



## COLLEGE TOOLKIT

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### WHO WE ARE

Community Against Sexual Harm serves women who have been commercially sexually exploited through survivor-led peer support and harm reduction services, while providing education about the harm inflicted on women and the community. We are located in Oak Park and serve women from throughout Sacramento County. Contact us at 916-856-2900.

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### WHAT'S INSIDE?

This toolkit was created in partnership with The Sierra Health Foundation and offers tips and resources to engage women who have been commercially sexually exploited and have trauma related symptoms.

Education, housing, and employment opportunities have been shown to be the factors that reduce the risk of continued exploitation. This guide is intended to help connect people with these opportunities.

# WHAT IS COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) occurs when a vulnerable person exchanges sexual acts for money, or to fulfill basic needs, including food, shelter, medicine, or safety; this may involve a third party who profits financially from the exploitation. A 'vulnerable person' is one who has few options for survival outside of CSE due to trauma, substance abuse, homelessness, threat of violence, or coercion by a trusted or more powerful party.

Despite their status as victims of crime, the stigmatized nature of trading sex for money often prevents exploited people from seeking services due to shame and fear of judgment from service providers.

## THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- **Human Trafficking**

The practice of a third party using force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. Though violence is often used as a means of controlling the individual, emotional and psychological abuse and manipulation are a crucial element of trafficking.

- **Prostitution**

The exchange of sexual activity for money or other valuable consideration, such as drugs. Prostitution often appears to be consensual, but it is often engaged in by vulnerable people with few other options for survival.

- **Survival Sex**

Prostitution driven by extreme need, and occurs when sexual activity is exchanged for shelter, food, or clothing. People engaging in survival sex are generally disadvantaged by society in some way, and include members of the LGBTQ community, people suffering from addiction or untreated mental health disorders, and the homeless.

## TYPES OF STIGMA

**Anticipated Stigma** refers to the fear of rejection a person may feel when interacting with someone outside of their stigmatized group.

**Internalized Stigma** occurs when a person comes believes the negative connotations related to the stigmatizing behaviors in which they engage are integral to their identity.

**Enacted Stigma** is the consequences of prejudice perpetrated by someone perceived to be outside of the stigmatized group.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

Stigma is negative stereotypes or **beliefs** attributed to behaviors that fall outside established social norms, while discrimination is the **action** that stems from stigma.

Discrimination may manifest as unequal treatment or refusal to provide services, housing, or employment to a member of a stigmatized group such as victims of CSE, substance users, or formerly incarcerated people.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

The following information is from Community Against Sexual Harm participants who volunteered to participate in a focus group to discuss their experience with education, housing, and employment opportunities.

### *“Everybody Judges”*

One of the most consistent feelings described by focus group participants was that they are always judged. Feeling judged shows up when someone anticipates stigma and can be debilitating when the stigma has been internalized. Both self-esteem and confidence in one’s future suffer when people feel they are less valued. The fear of rejection by others leads many people to limit their life opportunities.

### *“College costs a lot.”*

Focus group participants estimated that the out-of-pocket costs for community college attendance was anywhere from free to \$10,000. There was not a lot of agreement about what college might cost. Most felt that books were very expensive and complicated efforts to attend college. Costs, in terms of actual out of pocket expenses, and the opportunity costs of choosing between education and employment were a consideration for our focus group participants.

### *“I don’t think college is for me.”*

This sentiment was used to describe general feelings about education and classwork and the ability to organize life in a way that would work with the structure of formal education. High school completion rates vary for the women we serve, with approximately 55% having a high school diploma. However, self-perceived ability, anxiety related to past trauma, and the daily challenges of living in poverty create real obstacles to feeling like college is a good choice.

### *“In college, they don’t hold your hand.”*

While a majority of focus group participants indicated that they would go to a college and ask about things they do not understand, our experience paints a different story. We have found that there is a wedge between intending to ask for assistance and actually seeking assistance. This may be due to feeling uncomfortable around unfamiliar people. Stigmatization has been shown to produce difficulty engaging in normal social interactions. However, focus group participants indicated that they were much more likely to follow through with referrals if they have been specifically referred to them by a trusted person.

# 5 THINGS YOU CAN DO

We can all play a part in helping a person take meaningful steps toward the obtaining the education they need to fully move ahead in their life. Our suggestions are simple, but the impact can be great.

1

Encourage the participation of mentors, advocates, and caseworkers during orientation, to assist with applications, and as additional points of contacts to ensure there is a way to maintain contact with the college student.

2

Understand that poverty, trauma, and discrimination affect how people navigate their lives and are all part of commercial sexual exploitation. Memory, multi-tasking, and reestablishing priorities can all be challenging. Modest “nudges”, such as reminders or simple, personalized emails, have been found to improve individual decision making and increase attendance.

3

Promote a full range of college opportunities through literature, social media, and conversations. Certificate programs, evening and online classes, and part-time options may provide a better fit for some people who have been commercially sexually exploited. Choices and options help clarify how much flexibility there is in a system and the likelihood that continuing their education will work alongside multiple goals and priorities.

4

Use peer navigators. If possible, select people to guide new students through the process, who have faced challenges like chronic poverty, childhood trauma, and commercial sexual exploitation. People who have overcome hardship are easy to find and they often want to help. Develop a network to tap into this resource through the work study program or feedback from Professors. In our experience, there is no substitute for receiving help from someone who has walked in your shoes.

5

Normalize the assistance and guidance provided by enrollment specialists, special programs, and mentors. The idea that help is available, accessible, and used by many people reduces fear that someone should be able to navigate a system on their own.



**In case of an emergency, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733)**

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A college education not only improves a person's future, it is one of the factors that reduce the risk for commercial sexual exploitation. However, the stress of poverty and trauma, and the stigmatizing nature of sex work create additional challenges to receiving assistance. The following resources offer additional assistance to help people succeed.



Community Against Sexual Harm  
Mentoring, Wrap-Around Services, Drop-In Support Center  
916-856-2900 · [www.cashsac.org](http://www.cashsac.org)



TLCS Respite Center  
Respite center for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis  
916-RESPITE · [www.tlcssac.org](http://www.tlcssac.org)



Chicks in Crisis  
Prenatal care, parenting assistance, clothes, emergency food, baby supplies, and legal guidance  
916-441-1243 · [www.chicksincrisis.org](http://www.chicksincrisis.org)



Sacramento Food Bank  
Food access, clothing, GED, adult, parent, and youth education, immigration legal services  
916-456-1980 · [www.sacramentofoodbank.org](http://www.sacramentofoodbank.org)



One Community Health  
Primary health and specialty provider and covered CA Enrollment  
916-443-3299 · [www.onecommunityhealth.com](http://www.onecommunityhealth.com)



211  
Referrals to more than 1,600 community services in the Sacramento area  
Dial 2-1-1 or 916-498-1000 · [www.211sacramento.org/211](http://www.211sacramento.org/211)



Sources  
Corrigan & Watson: Understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness, Benoit, Jansson, Smith & Flagg: Prostitution Stigma and Its Effect on the Working Conditions, Personal Lives, and Health of Sex Workers & [www.mobilitypartnership.org](http://www.mobilitypartnership.org)