

Support and Transformation for Anti-Trafficking and Resilience in Survivors (STARS) House: A Grant Proposal

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Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis was to write a grant proposal to fund a 1-year planning phase for the creation of a residential shelter program for girls, including transgender/gender non-conforming youth, who are survivors of sex trafficking in Orange County and Los Angeles County. The program design and service delivery model is informed by prison abolition, feminist theory, and trauma-informed practices. The proposed program, Support and Transformation for Anti-Trafficking and Resilience in Survivors (STARS) House, utilizes trauma-informed practices and strengths-based approaches and centers survivor leadership to guide participants on their healing journey.

Through a literature review that focused on sex trafficking survivors, especially youth, and current interventions, this grant writer proposed and developed the residential program. This grant writer explored online directories of funders to select a potential funder with a mission aligned with the proposed program's goals and objectives. The grant writer utilized information from the literature review to make practice recommendations focusing on advocacy and strengths-based perspectives.

Introduction:

Key Definitions

CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children): A commercial sex act involving force, fraud, or coercion or involving anyone under 18 (TVPA, 2000).

Important Information and Statistics

- 98% of all human trafficking cases in the U.S. in 2023 were sex trafficking (Lane et al., 2021)
- Out of 1,197 human trafficking cases charged in 2021, 582 involved the sexual exploitation of children (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).
- Current residential interventions lack the adequate resources and nuances required to work with this population (Clawson and Grace, 2007).

Purpose of Thesis/Project:

- Develop a grant proposal to fund a one-year planning phase for a residential program.
- Discuss nuance and differing perspectives regarding feminist theory, sex work, and sex trafficking
- Create a planning phase outline as well as a program plan.

Target Population:

- Girls, including transgender/gender non-conforming youth, who are survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) who live or have been trafficked in Orange County and/or Los Angeles County.

Potential Funder and Host Agency:

Host Agency: Casa Youth Shelter

- Casa Youth Shelter is a local non-profit in Los Alamitos, California.
- Provides emergency crisis shelter for runaway, homeless, and abandoned youth ages 12–17.

Potential Funder: Change a Path

- Offers grants up to \$1 million — ideal for launching early-phase shelter projects.
- Sustainable financial support for anti-trafficking initiatives across Southern California
- Values closely aligned with the vision of the project, such as the promotion of survivor leadership, anti-carceral solutions, and support of LGBTQ+ youth.

Description of Proposed Project :

- One-year planning phase to develop a residential shelter for girls, including transgender and gender non-conforming youth, who are survivors of CSEC in Orange and Los Angeles Counties, California.
- The STARS House will be a small shelter in Orange County with 4–6 beds, offering 12-month stays, wrap-around services, and robust aftercare support.
- Grounded in prison abolition, feminist theory, and trauma-informed practices and will connect youth with providers who use a strengths-based, anti-carceral approach.
- Informed by federal best practices, the program aims to create a survivor-centered, healing environment that supports long-term stability and personal growth.
- Utilization of an advisory board (STARBeam) consisting of various personnel with lived experience of sex trafficking, homelessness, sex work, and youth advocacy.

Goals and Objectives:

STARS House's goals for this one-year planning phase are to create programming and procedures that facilitate thriving and healing among participants, form meaningful partnerships with other agencies to provide the best care, and foster survivor leadership and empowerment that allow participants to create a healthy, flourishing life after programming.

Objective 1: Create a 6-8 bed shelter facility space that fosters healing and thriving for survivors of sex trafficking.

Objective 2: Hire staff and establish an advisory team with deep knowledge and understanding of sex trafficking experiences and healing among youth.

Objective 3: Form partnerships with local agencies that can provide participants with referrals and therapeutic, educational, employment, and housing opportunities.

Objective 4: Prepare for implementing long-term holistic programming for participants, including case management, therapeutic services, community-building programming, and aftercare services.

Objective 5: Prepare for the recruitment and integration of the incoming residents of STARS House.

Description of Analysis:

Anti-Carceral Feminism: Carceral feminism relies on policing and prisons to address violence against women, often overlooking the harm these systems cause marginalized groups (Bernstein, 2012; Bernstein & Schaffner, 2005). Anti-carceral feminism promotes community-based, non-punitive responses to violence instead (Kim, 2019), as collaboration with law enforcement can further harm those in the sex trade (Capous-Desyllas et al., 2020).

Race and Sex Trafficking: Black and Indigenous girls are disproportionately trafficked due to systemic racism, poverty, and historical trauma. Black girls face higher arrest rates and less support, while Indigenous youth are overrepresented due to foster care involvement and exposure to violence (Constance-Huggins et al., 2021; Pierce & Koepplinger, 2011)

LGBTQ Youth and Sex Trafficking: LGBTQ youth, especially trans and gender non-conforming youth, face higher trafficking risks due to homelessness, abuse, and rejection. (Gerassi & Pederson, 2022). Many engage in survival sex and avoid services out of fear of discrimination. (Polaris Project, 2020).

Protective Factors:

Preventing sex trafficking involves economic stability, awareness of risks, and education for youth and stakeholders (Hurst, 2019). Resilience plays a key role in recovery, with survivors thriving through connection to themselves, others, and the community and receiving support that rebuilds self-esteem and affirms their experiences (Knight et al., 2023).

Budget Summary:

The projected budget for this residential center's first year is **\$244,820**

Includes salary, pay, training for additional staff and volunteers, operating costs, essential equipment, office supplies, and evaluation.

Personnel (Program Coordinator (LCSW), Program Associate (LCSW), Administrative Coordinator, Financial Coordinator, Human Resources Personnel) = \$215,000

Direct Operating Costs (rent, utilities, training, office supplies, residential furnishings, internet, travel) = \$19,820.

STARBeam Advisory Board (\$2,000/year x 5 members) = \$10,000

Potential Impact of Proposed Project:

Social workers must be aware of the patriarchal and political influences on sex trafficking and use that knowledge to serve CSEC better. This conforms with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2023) ethical standard of cultural competence, which addresses the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality. (NASW, 2023). Moving beyond traditional models creates space for youth to reclaim autonomy and access services that are affirming, empowering, and rooted in trust.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to lead meaningful change by deepening their understanding of sex trafficking through survivor-informed education. Centering the voices and leadership of survivors can enrich learning and improve outcomes.

Policies that move away from punitive systems and toward community-based, survivor-led responses are needed. Advocating for change through a lens of equity, abolition, and healing allows us to create safer, more inclusive support networks.

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Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Dr. Mimi Kim, Dr. Jo Brocato, and Dr. Eileen Mayers Pasztor for their meaningful contributions. I also want to thank my incredible parents, beautiful partner, and amazing friends and classmates. This wouldn't have been possible without all of you.