



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

A close-up photograph of several hands of different skin tones (white, light brown, dark brown) stacked on top of each other, symbolizing unity and support. The hands are positioned in the center of the page, with the fingers pointing towards the center. The background is a solid blue color.

# Enhancing Juvenile and Family Court Responses to Human Trafficking: A Project Snapshot

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# INTRODUCTION



In 2021, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) received funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime (OVC)<sup>1</sup> to provide training and technical assistance to four grantee sites separately funded under the Enhancing Juvenile and Family Court Responses to Human Trafficking Program. The program goal was to develop or enhance programs to provide direct services and diversion programs for youth in contact with the juvenile and family court systems who were victims of sex and/or labor trafficking, or at risk for human trafficking due to past or current crime victimization, including child abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup> The project objectives included:<sup>3</sup>

- Implementing screening and assessment protocols/processes;
- Developing or expanding intervention models to provide direct services and/or diversion programs;
- Providing trauma-informed care through a multidisciplinary team:
- Increasing awareness and identification of sex and/or labor trafficking involving youth; and
- Participating in an annual peer-to-peer learning opportunity.



<sup>1</sup>“OVC strives to uphold the intent of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations to ensure that all trafficking victims receive support in accessing the services they need.” Office for Victims of Crime, Human Trafficking: OVC Efforts, available at <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/human-trafficking/ovc-efforts>, (last visited Sept. 15, 2025).

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, OVC FY 2021 Enhancing Juvenile and Family Court Responses to Human Trafficking Solicitation, version 5, at 4 (2021).

<sup>3</sup>*Id.*

The program ran through September 2025, and through this award, the NCJFCJ facilitated improvements in processes to provide better outcomes for children and youth who were victims of sex and labor trafficking. The NCJFCJ worked specifically with the following four grantee sites awarded by OVC:

- **Cleveland Rape Crisis Center** – Enhancing the Cuyahoga Court of Common Pleas Juvenile Division’s Response to Human Trafficking
- **King County Superior Court** – Juvenile and Family Court CSEC (Commercially Sexually Exploited Children) Screening Program
- **Project PROTECT** – Philadelphia Response and Outreach to End Child Trafficking in WRAP (Working to Restore Adolescent Power) Court
- **Queens Community Justice Center** – the Rockaways Queens (part of the Center for Justice Innovation) – HOPE Expansion (part of the Center for Justice Innovation)



To enhance the technical assistance provided to the project sites, the NCJFCJ partnered with the Center for Human Rights of Children (CHRC) at Loyola School of Law in Chicago. Recognizing that children require special protections due to their vulnerabilities, the CHRC was established in 2007 to pursue an agenda of interdisciplinary research, outreach and education, and advocacy to address critical and complex issues affecting children and youth, both locally and globally. Katherine Kaufka Walts, the Director for the CHRC, provided training and technical assistance on child labor and sex trafficking for the grantee sites and at national events.

Key activities during the grant period included:

- Visits to the grantee sites to observe, assess practice, engage stakeholders, and provide onsite training and technical assistance,
- Annual in-person and monthly virtual peer-to-peer learning opportunities,
- Training provided to each of the sites based on their specific needs, and
- The creation of an online resource center on child sex and labor trafficking which can be found at [Resource Center for Courts on Child Trafficking – NCJFCJ](#).

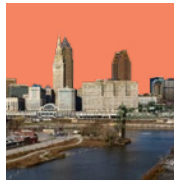
NCJFCJ provided training and technical assistance to the sites on topics including, but not limited to, screening and assessments, child labor trafficking, engaging youth survivors (youth choice and voice), special populations, multi-disciplinary teams (MDT's), forensic interviews and child advocacy centers (CAC's), harm reduction strategies, alternatives to detention, and collateral consequences.



# SITE PROFILES



The OVC competed funding awards for project sites and selected four grantee sites for this project. These are the profiles for the selected grantee sites.



## **Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC) – Enhancing the Cuyahoga Court of Common Pleas Juvenile Division’s Response to Human Trafficking**

[www.clevelandrapecrisis.org/services/trafficking/](http://www.clevelandrapecrisis.org/services/trafficking/)

The Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC) has a longstanding history of supporting survivors of sexual violence, having begun as a hotline in 1974 and evolving into a vital resource in Northeast Ohio's health and human services landscape. With a commitment to comprehensive care, CRCC implements screening and assessment protocols specifically designed to identify youth victims of sex and labor trafficking involved with juvenile and family courts. This initiative aims to enhance trauma-informed interventions, develop diversion programs, and promote community awareness of trafficking issues.

CRCC provides essential support for survivors of rape and sexual abuse, focusing on healing and prevention while advocating for social change. Each year, more than 46,500 individuals, including one-third who are youth, benefit from the CRCC counseling, advocacy, and education programs across Cuyahoga County, Ashtabula County, Geauga County, and Lake County. The CRCC offers trauma-informed crisis intervention, advocacy, and counseling to survivors of sex and labor trafficking within the community.

CRCC collaborates closely with the Safe Harbor Docket, which enhances the identification, referral, and treatment processes for youth affected by trafficking within the juvenile justice system.



This partnership emphasizes treatment over punishment, providing legal representation and support for young victims. Since its establishment in 2015, the Safe Harbor Docket has successfully connected juvenile survivors with trauma-informed services, ensuring their needs are met with compassion and support.



### ■ Accomplishments and Challenges

The Anti-Human Trafficking Team at CRCC has focused on expanding services for youth survivors and those at risk of human trafficking. This team has fostered new community partnerships and strengthened existing collaborations, resulting in an increase in trafficking-related services provided to youth.

To enhance outreach efforts, CRCC developed a "street card" for law enforcement officers, outlining red flags, common behaviors of trafficking victims and survivors, and tips for effective interaction with trafficked individuals, along with CRCC's contact information. The CRCC has initiated training sessions with law enforcement agencies, including brief presentations during roll calls and mandatory meetings focused on human trafficking awareness.

CRCC has challenges promoting the adoption of their screening tool among various agencies to enhance collaborative efforts in combating trafficking, coordinating, and scheduling trafficking-related training sessions and presentations with law enforcement agencies to improve awareness and response strategies. In addition to establishing partnerships with schools to deliver informative presentations on trafficking issues, focusing on educating youth about the risks and prevention strategies is an ongoing effort of the CRCC.



### **King County Superior Court: Juvenile and Family Court CSEC Screening Program**

[www.kingcountycsec.org](http://www.kingcountycsec.org)

With a population exceeding 2.25 million, King County stands as the most populous county in Washington State. In King County, the city of Seattle, and its neighboring areas, including Tacoma in Pierce County and Everett in Snohomish County, report the highest incidence of cases involving Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) in the state.

The King County CSEC Screening Program is committed to addressing the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children by providing survivor-centered services and support that cater to the unique needs of affected youth. This program places a strong emphasis on the safety and well-being of exploited children, working proactively to identify at-risk youth and furnishing them with vital services aimed at preventing further exploitation. Operating under the auspices of the King County Superior Court, the CSEC program collaborates with a network of community organizations including the Seattle Children's Hospital, King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, Advent Advocacy Consulting, and YMCA to deliver comprehensive care, resources, and support for those impacted by exploitation. Through these collaborative efforts, the program seeks to empower survivors and foster their recovery and resilience.

In April 2013, King County Superior Court Judge Barbara A. Mack convened the first meeting of the King County CSEC Task Force. The mission of the CSEC Task Force is to protect and support children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation while simultaneously working to prevent further exploitation.

### ■ King County CSEC Task Force Initiatives

The program is designed to identify youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and provide them with trauma-informed services tailored to their needs. It works closely with the King County CSEC Task Force, which leads initiatives to enhance the safety and support of exploited children. The program also offers training for service providers to improve their capacity to identify and respond to CSEC cases, ensuring that professionals are well-equipped to effectively assist affected youth.

### ■ Accomplishments and Challenges



A significant achievement includes the establishment of a universal screening system within the King County Superior Court. From October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2024, a total of 1,667 youth were screened, all of whom were involved in King County Superior Court—specifically, the Juvenile or Family Court Becca Programs. These youth were either facing criminal charges through Juvenile Court or were connected to Family Court Becca Programs, which include Truancy, At-Risk Youth Petitions, and Child in Need of Services Petitions.

Despite the expiration of grant funding, screening has continued. From October 1, 2024, to February 11, 2025, an additional 280 youth were screened. The King County Superior Court has



provided funding to sustain universal CSEC screening from October 1, 2024, to March 7, 2025. Furthermore, Washington State passed SB 6006 in 2024, mandating screening in all “child welfare” and “juvenile justice” organizations starting July 1, 2025. King County Superior Court is actively working to comply with this requirement.

King County has successfully increased screening efforts and the number of youth who could benefit from community-based services. However, this surge in referrals has strained the community-based resources of agencies traditionally providing CSEC services. To address this, King County is enhancing the knowledge base of community organizations through free training, thereby expanding the network available to receive referrals.



## **Queens Community Justice Center – The Rockaways: Queens Heal, Overcome, Prosper, Empower (HOPE) Expansion**

[www.innovatingjustice.org/program/queens-community-justice-center-rockaways/](http://www.innovatingjustice.org/program/queens-community-justice-center-rockaways/)

The Queens Community Justice Center (QCJC), part of the Center for Justice Innovation, is committed to preventing individuals from entering the justice system by offering supportive alternatives to incarceration and criminal convictions. For clients engaged in the justice system, QCJC employs a comprehensive approach aimed at mitigating the negative consequences of legal involvement while addressing underlying needs to prevent future recidivism. The center provides young individuals with leadership training, internships, and opportunities to make a positive impact within the Queens community.

QCJC offers specialized direct support and mentoring services to young girls aged 12 to 18 who are at risk of sexual exploitation and domestic sex trafficking. A dedicated social worker and case manager provide one-on-one and group support, delivering intensive case management and trauma-informed, survivor-centered services, including appropriate mentoring.

To effectively screen incoming youth, QCJC utilizes the West Coast Children’s Clinic Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT). Additionally, the center implements a 10-week curriculum for youth participants that focuses on discussions about safety, self-love, and making informed decisions in high-risk situations.



## ■ Accomplishments and Challenges

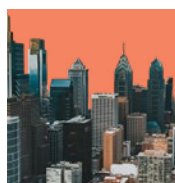
QCJC has successfully transitioned its Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to in-person formats, significantly enhancing engagement among partners. This shift has fostered deeper collaboration, resulting in the co-development of a one-pager to be included in a broader toolkit for parents and professionals.



The Queen's HOPE program actively recruits girls at-risk for human trafficking from the Far Rockaway community to participate in one of their cohorts to receive an evidenced-based curriculum addressing healthy relationships and human trafficking. Each cohort member can engage in one-on-one sessions with a licensed social worker, in addition to participating in group activities within the cohort. The latest cohort, running from January 2025 to March 2025, incorporated the Ten Steps Ahead curriculum, adapted from the My Life program. This innovative approach equips youth to “think like a trafficker,” enabling them to recognize grooming, manipulation, and other early warning signs. Sessions are designed to be interactive and honest, providing participants with essential tools for setting boundaries and ensuring their safety.

Many participants remain engaged beyond the program, often returning as peer mentors, where they learn to support others while continuing to receive mentorship from staff. Participants leave the program equipped with self-management tools, a deeper understanding of their intrinsic worth, and a strong sense of community support.

It is anticipated that the ongoing implementation of the curriculum will enable Queens HOPE to foster engagement within the Far Rockaway community, positioning it as a safe space while enhancing its visibility among other community organizations to receive referrals that will lead to the identification of verified victims of sex trafficking.



### **Project PROTECT: Philadelphia Response and Outreach to End Child Trafficking in Working to Restore Adolescent Power (WRAP) Court**

[www.sccalaw.org/about-child-advocates/](http://www.sccalaw.org/about-child-advocates/)

Project PROTECT launched Philadelphia's WRAP Court in 2015 in response to the absence of safe harbor legislation in the state. This initiative operates under the Support Center for Child Advocates, the nation's oldest and largest volunteer legal services agency dedicated exclusively to abused and neglected children and youth. The primary goals of WRAP Court include the identification of young trafficking victims and the implementation of trauma-informed diversion alternatives.



Founded in 1977, the Support Center for Child Advocates partners staff social workers and attorneys with over 330 specially trained volunteer attorneys to represent more than 1,000 children annually. Their mission is to secure safety, justice, well-being, and a permanent, nurturing environment for every child. The organization advocates collaborative, multidisciplinary casework, and solutions to systemic issues, while also providing educational programs to raise awareness of the child welfare system and the prevention of child abuse.

The Support Center for Child Advocates collaborates with WRAP Court to facilitate identification, screening, assessment, court engagement, legal representation, treatment, and support for youth and their families in both delinquent and dependent courts.

## ■ Accomplishments and Challenges

Project PROTECT has established a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) led by Liz Stein, a Survivor Mentor and Child Policy Associate at the Support Center for Child Advocates. Liz Stein also trains other community-based agencies on best practices for ethical engagement with youth in the creation of YABs.

Through Project PROTECT's convening of stakeholders in WRAP Court Collaboration meetings, considerable progress has been made in addressing barriers to youth access to WRAP Court. Stakeholders have developed informative one-pagers to educate Family Court practitioners, including attorneys and judges. Additionally, Project PROTECT is convening multi-disciplinary team (MDT) stakeholders through Philadelphia's Juvenile Anti-Trafficking Coalition, which is creating a social services directory and legal services for minor victims through the collaboration of the Support Center for Child Advocates and Project PROTECT.



# LOOKING FORWARD



A final topic of discussion for the NCJFCJ with the grantee sites was to address the sustainability of their programs after their OVC funding awards end. Each grantee site is committed to continuing some form of their programs and strategies to serve child victims of trafficking. The OVC Grantee Sites continue to be guided and supported through innovative and determined staff teams and collaborative partners who have committed to continuous improvement in serving child victims of trafficking. Each grantee site continues to engage in strengthening their child victim identification efforts, program development, and training opportunities in their communities. They continue to participate in peer learning activities. Each grantee site is established in their respective communities as an anti-trafficking response for young victims. Resources continue to be available for the grantee sites and for any community wishing to address child trafficking through the [OVC Human Trafficking webpages](#) and the NCJFCJ [Resource Center for Courts on Child Trafficking](#).