



CHILDREN'S BUREAU GRANTEE LESSONS LEARNED

Human Trafficking: Working With Faith-Based Groups

The Children's Bureau awards discretionary grants for research and program development to State, Tribal, and local agencies; faith- and community-based organizations; and other nonprofit and for-profit groups. This series raises awareness of the lessons learned by various grantee projects on subjects spanning the child welfare continuum.

Responding to human trafficking has become a point of emphasis in the child welfare field due to the high risk of exploitation for children and youth with experience in foster care (See Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Human Trafficking and Child Welfare: A Guide for Child Welfare Agencies](#) for more information.) In October 2014, the Children's Bureau awarded [nine 5-year grants](#) to continue the development of their child welfare systems' response to human trafficking through infrastructure development and multisystem approaches.

Several grantees developed or leveraged partnerships with faith-based organizations to support the response to human trafficking. These partnerships brought a set of unique benefits and challenges. The following lessons learned offer information and strategies for working with faith-based organizations to respond to human trafficking in any community.

LESSON LEARNED

[01]

Identify specific gaps in services that can be met by groups outside the child welfare agency.

Tackling a problem as large and complex as human trafficking requires ample resources in terms of both time and funding. Grantees found that close collaboration with community partners, such as faith-based organizations, can assist with efforts to address human trafficking, including:

- Providing fundraising support for specific needs, such as supplies for hygiene bags or increasing access to safe housing for identified victims
- Using their reach to assist with efforts to engage new specialized therapeutic foster homes
- Providing training and education on human trafficking within the community
- Assisting with victim care during intake or after a victim of trafficking has been identified

The Underground (CT)

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) created the [Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team \(HART\)](#) to bring awareness and reduce child trafficking. Early on, DCF formed an integral partnership with the [Underground](#), a grassroots faith-based initiative of over 135 community churches dedicated to ending sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in Connecticut. The Underground financially supported human trafficking awareness events, provided career development workshops for youth, offered an enrichment scholarship program to identified victims, and more. Underground members receive training using DCF trafficking curricula and have representatives on the HART committee. The partnership has propelled anti-trafficking efforts in the State.

For more information, contact Tammy M. Sneed (DCFHART@ct.gov or 860.550.6471).

LESSON LEARNED

[02]

Utilize existing resources in your community.

Child welfare agencies may be uncertain which faith-based or community organizations to partner with. Some communities already have an anti-trafficking group or initiative. If not, there often are already efforts focused on similarly high-risk or crossover populations (e.g., homeless youth). Grantees shared that child welfare agencies can look to join or assist these existing organizations or partnerships and build upon work that is already being done.

After potential partners have been identified, grantees suggested that child welfare agencies should screen them for qualities that would likely lead to successful collaborations, such as the following:

- Consistent follow through with agreements
- Willingness to collaborate with other organizations and agencies
- Effectiveness in addressing needs and meeting goals
- Professional approach

Empower 225 (LA)

The relationship between the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and [Empower 225](#), a faith-based organization formerly known as Healing Place Serve, started well before they received Children's Bureau funding to address human trafficking within the child welfare system. A decade before the grant was awarded, Empower 225 went to the DCFS State office and asked staff members a simple question: What do you need? It started small—a pair of shoes for a youth, lunch for caseworkers, and redecorating a visitation room at a local office. Empower 225 consistently showed up and delivered. Many collaborations and projects later, Empower 225 worked as the lead agency for the trafficking grant through a close partnership with DCFS. Empower 225 employees were even colocated at DCFS to ensure collaboration throughout the grant.

For more information, contact Alliece Cole (Alliece.Cole@empower225.org).

LESSON LEARNED

[03]

Set clear guidelines and expectations upfront.

Grantees learned that child welfare agencies and prospective partners should discuss their objectives and anticipated benefits before entering into a partnership. Prior to formalizing an agreement, it is important that clear ground rules and guiding principles are established. Grantees found it helpful for child welfare agencies and prospective partners to agree on the following:

- **Policies and guidelines.** The partners should agree to expectations regarding a variety of topics, including rules on discussing faith, a physical touch policy, maltreatment reporting guidelines, privacy laws, and other issues related to working with those involved in child welfare.
- **Program and oversight requirements.** The partners should determine, for example, what services and supports each party will contribute; what, if any, outcomes they will measure; who is the point of contact during the day and at night; and who needs to be engaged as part of the decision-making process.
- **Training requirements.** Grantees shared the importance of training volunteers on the human trafficking of children and youth, including related policies and guidelines as well as program and oversight requirements. Some grantees recommended that volunteers who work with or around children and youth should also receive training on how trauma affects young people (e.g., increased risk for truancy or running away, trauma bonding).

It may be helpful for the partner organization and child welfare agency to acknowledge that rules and guidelines may change throughout the partnership. A successful partnership requires all parties to remain open to discussing concerns and be respectful of each other's differences.

Information in this brief was gathered in 2018 via in-person site visits, phone calls, and a review of grantee materials and does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement of any program or practice. This series is offered for informational purposes only and the information presented does not represent an endorsement by the Children's Bureau or Child Welfare Information Gateway.



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