



Healthy Teen Network

## POSITION STATEMENT ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*Adopted by the Healthy Teen Network Board of Directors on October 24, 2016*



### Position

Healthy Teen Network supports the development and delivery of resources and services for youth who are victims and survivors of human trafficking. All resources and supports should be youth-centered, trauma-informed, and holistic to include health services (such as unrestricted access to emergency contraception and all other forms of contraception, as well as rapid testing for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy), legal aid, income support, housing, immigration assistance, and educational and vocational services, including connections to legitimate income generation sources. Services should be provided to victims and survivors regardless of immigration status.

Healthy Teen Network calls upon all organizations that interact with youth, including hospitals, health centers, law enforcement agencies, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice authorities, youth-supporting organizations, and schools to screen youth to assess their risk of being trafficked and trafficking experience. We expect these organizations to connect identified youth to resources and services designed to support these vulnerable youth. Further, policy and program leaders of health, education, human services, and justice administration systems and

organizations should ensure training of their personnel on appropriate responses to youth victims and survivors of human trafficking.

According to federal law, anyone under the age of 18 found engaged in prostitution and/or acts derived from commercial sexual exploitation is a victim of human trafficking. Thus, Healthy Teen Network supports the repeal of state and local laws that punish children and youth for engagement in such acts, as they are a result of criminal activity inflicted upon them.

## Issue

Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of someone for the purposes of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

Criminals that engage in human trafficking strip their victims of basic rights such as safety, health, and dignity. Victims of human trafficking experience physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and financial damage. Recovery from the harm of human trafficking is possible – when survivors receive support to repair harm inflicted, promote healing, and restore whole health.

Identifying youth as trafficking victims is challenging because they do not often self-identify due to stigma or fear of involvement in public custodial systems. Sometimes youth victims of trafficking come into contact with child welfare, justice administration, mental health, and runaway and homeless youth services systems for other reasons, without the root cause of human trafficking being uncovered or explored.

Victims of human trafficking face legitimate fear of involvement in the criminal justice system, particularly in jurisdictions in which even minor-aged children and youth can be punished for engaging in prostitution. Foreign-born victims of trafficking fear deportation for themselves or their family members.

## Supporting Information

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines human trafficking as:

- A. Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- B. Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.<sup>1</sup>

Human trafficking reaches every culture and demographic group in the United States. Youth who run away from or are pushed out of their homes, experience homelessness, and/or experience frequent disruptions in their primary family relationships are at high risk for human trafficking. Youth who are victims of human trafficking often end up laboring in agricultural, construction or manufacturing settings, hospitality settings, household servitude, or the sex industry, or are forced into panhandling or arranged marriages.

Criminals recruit by selecting targets vulnerable due to disconnection from families and homes, and then gain the target's trust. The perpetrator may be known to the target, such as an intimate partner, neighbor, or family

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<sup>1</sup> Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. Pub. L. no. 106—386 (2000). Retrieved from: [www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf)

member. Or, the perpetrator may entice the victim through trickery such as fake employment agencies, newspaper ads, and front businesses. Some victims are abducted. The trafficker controls the victim by threatening to deprive them of life-sustaining resources such as food or shelter, applying a strong psychological hold, making the victim fearful through abuse and lies, and/or physically restraining them or controlling their movement.

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