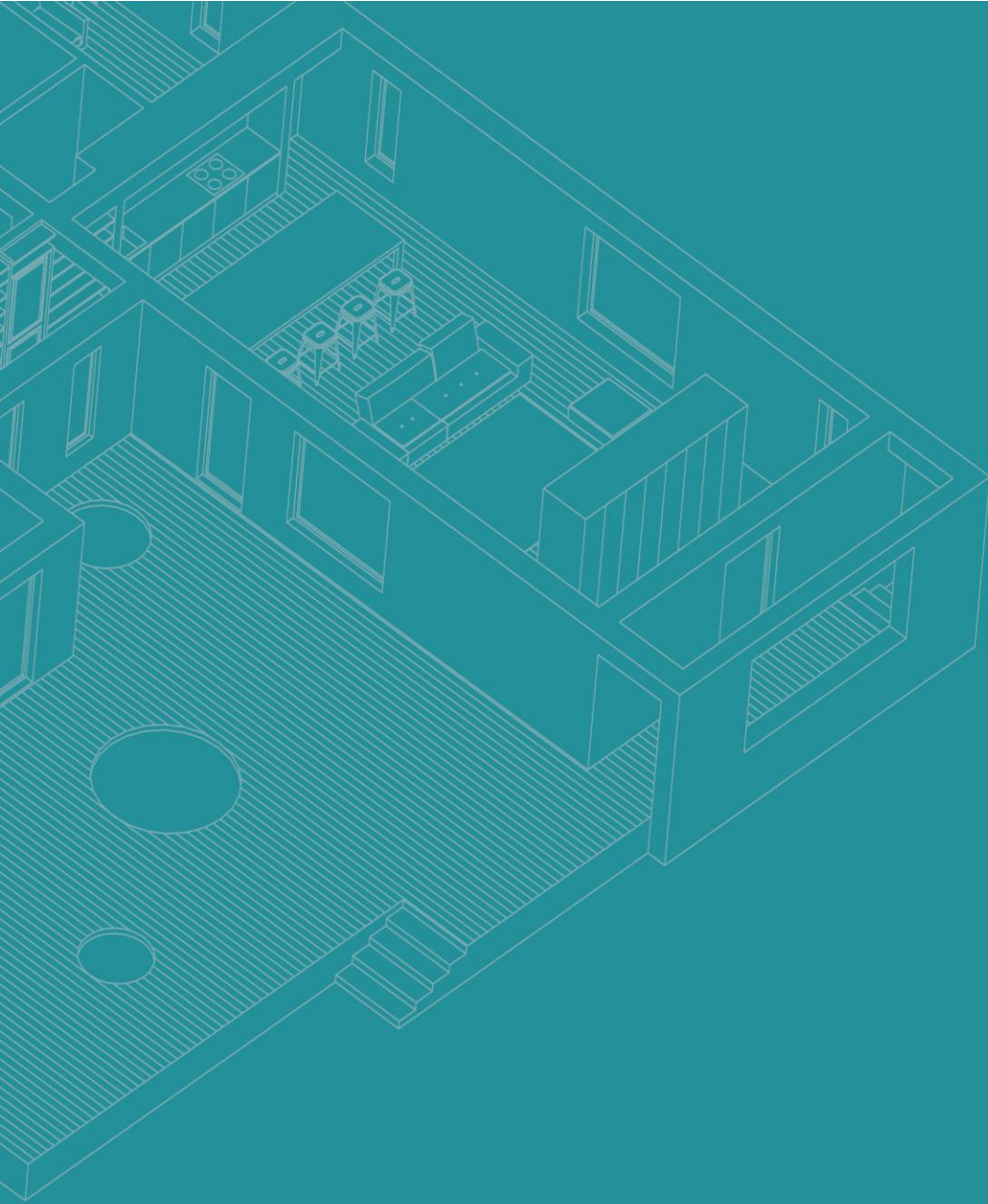
- County practices that contribute to higher rates of identification of African American youth as CSEC/Y including higher rates of child welfare and juvenile justice system involvement, decision-making practices regarding placement of youth in out-of-home care, access to and effectiveness of in-home services and supports for families, school discipline and school-based arrests, especially for youth already in care, homelessness, and policing and surveillance practices;
- Further data exploration regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latinx youth in the identified CSE population, and County practices that may be contributing to lower rates of identification, such as lack of investigation and law enforcement efforts in areas in which Hispanic/Latinx youth are more likely to be exploited (such as in homes or establishments posing as cantinas, bar, restaurants, or nightclubs), effectiveness of engagement and support strategies by law enforcement, systems and providers that may be already interacting with unidentified CSE children and youth, and community knowledge and attitudes about CSE, disclosure, and help-seeking;
- Availability and effectiveness of culturally appropriate services for youth and families, including both prior to and after identification of CSE. To the extent such practices are being used, further evaluation through formal research, focus groups, or polling to ensure they are effective and appropriate from the community's perspective may be appropriate;
- Recognition and strategies to address distrust of law enforcement and public systems that may exist as a result of historical and intergenerational experiences of communities and families of color with the systems.

## 8. **Build a Robust Data Collection and Evaluation System:** This study represents the first of its kind to evaluate the impact of placement type and a range of specialized services that children and youth who experienced CSE have received. However, there are no standardized measures used systematically by agencies, which are necessary for a robust evaluation. In particular, there is a lack of standardization or capacity in a number of key areas: how success or ideal outcomes are defined by agencies and youth; methods of

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collecting data based on these hypothesized outcomes in current data systems; standard criteria for determining when and which youth are referred to or eligible for particular specialized services; and assessments to identify needs and strengths prior to and after receipt of services to measure changes and impact over time. In order to better assess the impact of placements and specialized services, we recommend that agencies hold a summit with researchers with expertise on this topic, as well as other key stakeholders, such as youth, families, and community-based service and placement providers, to brainstorm and develop the most appropriate measures to be used by Probation, DCFS and other key agencies at specific decision points. These decision points may include: identification of CSE, assessment of behavioral, mental, and physical health service needs, and assignment to specialized services and placement options. The data system should also make clear which types of data should be collected on an ongoing basis, and when, and which are one-time only measures. Issues to consider include:

- Clear definitions of individual success and positive outcomes, with input from children and youth in defining those measures. These may include: medical and mental health outcomes, placement stability and reducing runaways, reunification with family, subsequent arrest/violation history, interactions with traffickers, contact with providers when AWOL, and other indicators of youth well-being, such as educational attainment, physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health, reduced substance use, engagement in recreational or employment activities, and healthy relationships with peers and adults;
- Clear definitions of program and system successes and positive outcomes, again with input from children and youth, such as low staff turnover, increased rates of staff trained to work with the population, reduction in AWOLs, increased engagement in multidisciplinary and collaborative settings focused on case planning and coordination, and positive evaluations from children and youth;
- Use of a combination of objective measures (i.e., standardized screening and assessment tools) and subjective measures (e.g., youth and staff feedback);
- Collection of data at key decision-making points, including identification as CSE, receipt of services, and time of placement or placement change, and others to be defined by researchers; and
- Collection of pre- and post-intervention data, which includes standardized criteria for determining which youth are referred to particular specialized services, and assessments of children and youth before and after the service or intervention to measure change over time, service dosage, and variations in response to services.



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