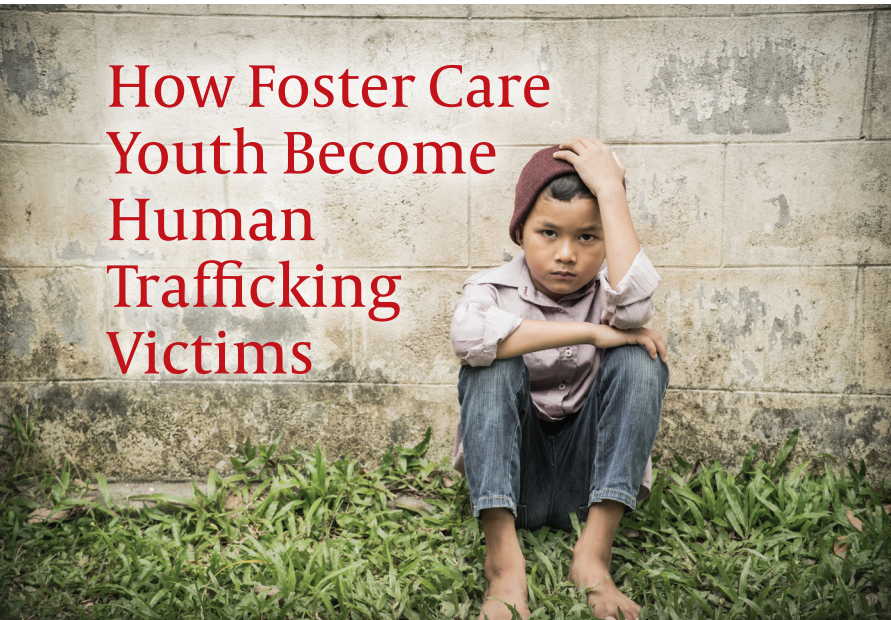


Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: Children in the foster care system lack a permanent and stable family, they may move multiple times during their time in foster care and may have limited access to educational opportunities. This may contribute to their sense of vulnerability and puts them at risk to human trafficking.



How Foster Care Youth Become Human Trafficking Victims

Jean Henningsen, MSW, discusses how the vulnerabilities of youth in foster care make them susceptible to human trafficking.

On any given day, there are nearly 443,000 youth under the age of 18 in foster care in the United States. These children and teens typically lack a permanent and stable family. Along with this they may experience a limited access to educational opportunities. Usually they move multiple times during their time in foster care. For example, they may start living with a relative and then move to a foster home or group home. This contributes to their sense of instability and vulnerability. Children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system and are especially vulnerable.

According to the Darkness to Light Foundation, a non-profit committed to empowering adults to prevent child sexual abuse, “foster children are 10 times more likely to be sexually abused than children that live with both biological parents.” They also report that children with a history of sexual abuse are highly vulnerable to human trafficking: “More than 90% of children who are commercially sexually exploited have been sexually abused in the past.”

Traffickers always prey on the vulnerable. Traffickers target children who do not have a loving, stable family to turn to and manipulate these children into trusting them. Click [here](#).

Why are Children in Foster Care More Vulnerable to Trafficking?

The National Foster Youth Institute estimates that 60 percent of child sex trafficking victims have a history in the child welfare system. Human traffickers always prey on individuals who are vulnerable and children in foster care have a greater risk of becoming victims than those in a stable family environment.

Reasons why children in foster care are more vulnerable to human trafficking include:

- ◆ They often have feelings of hopelessness and depression and have experienced trauma
- ◆ Many run away from group or foster homes and are then homeless and live on the streets
- ◆ Young adults are sent out of foster care at the age of 18

Sadly, many foster children have a history of being used by biological parents as a “paycheck.” This may make them more attracted to increased attention and lavish advances of human traffickers.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Awareness

A survivor speaks of the foster care system and of human trafficking:



“Being in foster care was the perfect training for commercial sexual exploitation,” reported a youth rescued from that abuse. Quoted in a report from the California Child Welfare Council, the child explained: “I was used to being moved without warning, without any say, not knowing where I was going or whether I was allowed to pack my clothes. After years in foster care, I didn’t think anyone would want to take care of me unless they were paid. So, when my pimp expected me to make money to support ‘the family,’ it made sense to me.”

Click [here](#) to read more.

Life After Foster Care

Debra Schilling Wolfe, MEd, the founding executive director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research, discusses the special vulnerabilities of children when they “age out” of the foster care system.

Children “age out” of the foster care system between the ages of 18 to 21, depending on the state. Unless these young people have found a permanent home or have opted for extended care, they are on their own to navigate the adult world. Without access to jobs or adequate wages, skills for independence, a place to live, or connection to a caring adult, youths aging out of foster care are particularly vulnerable to traffickers.

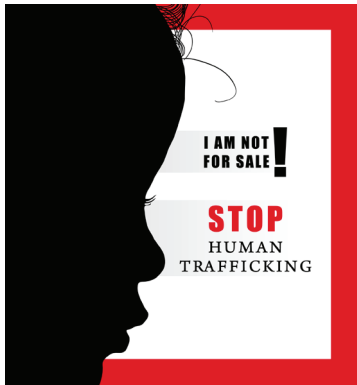
A youth over the age of 18 is at higher risk of being criminalized if they are caught engaging in commercial sex acts. When a person is under the age of 18 and engaged in commercial sex or forced labor, they do not have to prove any of the three key elements of trafficking – force, fraud, or coercion. However, people over the age of 18 would have to prove one of these factors are involved if they are caught engaging in commercial sex acts, or if they complain of forced labor.

When survivors of trafficking were surveyed on what could have helped prevent them from being trafficked,

the most frequent response was having supportive parents or family members. The survivors cited learning independent living skills and having a supportive adult or mentor available to teach them critical life skills as the primary assistance they wish they received to learn to live on their own. Without these skills and resources, children who “age out” of the foster care system are susceptible to traffickers.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

“... independent living skills... having a supportive adult or mentor available to teach them critical life skills as the primary assistance they wish they received to learn to live on their own.”



From Foster Care to Trafficking

Christian O'Neill is a clinical social worker and specializes in family support and stabilization. "From Foster Care to Trafficking" explains why foster care often leads to trafficking. New legislation should support families and improve the foster care system to help prevent child exploitation.

Placement in a foster home is inherently traumatizing. Children may lose their connections to their family as well as to the places and people they are familiar with, like their school, friends, and teachers.

Foster parents are paid by the government. Children in foster care are often all-too aware that their presence brings their foster parent a government paycheck. They can feel their caregivers keep them just for the money. Many foster children are frequently uprooted and moved around. Children often feel that they are moved from home to home arbitrarily, and without warning.

Federal funding favors foster care; federal funding for foster care is considered a non-discretionary entitlement, that is unlimited. On the other hand, funding for family preservation services is limited and accounts for only five percent of federal spending on child welfare. Consequently, many families are torn apart unnecessarily, and more children need placement than there are foster families. This results in lower enforcement of foster home vetting standards and reduced foster home quality, as well as placement in group homes.

Traffickers are aware that foster kids are vulnerable targets and they frequently recruit around places likely to be attended by foster children. They know foster children are more likely to be traumatized and susceptible to their messages. Lack of adequate supervision, awareness and training of personnel to combat this targeted recruitment leave the children vulnerable.

Moreover, foster children can feel the streets offer more control than their foster care offers and so they often run away. When living on the streets, a trafficker offering attention and care can easily pick them up.

Once minors age out of foster care, they are likely to become homeless and be left without a significant family connection to return to for support.

An Overhaul is Coming to American Child Welfare Services

Change is coming with the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), part of the government spending bill in 2018. This law changed the way child welfare services are funded by the federal government. The priority is on keeping families together by putting more money towards parenting classes, mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment. Click [here](#) to learn more.





FOSTER CARE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING A STATE-BY-STATE EVALUATION

This 2017 report released by Human Trafficking Search evaluates each state and the District of Columbia on their anti-trafficking protections for youth within the foster care system.

Youth in the foster care system are at risk for human trafficking. Researchers have examined aspects of the link between human trafficking and foster care, but few studies have explored the efficacy of state policy and practice in keeping children safe from being trafficked while in foster care.

By grading the states on a detailed 32-point scale, this study highlights the areas where states have been successful in deterring trafficking of youth while in foster care, and more importantly where states lack the necessary protections. The seven main criteria used in this study are as follows: aging out policies; kinship care; relevant foster care provisions; task forces and law enforcement training; LGBT youth protections;

relevant anti-trafficking provisions; and state reporting laws. Each criterion presents a challenge to creating a strong foster care system that reduces the possibility of trafficking.

In this study the authors utilized the reporting criteria from the Polaris Project recognizing that Safe Harbor legislation is an important component of anti-trafficking legislation. Therefore, states receive one point for just having the legislation.

Other relevant anti-trafficking provisions included:

1. Lower burden of proof for sex trafficking minors which ensures that the elements of force, fraud, or coercion are not required for a trafficker to be prosecuted for the sex trafficking of a minor.
2. Sex and Labor Trafficking statutes.
3. Immunity from Punishment. This permits victims to have their convictions for prostitution as a result of trafficking vacated from their criminal records.

4. Victim Assistance and Access to Civil Suit Damages. This provides assistance, mandates a victim services plan or funds programs to help victims of human trafficking. Access to civil suit damages will allow victims of human trafficking the ability to seek civil damages from their traffickers.
5. Human Trafficking Intervention Court. Human Trafficking Intervention Courts are problem-solving courts that incorporate specially trained judges, judicial monitoring, and linkage to services.

The results from this state-by-state report card indicate that, despite evidence that the foster care system and trafficking are connected, states have yet to take adequate steps to protect youth in the foster care system from human trafficking. The highest score for any state (Illinois and Texas) was 23.5/32 (73%), with an average score of 17/32 (53%). Montana and South Dakota had the lowest score of 11.5.

Thirty-one states including the District of Columbia received 4 points or higher on antitrafficking provisions, an indication that addressing human trafficking has been a concern of national and state legislators.

All states recognize human trafficking as a crime. This is an improvement from 2013, when, for example, Pennsylvania and Colorado did not specifically criminalize sex trafficking. The burden of proof to convict child traffickers is also lowered in forty-seven states. This is an indication of the nation's effort to protect minors that have been sexually exploited as a result of sex trafficking. This also reflects a change in the discourse from criminalization to protection. However, twenty states still have not enacted any Safe Harbor Law. Without Safe Harbor legislation, minors are left in the criminal justice system, without access to critical social services. There is also no mandatory training for state law enforcement on human trafficking victim identification and protection which leaves many victims of sex trafficking in the criminal justice system instead of receiving appropriate treatment.

Thirty-three states lacked an option for the kinship caregiver to acquire legal custody of the child in their care while twenty-three states provide the same financial aid for both non-relative and relative care homes. All fifty states and the District of Columbia provide background checks of potential foster parents; however forty-five states will not disqualify prospective foster parents for having sex offender or human trafficking convictions, which puts foster children at an unnecessary risk.

Only California and D.C. have any laws specifically to help LGBT youth experiencing homelessness or address the discrimination and abuse that LGBT youth face in foster care.

In forty-two states, once youth are placed in the welfare system, foster care benefits don't terminate until they turn 21. Three states, Massachusetts, Texas, and Connecticut offer foster care benefits to the recipients after they have turned twenty-one. This is a critical protective factor that prevents youth in foster care from ending up in human trafficking situations.

The researchers offer the following recommendations for child welfare agencies to prevent human trafficking of foster youth.

1. Child welfare agencies should pay more attention to cases of missing and runaway foster youth. Agencies should not only be mandated to immediately report missing children, but also to have screenings of returned children for any signs of trafficking or exploitation.
2. Agencies should screen each child entering the system for signs of trafficking.
3. Foster care youth should be educated on human trafficking and how to identify and report it if they see it happening or if they are being trafficked.
4. Child welfare agencies should conduct thorough background checks on all potential foster parents to eliminate the chance of children being placed in the homes of abusers or traffickers.
5. Kinship care benefits should be increased so

Advocacy

families receive additional benefits in becoming foster parents, and families should also be encouraged to have legal custody of the youth.

6. To prevent foster youth homelessness in the first place, allow children to stay in the system and receive benefits until they are at least 23 years

old. Transitional housing aid and university tuition waivers are possible ways to ensure that foster children are taken care of after exiting the system.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Report to Congress: The Child Welfare System Response to Sex Trafficking of Children

This 2019 report summarizes current efforts related to children in foster care and their risk of trafficking, state efforts to serve children who are sex trafficking victims, and state efforts to support long-term connections to caring adults for children in foster care.

In recent years, child welfare agencies have expanded their capacity to identify and serve victims of sex trafficking. Their rapidly increasing role is due to legislative mandates and reflects the frequent co-occurrence of sex trafficking and other forms of child abuse. Child welfare agencies collaborate closely with other agencies that encounter trafficking victims in training workers and implementing prevention programs.

Screening is an essential first step in connecting victims with needed services. Child welfare agencies use a variety of approaches to screen for trafficking. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia actively screen children at intake, investigation, or assessment. At least 24 of these states use tools developed within the child welfare agency or task force, versus relying on external service providers or researchers.

Some screening tools are based on behavioral or situational indicators that can be noted during conversations, observed during interactions, or identified from case records. Other tools involve standardized interview questions. At least 13 states modify screening tools when a youth returns from a runaway episode. Despite widespread use of screening tools, few have undergone validation tests to assess their effectiveness identifying trafficking.

Documenting trafficking in the child welfare system is needed to inform prevention and service planning. Efforts to document trafficking within statewide child welfare information systems are ongoing. Most states have created child maltreatment allegation categories for human trafficking within their child welfare information systems and

for reporting to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).

Child welfare agencies continue to develop and adapt services to meet the needs of trafficked youth. These services include specialized case management, specialized placement resources and partnerships with trafficking-specific providers, including survivor-led programs. Coordinated response models establish cross-agency shared protocols for identifying and serving trafficking victims.

Young people in the child welfare system may be protected against human trafficking when lasting relationships with caring adults are established. However, many children served by the child welfare system experience several challenges in forming and maintaining such relationships. These challenges exist prior to being involved in the child welfare system because trauma associated with parental and caregiver maltreatment can have lasting effects on relationships.

“Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia actively screen children at intake, investigation, or assessment. At least 24 of these states use tools developed within the child welfare agency or task force, versus relying on external service providers or researchers.”

For children and youth in care of the child welfare system, system goals in place to maintain connections with a caring adult include placement with kin, reunification with family of origin, or exit to relative guardianship. Mentoring programs are among the best-known approaches to supporting caring relationships. Youth who have a mentor, or a close, positive, and stable relationship with a caring adult, are found to exhibit reductions in behavioral problems and improved educational and career success.

Click [here](#) to read the complete document.

Documentary on Connection Between Foster Care, Homelessness and Human Trafficking

A new documentary, *Breaking the Cycle*, explores the intersection of the foster care and human trafficking. Filmmaker Arzo Yusuf captured multiple perspectives from a variety of people in the system including former foster youth and professionals who work with young people in foster care.

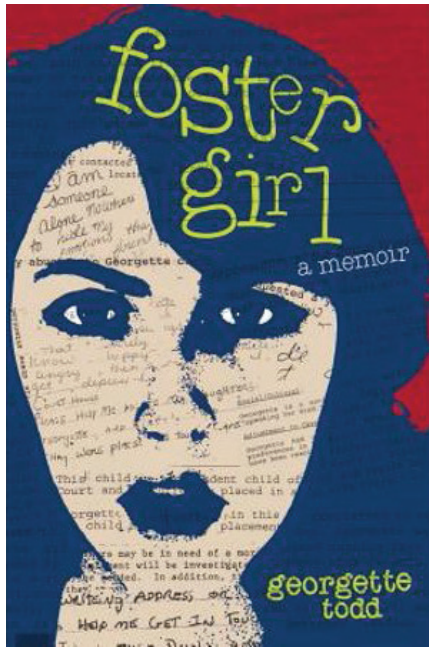
As Yusuf explains, when a trafficker is scoping out potential foster youth to turn on to trafficking, they manipulate these young people by mimicking the love and dependability that the foster youth feel they've lost in the system. Most foster youth are not prepared to reject the false projections of security and personal investment that an exploiter may show them. This makes the foster care system a playground for opportunists to impose their will on impressionable youth.

Yusuf first got involved with the foster system when she started working for Angel's Nest, an organization that assists young adults who have aged out of the foster system. It was there that she learned how the foster care system often serves as a pipeline into homelessness and commercial sexual exploitation.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Action



Foster Girl

by Georgette Todd opens with a bullet to the head, along with a family history of abandonment, alcoholism, drug use, abuse, incarcerations, and a tragic death, all of which force Georgette and her younger sister into the world of foster care. Complete with transcribed court documents, letters, photos, and narration by a spirited yet desperate teenager, *Foster Girl* recreates an unpredictable coming-of-age story of one girl's struggle to survive long enough for life after foster care. Through a uniquely unfiltered voice, *Foster Girl* reveals what it feels like to grow up in foster care. It helps the reader understand how the foster care system works and what we can all do to make a difference.

How Can I Help?

Many federal and state laws can lead foster children into situations where they are set up to fail and it will take persistent action to reform these laws. To learn about and support efforts to reform the child welfare system visit the *Center for the Study of Social Policy*.

There needs to be more education to both foster children and adults involved in the foster care system about human trafficking. Children need to be taught what to look out for when it comes to human traffickers attempting to lure them into dangerous situations. Parents and foster adults need to be aware of the red flags that children who may be victims of human trafficking exhibit. Adults also need to learn the signs when other adults may be attempting to prey on vulnerable kids. Guidelines for adults currently involved or considering becoming involved in the foster care system may be accessed through a recent publication from the *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, *Promoting Well-Being Through the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard: A Guide for States Implementing the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act*. Click [here](#) to learn more.

From Foster Care to Trafficking

In 2018, ECPAT published *From Foster Care to Trafficking, An Analysis of Contributory Factors*. This 24-page report outlines the forms of psychological manipulation traffickers use to trap victims and maintain a hold over them.

In the United States, this often means exploiting children involved in the child welfare system. The awareness of the links between child sex trafficking and the child welfare system has grown in recent years. We are called to create a system that nurtures, protects, and empowers children.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Human Trafficking and Foster Care

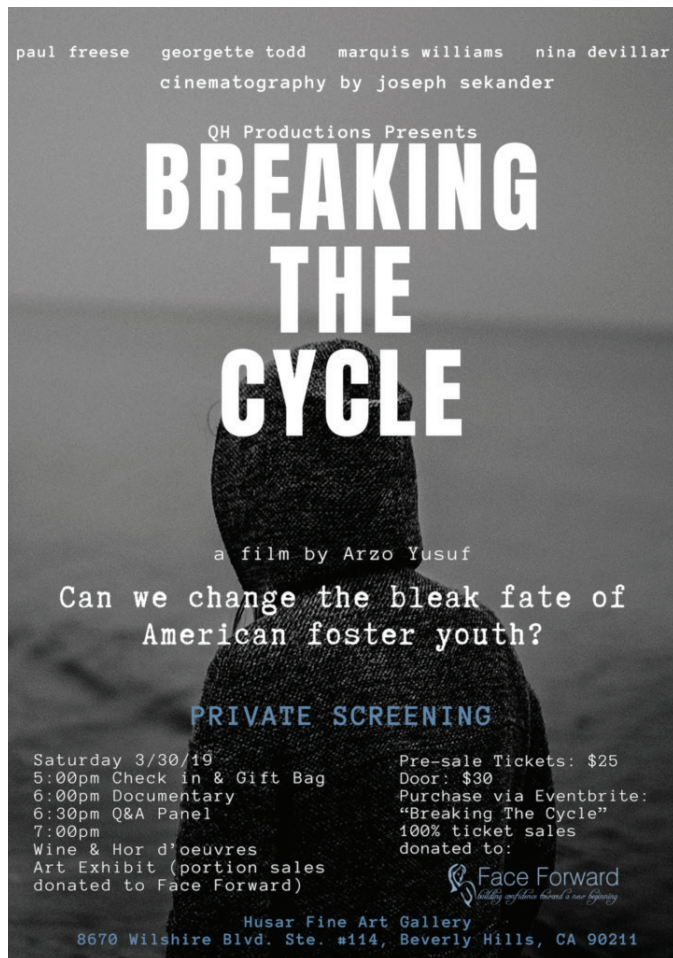
The one thing that many child victims of sex trafficking have in common is involvement in the child welfare system. More than 60% of youth rescued from traffickers reside in either foster care or group homes. This 20-minute webinar presented by the Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence explores how traffickers exploit the vulnerabilities of youth involved in the child welfare system, risk and protective factors, and how foster parents and case workers can protect the youth in their care.

Click [here](#) to view.

Human Trafficking Act of 2020

S.3333 - Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Training Act of 2020

In February 2020 Senator Lisa Murkowski, (AK) introduced the *Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Training Act of 2020* which has been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Urge your Senators to co-sponsor and support this legislation by clicking [here](#).



Recent Bill Introduced to Combat Child Trafficking

H.R.5740, the *Save Our Girls from Sex Trafficking Act of 2020* was sponsored by Rep. Frederica Wilson (FL) and introduced in January 2020. The bill was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and in addition to the Committees on Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, and Financial Services. This bill establishes an interagency task force and authorizes various grants to combat domestic child human trafficking. Additionally, it requires the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services to study and report on child human trafficking, including how and why children enter the sex trade. Please click [here](#) to urge your United States Representative to co-sponsor and support this legislation.

Human Trafficking and Foster Care

In this 29-minute podcast, Pat McKenna of the Virginia Beach Justice Initiative shares the connection between human trafficking and foster care. Though anyone can become a victim, statistics show that foster children are at a higher risk. What are the warning signs and how can we prevent children from becoming victims?

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Click Below to Visit These Sites

[Darkness to Light Foundation](#)

[From Foster Care to Trafficking](#)

[Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)

[Covenant House](#)

[National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System](#)





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