

A Look Back at The Child Trafficking Unit: Where to Go From Here



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The 2011 Alternative to Detention (ATD) grant awarded to the Los Angeles County Probation Department by the SACJJDP (State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) aimed to decrease detention for commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) and connect them with community healing services.

All Hands on Deck

*Identifying and Supporting
Commercially Sexually Exploited
Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*



In this report you will find reflections on the Los Angeles County Probation Department's efforts over the past eight years to better identify and serve youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation. And it is our hope that it can serve as a tool kit for other jurisdictions doing, or just beginning, this work.

- Los Angeles County Chief Probation Officer Terri L. McDonald

LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT 2020

Develop a SOLID Team



Support the Youth



Survivor
Leadership

Guiding Principles

“I’m encouraged by the CTU – by how deeply the Probation Officers have taken this on as their call and have been flexible, creative, and available to all of us.”

Sara – Community Advocate

Multi-Agency Collaboration



GROWTH OF CTU

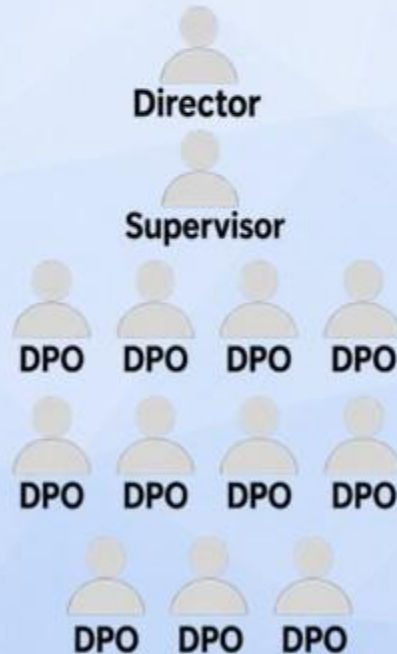
2012



CTU Staffing

- Director
- Supervisor
- (1) DPO – Staff Assistant
- (1) DPO – MDT / STAR Court
- (1) DPO – Locate Team
- (1) DPO – TAY / Assessment
- (8) DPO's – Supervision

2023





“We work well together because we step up where we know we’re strong, and where we’re weak, we’re not afraid to ask for help”



In a recent survey, youth impacted by CSE were asked “if it helped to have a CTU DPO” **97% reported that it was.**



“Even though I was not open with my PO at first, having the same PO the entire time has given a chance to develop a relationship of trust.”

Probation Child Trafficking Unit

est. 2012

Small Team BIG Difference



More than supervision...

- Vital Records
- Birthdays
- Baby Showers
- Graduations
- Prom Dress shopping
- College Tours
- Shopping for work clothes
- Cosmetology Support
- Hospital Support
- Fun Fridays
- Valentines Self Care Box

Multidisciplinary Team

MDT Partners:

- Probation
- Child Welfare
- Mental Health
- Public Health
- Education
- Community Advocates
- Youth's Attorney / CLC
- DA



STAR Court



Small things, like bringing a cupcake to court on a youth's birthday, sometimes mean more than the big things. Birthday cupcakes have come to be a tradition in STAR Court over the years (and an expectation from the youth!)

“When we first started, I frankly did not think that this level of teamwork would be possible.”

Honorable Judge Catherine Pratt

STAR Court

The goal of STAR Court is to use a collaborative and non-adversarial approach to addressing the needs of youth experiencing CSE who are on probation.

The STAR Court's approach is centered on services, support, and relationship building.

The STAR Court sees each youth every 4-6 weeks, which is more frequent than other courts, in order to build rapport and trust among the youth, judge and MDT partners.

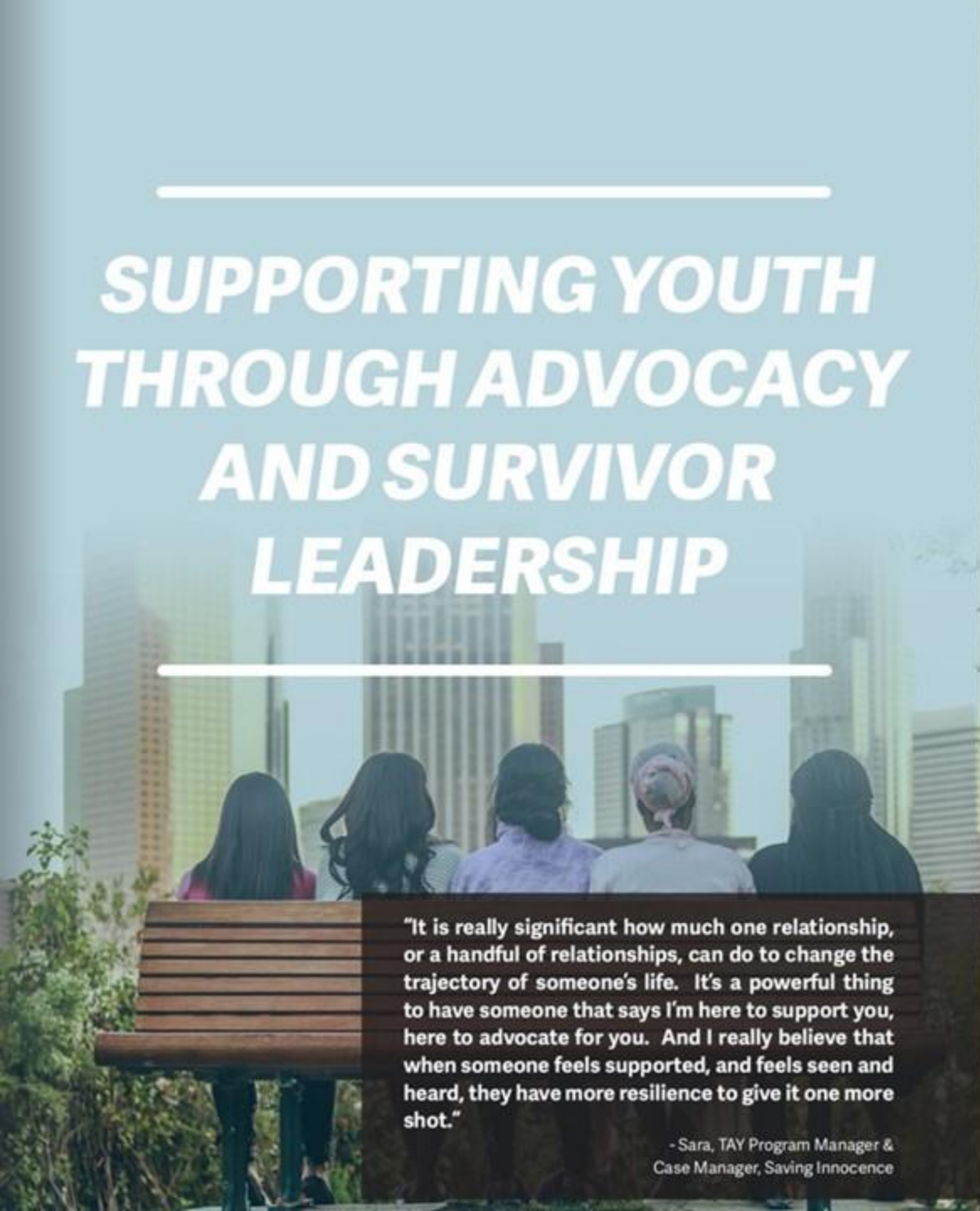
Each youth is assessed for their needs and supported by the Probation MDT team.

Youth involved in STAR Court had significant decreases in episodes of leaving care without permission, criminal involvement, and housing changes.

And an increase in linkages to substance use and mental health treatments during their involvement in STAR Court.

(Bath et al., 2020)

SUPPORTING YOUTH THROUGH ADVOCACY AND SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP



"It is really significant how much one relationship, or a handful of relationships, can do to change the trajectory of someone's life. It's a powerful thing to have someone that says I'm here to support you, here to advocate for you. And I really believe that when someone feels supported, and feels seen and heard, they have more resilience to give it one more shot."

- Sara, TAY Program Manager &
Case Manager, Saving Innocence



SAVING
INNOCENCE



The Child Trafficking Unit has
worked with approximately
1,101 (84 ave. per year) youth
identified as Commercially
Sexually Exploited
2012 – 2025

- Females (81%)
- Cis-Males
- Gay Males
- Transgender Females / Males

Relationships are the Foundation of this Work

“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.”

Child Trafficking Unit Logic Model: Los Angeles County Probation Department

INPUTS

Culture of Support

Specialized Recruitment of Probation Officers

Leadership

Legislation and Policy

Professional Development

ACTIVITIES

Multidisciplinary Teaming

- Referral and Assessment
- Regular Multidisciplinary Team Meetings

Relationship-Informed Care

- Youth and Family Engagement
- Collaboration
- Staff Wellness and Organizational Support
- Youth Voice and Choice
- Empowerment
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Trauma-Informed Case Management

- Frequent Contact with Youth
- Service Continuity
- Service Referrals
- Goal Setting
- Harm Reduction

Specialized Protocols

- First Responder Protocol
- Detention Protocol
- Victim-Witness Testimony Protocol
- Locate Protocol

Specialized Programs

- Community-Based Advocacy
- STAR Court

OUTPUTS

Referrals Made to Services

Youth Assessed and Served

Hours of Training

Self-care/STS Activities

MDTs Held

Agency Collaborators on Case

Case Plans including Goals and Harm Reduction Strategies

Family Meetings/Contact

Frequency of Contact with Youth

PROXIMAL OUTCOMES



Academic Improvement



Accessing Employment Opportunities



Safe and Stable Living Situation



Removing Ties to Exploitation



Social Support System in Place



Accessing Services



Progress Towards Goals



Reductions in Traumatic Stress Symptoms

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES



Education, Vocational Training, and/or Employment



Housing Security



Youth Free of Exploitation



Self-Sufficiency



Improvements in Mental, Behavioral & Physical Health



Healthy Relationships



Community Engagement/Supports

LA County's Trajectory

2012

Development of specialized STAR Court and Probation Child Trafficking Unit through a Title II Grant

2015

SB 855 – Launch State CSEC Program (SB 855)

2020 – 2023

Evaluation of CTU and DCFS Specialized Units funded by DOJ

2023

Ending the Incarceration of Girls and Gender Expansive Youth Initiative (EGI) Begins in LA

2024-2025 FY

EGI work paused in LA

Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol launched

2014

SB 1322 Decriminalization into effect
DCFS Ramps up services

2017

5 Year Strategic Plan to Address Child Trafficking in Los Angeles County Approved by the BOS

2024

CTU Staffing begins to decrease

2024

Carly B. Dierkhising, PhD
Professor, California State University, Los Angeles

CTU Staffing

OVER TIME



Total Reduction
Apr 2023 – Jun 2026

60% 10 staff
→ 4 staff



DISCUSSION

Where do we go from here, and
How does this tie into the EGI
work in LA County