DATE: November 22, 2019

TO: Human Trafficking Commission

FROM: Robert Menicocci, Social Services Agency Director

SUBJECT: Screening and Assessment for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report from the Social Services Agency, Department of Family and Children's Services relating to the screening and assessment of children at risk for commercial sexual exploitation, including system entry points and timelines regarding screenings, assessments, and access to services.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

DFCS was asked to provide the Human Trafficking Commission with updates on DFCS’s screenings, system entry points, timeline for screening, and timeline for accessing services for commercially sexually exploited children.

Transformation Team

In an effort to mitigate the stigma associated with the term Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC), and to be inclusive of youth that are at risk or confirmed CSEC, the DFCS team working with this population adopted the name Transformation Team. DFCS’s Transformation Team provides education, prevention, and intervention services to children and youth at risk or confirmed to be commercially sexually exploited. The Transformation Team is comprised of one social services analyst and one social worker III. The Transformation Team social worker coaches department social workers on interview strategies for when a child is suspected of being a victim of commercial sexual exploitation.

DFCS’s Transformation Team mostly works with youth that are suspected or “at-risk” of commercial sexual exploitation. Most system-involved youth will not disclose experiences with CSEC activities for about two years after engagement in the activities or they do not recognize that they have been exploited. WestCoast Children’s Clinic (WestCoast), a private non-profit children’s community psychology clinic, is a leader in information regarding CSEC. WestCoast identifies the challenges in identifying youth that have been exploited:
Among WestCoast’s clients, 75% do not recognize that they are being exploited and do not seek help, a phenomenon not uncommon when abuse is severe, happens at a young age, or involves feelings of responsibility or shame. Because of the impact of trauma and the dynamics of trauma bonding—the strong emotional attachment between a person being abused and their abuser—most youth view their trafficker(s) as operating with their interests in mind.  

DFCS’s Transformation Team is part of a Countywide Transformation Team consisting of staff from DFCS, the Public Health Department (PHD), the Behavior Health Services Department (BHSD), Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) and community partner advocates. The Countywide Transformation Team facilitates bi-weekly meetings to discuss cases and service needs.

In 2016, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) issued All County Letter (ACL) number 16-49 that provided instructions to child welfare agencies on how to document CSEC youth within the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). DFCS interpreted the ACL to apply to youth who are “at risk” and who are within the foster care system. However, other counties interpret the ACL to apply to all allegations of child abuse and neglect. In August 2019, DFCS asked CDSS for further clarification regarding these two interpretations.

Screening Tools

The following are screening tools that the DFCS uses or is considering using to identify CSEC. Two of these tools are specific to CSEC: CSE-IT and the CSE-IT hotline and intake tool, both created by WestCoast. Other tools utilized by DFCS include Structured Decision Making (SDM), a tool used to identify child abuse and neglect, and Katie A., a tool to determine a child’s need for mental health services and/or intervention.

CSE-IT

Commercial Sexual Exploitation - Identification Tool (CSE-IT) is used by both DFCS and JPD. CSE-IT was created based on input from over 100 survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and service providers. In 2016, the tool was validated with data from a 15-month pilot to ensure that it accurately identified youth who have clear indicators of exploitation.

CSE-IT provides a continuum for concern based on a score of eight key indicators:

- Housing and caregiving - the youth experiences housing or caregiving instability for any reason.

---

2 Advocacy services for CSEC are provided by Community Solutions and YWCA
4 Please see Attachment A (CSE – IT) for further detail of the eight key indicators.
• Prior abuse or trauma - the youth has experienced trauma (not including exploitation).
• Physical health and appearance - the youth experiences notable changes in health and appearance.
• Environment and exposure - the youth’s environment or activities place them at risk of exploitation.
• Relationships and personal belongings - the youth’s relationships and belongings are not consistent with their age or circumstances, suggesting possible recruitment by an exploiter.
• Signs of current trauma - the youth exhibits signs of trauma exposure.
• Coercion - the youth is being controlled or coerced by another person.
• Exploitation - the youth exchanges sex for money or material goods, including food or shelter.

CSE-IT tool categorizes youth into three different categories: “no concern”, “possible concern” and “clear concern”. When JPD administers the tool, youth are often categorized as “clear concern” due to their involvement within the criminal justice system; however, this classification based on a criminal history does not necessarily mean that a youth was a victim of commercial sexual exploitation.

**CSE-IT Hotline and Intake Tool**

WestCoast developed a tool that was designed to screen child abuse reports, made to a child abuse and neglect hotline, for indicators of trafficking. DFCS is considering whether to utilize this tool within its Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC). (Please see Attachment B (CSE-IT-HI) for key indicators).

**Structured Decision Making**

The Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool is an approach to child welfare services that uses clearly defined and consistently applied decision-making criteria for screening, determining response priority, identifying immediate threatened harm, and estimating the risk of future abuse and neglect. This tool is used at DFCS’s CANC and throughout the life of DFCS case.

**Katie A.**

Katie A. is a mental health screening tool administered at least every six months to all DFCS youth who receive voluntary services, are admitted at the Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Center (RAIC), have had a placement disruption, and/or are court dependent. This screening tool is also used by BHSD clinicians to identify mental health services that would benefit a youth. When the BHSD coordinator has concerns about youth being at risk or involved in CSEC, the coordinator makes a referral to the BHSD representative on the Countywide Transformation Team.

**Screenings**

CSEC screenings are conducted at multiple levels within DFCS.
DFCS’s social workers receive mandated CSEC 101 training (the trainings are offered three times a year) to identify when a youth might be at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Social workers learn about consultations with DFCS’s Transformation Team and CSE-IT analyses. Social workers also assess a youth every time he or she returns from runaway status, per the runaway protocol, and notifies the Transformation Team if the youth demonstrates key indicators of exploitation.

CANC social workers use the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool to determine whether to investigate a referral as a CSEC case. The CANC social worker contacts the DFCS Transformation Team when an assessment indicates that a child is at risk or subject to commercial sexual exploitation. If the CANC determines an Emergency Response is warranted then the Transformation Team will reach out to the Emergency Response social worker for a CSEC consultation and CSE-IT evaluation and assessment. If the referral is a non-report or evaluate out, the Transformation Team will monitor the referral via its internal database and/or through CWS/CMS.

Once DFCS’s Transformation Team completes a consultation, CSE-IT, and assessment of services and needs, the Transformation Team social worker and/or a probation officer will coordinate service delivery by making referrals the Countywide Transformation Team partners for both DFCS and JPD. Additionally, DFCS’s team monitors the status of the youth throughout the Countywide Transformation multi-disciplinary team staffing to ensure coordination and availability of ongoing service needs and engagement.

All youth within the foster care system have a Katie A. screening assessment. If the Katie A. report indicates a CSEC concern, a referral is made to BHSD’s Transformation Team for appropriate mental health services.

Juvenile probation officers complete the CSE-IT tool for all youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System.

**System Entry Points**

Youth that are at risk, suspected, or confirmed to be subject to commercial sexual exploitation can be identified by any of the below listed DFCS units.

- CANC
- Emergency Response
- Dependency Investigation
- Safety and Wellbeing (formerly known as Continuing)
- Dually Involved Youth
- Non-Minor Dependent
- Voluntary Services
- HUB
- Post Adoptions
• Transformation Team

Timeline for Screenings

The timelines for when a child is screened for CSEC involvement are provided below.

When a youth demonstrates risk factors for CSEC or is identified as “at risk” for exploitation, an immediate consultation with DFCS’s Transformation Team will initiate the CSE-IT for identification of concern. Sometimes this immediate consultation is delayed until a case carrying social worker is available for the consultation.

Once a consultation occurs, and it is determined that the child/youth meets the state’s definition of “at risk” for exploitation, DFCS’s Transformation Team social worker will assess the youth’s needs with the case carrying social worker to determine engagement of the Transformation Team and services thereof. This process includes the completion of the Transformation Team referral by the case carrying social worker, preferably within 48 hours of the initial consult, to provide more in-depth information for the assessment and service delivery.

Best practice recommends that a CSEC screening occur within twenty-four hours after a youth returns from runaway status.

JPD officers screen youth prior to filing a petition with the Office of the District Attorney.

Timelines for Accessing Services

The timelines in which a youth can access services is dependent on whether there is an immediate crisis. In addition, it is important to note that all Transformation Team services provided by BHSD, PHD, and advocacy partners are voluntary. A youth does not need to be a DFCS client to receive services.

If there is an immediate crisis

All relevant Countywide Transformation Team members and/or law enforcement will be contacted for an immediate response to the child/youth and an advocate should meet the youth within 90 minutes of the call. If the immediate crisis occurs after-hours, an Emergency Response social worker or law enforcement officer can contact advocacy partner Community Solution’s crisis hotline and have an advocate at the location of the youth within 90 minutes. During the crisis, the advocate will provide intensive support to the youth for the first 72 hours and then ongoing support as long as the youth accepts the support.

If not an immediate crisis

When the need is not immediate, a written referral for services will be submitted by DFCS’s Transformation Team to its partners (Community Solutions, BHSD, and/or PHD) within 24 hours. Community Solutions will assign a case manager who will connect with the social worker and meet with the youth within four working days of receipt the referral. BHSD and PHD staff will each make contact with the youth within three working days and an informal intake will occur within 10 days of the referral.
If the report is considered a non-report or information-only, DFCS’s Transformation Team will call and/or mail the youth’s caregiver with information of available services if appropriate and there is sufficient information.

**Services Available for Youth and Caregivers**

DFCS and its Countywide Transformation Team partners provide an array of services for youth and caregivers impacted by commercial sexual exploitation, including but not limited to, a Youth Empowerment Summit; Intern and Earn; H.O.P.E.\(^5\) workshops; the Youth Advisory Board; Child and Family and Team meetings; Wraparound services; mentoring and support; consultation and support on health issues; information and prevention services for HIV, STDs, and pregnancy; support during medical appointments, including Sexual Assault Response Team exams; individual therapy for parents and youth; family therapy; parent support groups; and, regular activities for the youth.

**CHILD IMPACT**

The recommended action will have a positive impact on the **Safe & Stable Families, Juvenile Arrest Rate, Healthy Lifestyle, and Youth Feel Valued by the Community** indicators by providing the Human Trafficking Commission with an update on CSEC screening and assessment of children.

**SENIOR IMPACT**

The recommended action will have no/neutral impact on seniors.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommended action will have no/neutral sustainability implications.

**BACKGROUND**

California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 16524.7 established the CSEC Program administered by CDSS. County welfare departments participating in the program receive funds to implement an interagency protocol that is led by the county child welfare department.

**CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION**

The report regarding Screening and Assessment for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children would not be received a consequence of a negative action.

**STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL**

The Clerk of the Board will follow the usual process for this type of legislative file.

---

\(^5\) Honest. Open. Positive. Empowerment (H.O.P.E.) is a six-week support group for youth confirmed or at-risk of exploitation. Topics include the effects of trauma, education about human trafficking, what puts one at risk, safety planning, healthy relationships, self-esteem, expressive arts, self-care, and mindfulness.
ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A (CSE-IT) (PDF)
- Attachment B (CSE-IT-HI) (PDF)