

Project NO REST: Addressing Human Trafficking in North Carolina

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Project NO REST (North Carolina Organizing and Responding to the Exploitation and Sexual Trafficking of Children) is a 5-year effort funded by the US Children's Bureau to address the trafficking of individuals age 25 years and younger in North Carolina. The project aims to increase awareness of human trafficking affecting children and youth, especially those in the child welfare system; to reduce the number of these youth who are trafficked; and to improve outcomes for those who are trafficked. In the project's first year, nearly 100 stakeholders statewide developed a comprehensive plan to address trafficking. Later, 5 communities were recruited to implement the plan at the local level. Their experiences will be used to develop a toolkit for future anti-trafficking efforts.

The prevalence of human trafficking in North Carolina is unclear. Data on the number of calls North Carolinians made to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline show that North Carolina ranked 7th in the nation in contacts in 2012; in 2013, the state ranked 11th; and in 2014, it ranked 10th [1]. While these rankings suggest that the state has a significant problem with human trafficking, the volume of calls to the national hotline does not appear to correlate with law enforcement action. Data from the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts show 24 arrests for human trafficking in 2013 and 85 arrests in 2014 [2]. There is wide variation in estimates of the number of children who are trafficked or are at risk of being trafficked—and at least one group of scholars argue that there are no reliable estimates of the number of children who are being trafficked [3]—but both labor and sex trafficking appear to be significant problems around the world, across the United States, and in North Carolina [1, 4].

Background

In October 2014, the US Children's Bureau awarded a grant to a team in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) to address the trafficking of youth in the state. The purpose of this effort, Project NO REST (North Carolina Organizing and Responding to the Exploitation and Sexual Trafficking of Children), is to increase awareness of human trafficking affecting children and youth, especially those involved in the child welfare system in North Carolina; to reduce the number of these youth

who are trafficked; and to improve outcomes for those who are trafficked.

Project NO REST is pursuing 4 strategies drawn from the Federal Strategic Action Plan on Services for Victims of Human Trafficking in the United States 2013–2017 [5]. The first strategy is to develop an integrated, coordinated system for providing services to youth victims of human trafficking, especially those involved in the child welfare system. The second strategy is to expand and coordinate research, data, and evaluation relevant to youth victims of human trafficking. The third strategy is to provide training and technical assistance to state and local agencies and organizations to increase victim identification, promote outreach, and expand the availability and accessibility of services to victims. The fourth strategy is to promote the use of effective, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services to improve the short- and long-term health, safety, and well-being of youth victims of human trafficking, especially those who are involved in the child welfare system.

Timeline of Anti-Trafficking Activities in North Carolina

North Carolina has been working for more than a decade to combat human trafficking. According to a timeline constructed by Maria Fryer, a former crime victims planner with the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission [6], the first statewide anti-trafficking efforts began in April 2004, when the North Carolina Attorney General's office and the North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCCASA) hosted a meeting in Raleigh that brought together a large number of individuals from local, state, and federal agencies. One outgrowth of this meeting was the creation of the Recognition, Identification, Protection, Prosecution, Liberation, and Empowerment (RIPPLE) coalition focused on ending trafficking in the state.

In April 2006, the UNC-CH Carolina Women's Center hosted an international conference on sex trafficking. In the same year, RIPPLE pursued anti-trafficking legislation in

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North Carolina, as well as a bill to outlaw enticing minors to leave the state for employment. In addition, RIPPLE advocated for laws that mandated training for professionals who were likely to encounter trafficking victims and provided funding for victim services.

The Carolina Women's Center hosted a second conference on sex trafficking in 2008. Shortly after that conference, the state received funding from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). The BJA award was made to the Pitt County Sheriff's Office, while the grant from OVC was given to NCCASA. The funding was designed to support the state's victim response efforts.

In 2009, RIPPLE began working with agencies across the state to create rapid response teams composed of individuals in law enforcement, county social service agencies, health care, legal services, and other areas. These rapid response teams can be brought together quickly to coordinate services when a victim of trafficking is identified. In 2010, RIPPLE changed its name to the North Carolina Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Efforts to combat human trafficking have continued to grow across the state. In 2011, the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission awarded a grant to NCCASA to combat sex trafficking in Cumberland County. In 2012, a symposium on sex trafficking of minors was hosted by NCCASA, and there was also an initiative by the Children's Advocacy Centers of North Carolina, funded through the Governor's Crime Commission, to expand the use of rapid response teams. Also in 2012, the North Carolina General Assembly created a Human Trafficking Commission that is housed within the North Carolina Department of Justice.

In 2013, the General Assembly passed Safe Harbor/Victims of Human Trafficking legislation [7] that applies to involuntary and sexual servitude. The legislation also rewrote the state statutes on prostitution, making prostitution a felony and strengthening protections for victims of trafficking. The Safe Harbor legislation provides minors with immunity from prosecution for prostitution and requires law enforcement officers who take minors into custody to immediately notify the local Department of Social Services. The local Department of Social Services is required to launch an immediate investigation into child abuse or neglect. The legislation also allows victims of trafficking to receive benefits and services without having to meet state residency requirements. Individuals older than 18 years who are charged with prostitution can have these charges expunged if they are victims of trafficking.

In 2014, Rebecca Macy and Jennifer O'Brien of UNC-CH published an evaluation of anti-trafficking activities in North Carolina [8]. Although their research was focused on a small subset of the trafficked population (ie, foreign-born victims not yet certified by immigration officials), their findings are applicable to the general issue of human trafficking. The authors recommended supporting efforts to increase aware-

ness of human trafficking among service providers, particularly those in small communities and rural areas [8].

Project NO REST Activities

Building upon these earlier efforts, Project NO REST includes 5 major activities. First, the project has created a stakeholder team. This team functions as a steering committee to advise on the overall management and direction of the project. Second, the project has a comprehensive plan to address trafficking. This plan, developed during the first year of Project NO REST, uses a trauma-informed approach and provides a framework for providing an array of services at the state and local level, including prevention, outreach, intake, mental and physical health, housing, and life skills. Third, based on the comprehensive plan, Project NO REST is implementing pilot interventions in 5 communities across the state. These pilot interventions will provide the services identified in the comprehensive plan to individuals age 25 years and younger, especially those involved with the child welfare system. Fourth, the project is mining existing data sources to develop valid and reliable estimates of the number of youth who are victims of trafficking. Fifth, the project is developing a toolkit that other communities can use in implementing anti-trafficking efforts and disseminating project information across the state and the country.

Project NO REST presents a coordinated approach to providing services to youth who are victims of trafficking. If not for the implementation of this project, these individuals would be provided a hodgepodge of unconnected services some of which may not be appropriate. The comprehensive plan was developed by a group of diverse stakeholders from local, regional, and statewide agencies and organizations. The group was comprised of representatives from county Departments of Social Services, juvenile justice staff, human trafficking service providers and advocates, medical and mental health professionals, child advocacy centers, law enforcement officials, district attorneys and other court personnel, guardian ad litem, agencies that provide services to victims of labor trafficking, organizations that provide services to runaway and homeless youth, private philanthropies, schools, and a number of other state and local agencies. In many cases, group members were not well informed about trafficking but were and continue to be significantly committed to developing policies and practices within their agencies to address the problem.

The comprehensive plan addresses labor trafficking as well as the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, both of which are addressed in the federal Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. If the victim is over the age of 18 years, sex trafficking is defined as an activity in which a "commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion"; any commercial sex act is considered trafficking when the person performing the act is under age 18 years [4]. Labor trafficking is the "recruitment, harbor-

ing, [and] transportation...of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion" [4].

A primary focus of Project NO REST's plan is to use a trauma-informed approach in dealing with youth who may have been trafficked. The intent of the plan is to address the trauma that youth experienced while being trafficked, to minimize the trauma they experience in leaving trafficking, and to assess the trauma they may have experienced before being trafficked. The trauma-informed approach includes activities for outreach, screening, and ongoing services, as well as the provision of prevention services.

A systems approach was used in developing this plan. Attempts were made to achieve a balance across activities and not to focus on just one set of efforts. To accomplish this goal, 6 workgroups were created to develop various aspects of the plan; these workgroups address prevention, youth engagement and outreach, screening and intake, services and practices, funding, and data and evaluation. Membership in each workgroup was drawn from an array of agencies and organizations, and some individuals serve on multiple workgroups. The project's steering committee oversees the activities of the workgroups. Each workgroup is chaired or co-chaired by individuals who also serve on the steering committee.

The prevention workgroup is focused on identifying risk factors for child trafficking, documenting best practices and model policies to prevent trafficking, and developing recommendations to enhance current state and local policies. This workgroup is also crafting strategies to increase public awareness of child trafficking risk factors and addressing approaches to engage youth who are at risk of being trafficked. Additionally, the workgroup is identifying primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention activities.

The youth engagement and outreach workgroup was tasked with identifying ways to engage youth who are being trafficked and those who are trying to leave trafficking. The workgroup identified strategies for outreach and engagement that might occur outside traditional aid organizations. One focus of the workgroup is to determine what message should be conveyed to these youth and how that message should be delivered. The workgroup has explored the use of intermediaries to engage youth who may be trafficked; these individuals include law enforcement officials, individuals from emergency departments and health clinics, teachers, counselors, school social workers, and other individuals who routinely are in contact with a large number of youth. The workgroup has also supported the efforts of a broadcast outlet to develop and implement a public awareness campaign to raise the awareness of trafficking and to provide information for youth who have been trafficked about where to go for services.

The screening and intake workgroup has developed approaches for the initial interview of potential human trafficking victims. Using policies and procedures similar to those followed in child advocacy centers, this workgroup

created a model of collaborative fact-gathering among law enforcement, county Departments of Social Services, guardians, and the courts. The workgroup also identified a process for assessing immediate physical, dental, and behavioral health needs, as well as long-term needs. The plan will be enhanced over time to clearly articulate ways to provide these services and will propose guidelines for providing them in a trauma-informed manner.

The services and practices workgroup has identified procedures and models to inform several needs: how to connect trafficked youth with a safe place to live and heal as they transition to independent living; ways to connect youth to needed therapeutic and medical services; ways to connect youth to postsecondary education; and an array of services that youth may need, including life skills, financial literacy, employment, and training. Future enhancements to the plan will articulate standards for the types of services that should be provided.

The funding workgroup has explored ways to fund the services and activities recommended by the other workgroups. As part of their work, members of this workgroup cataloged public and private funding sources that currently support or could support recommended service components. They recommended funding strategies and models to support efforts to reduce trafficking; identified ways to support public-private partnerships; and found sources of both one-time and ongoing support. The workgroup also developed a matrix of current and potential investments in anti-trafficking efforts.

Finally, the data and evaluation workgroup inventoried and analyzed current data sources that contain information on youth who are being trafficked, especially those involved with the child welfare system. This workgroup explored approaches to develop valid and reliable estimates of the number of youth who have been trafficked. The workgroup also established criteria for collecting data for the identification, screening, and assessment of trafficking victims and evaluating anti-trafficking programs.

Selection of Pilot Sites

Five communities, representing 16 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, were selected in July 2016 to serve as pilot sites for Project NO REST's work to implement anti-human trafficking efforts through community collaborations. These 5 communities were selected from 11 that submitted applications; some communities included several neighboring counties that shared resources and responsibilities. The 5 sites and the counties they represent are listed in Table 1.

Implementation of the comprehensive plan in the 5 sites began in October 2016. The pilot sites will focus on the development of infrastructure at the local level that mirrors the structure of the steering committee. The projects will be implemented over a 3-year period. Project staff will work with the pilot sites to facilitate meetings, foster collaboration, deliver trainings, and offer technical assistance.

The comprehensive plan will provide a framework for providing services to youth who are victims of trafficking, but it will not address the specifics of all necessary aspects of such services (eg, who should provide prevention services, mechanisms for providing intake services 24/7, after-hours staffing). The pilot sites will need to develop many procedures, which will require a high level of coordination and collaboration. Further, a great deal of process discussion will need to be undertaken and completed at the local level in order to implement the plan at each site.

The local leaders and staff involved in each pilot initiative are expected to include several individuals: a senior leader from the county Department of Social Services, other staff from the Department of Social Services, leaders of the local human trafficking organization, a senior leader from local law enforcement, officers from multiple law enforcement departments, a representative of the district attorney's office, a representative of the local child advocacy center, a representative of the local Family and Youth Services Bureau grantee, and representatives of other organizations. Each local pilot group should involve both leaders and frontline staff because the commitment and collaboration of individuals at all levels is needed in order to have a successful pilot implementation.

An outgrowth of the pilot projects will be the development of a toolkit for use with collaborative initiatives that can help to address the needs of youth in all North Carolina counties who are victims of human trafficking. The toolkit will focus on the project's comprehensive plan but will also address practical approaches for fostering collaborative relationships among stakeholders at the county level. The toolkit will be based on the lessons learned in implementing the pilot initiatives and will serve as a guide in disseminating effective approaches to other counties. The toolkit will be designed for use by agency managers, supervisors, staff, interested stakeholders, and trainers/facilitators.

Summary

Project NO REST is designed to increase the awareness of human trafficking affecting children and youth in North Carolina. The project aims to reduce the number of youth

who are trafficked and to improve outcomes for those who have been trafficked. These goals will be accomplished by bringing together government agencies, organizations, and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and coordinated plan to address human trafficking among individuals age 25 years and younger. Through the development of this comprehensive plan, the state's infrastructure for dealing with human trafficking issues affecting child welfare-involved children and youth will be strengthened and enhanced.

In addition to creating a stakeholder group to oversee and advise in the development of the strategic plan, Project NO REST is implementing a set of pilot projects that use the comprehensive plan for trafficking prevention and provide services to youth identified as victims of trafficking. Experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of the pilot projects will be used to develop a toolkit that provides a template for implementing similar efforts in counties across the state. Existing data sources will be mined and explored to develop valid and reliable estimates of the size of the human trafficking problem in the state. Additional sources of information will be identified. Information developed from this project will be widely disseminated across the state. **NCMJ**

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TABLE 1.
Pilot Sites for Implementation of Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts Through Community Collaborations

Pilot site	Counties represented
30th Judicial District Domestic Violence-Sexual Assault Alliance	Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties along with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
Our VOICE	Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, and Yancey counties
Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center	Mecklenburg County
Friend to Friend	Montgomery, Moore, and Randolph counties
Cumberland County Sheriff's Office	Cumberland County