



For Immediate Release

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State of Minnesota Safe Harbor Program Funds Four Agencies to Provide Housing and Services for Sexually Exploited Youth

Four Minnesota agencies are joining together under the Minnesota Department of Human Services Safe Harbor Shelter and Housing grants to provide shelter and services for our state's sexually exploited youth. "Safe Harbor is the most significant state investment in the country to end child sex trafficking," said CeCe Terlouw, executive director of the Heartland Girls' Ranch of Benson, one of the four Minnesota Safe Harbor grantees.

Minnesota has, in the past, arrested and prosecuted youth for prostitution. This legal framework views juveniles used in prostitution as criminals. "Safe Harbor laws go into effect August 1, 2014 and will shift the paradigm for at risk and sexually exploited youth, viewing them as crime victims rather than criminals," said Linda Riddle, Safe Harbor program manager at Life House, a grantee agency in Duluth. Specifically, Safe Harbor laws are designed to exempt children from prostitution arrest and prosecution, train law enforcement and community members on how to identify and assist victims, increase penalties for traffickers, and promote the development of a statewide system of care.

In the January 2013 Minnesota Department of Public Safety comprehensive *No Wrong Door* report, a recommendation of \$13.5 million was made to the Minnesota Legislature to begin to implement Safe Harbor statewide. Of the \$2.8 million that was actually approved in the 2013 budget, just \$1 million was allocated for services and housing/shelter programs over two years—2014 and 2015. A total of four programs in Minnesota were selected in a highly competitive process to receive this funding.

Breaking Free (St. Paul) www.breakingfree.net

Safe Harbor funding will allow Breaking Free to maintain and expand services to support a new youth transitional housing program to include apartment housing for 6-20 girls ages 16-17. The total amount of funding allocated to Breaking Free is \$128,000 per year for two years.

Heartland Girls' Ranch (Benson) <http://heartlandgirlsranh.org>

Funding from Safe Harbor will provide survivor-led supportive services for up to 8 trafficked girls in its residential group home for girls ages 12-17. The total amount of funding allocated to Heartland

Girls' Ranch is \$82,000 per year for two years.

The Link (Minneapolis) www.thelinkmn.org

Funded by Safe Harbor to provide 6 emergency shelter beds in Shakopee for trafficked girls, boys, and transgender youth ages 13-17 and five units of supportive housing for trafficked girls, boys, and transgender youth ages 16-23 (any youth 18-23 will be paid for with non-Safe Harbor funds). The five housing units can also serve parenting youth and their children. The total amount of funding from Safe Harbor allocated to The Link is \$190,000 per year for two years.

Life House/PAVSA/Safe Haven Shelter (Duluth) www.lifehouseduluth.org

Safe Harbor funding will allow for 2 shelter beds for girls, boys, and transgender youth 17 and under. The total amount of funding allocated to Life House/PAVSA/Safe Haven is \$100,000 per year for two years.

All four Safe Harbor-funded agencies are collaborating to ensure that Minnesota's sexually exploited youth are identified as victims and are able to receive comprehensive services that will ensure their safety and eventual self-sufficiency.

"The \$2.8 million the Legislature allocated last session is about 21% of what we need to fully fund Safe Harbor," stated Vednita Carter, executive director of Breaking Free. She noted that there are bills moving through the Minnesota House and Senate during this session that would provide an additional \$2.5 million to provide housing and services to sexually exploited youth if approved. "This funding was an excellent start but we hope that the Legislature understands that to provide real impact in the lives of youth, Safe Harbor funding needs to be increased this session. We are grateful for the support from the Minnesota Legislature on this issue and are hopeful the Governor will also understand the importance of this request in his final budget."

Beth Holger-Ambrose, executive director of The Link, added: "The cost of providing specialized emergency shelter or housing with the vital supportive services on-site that sex trafficked youth need is between \$280 and \$320 per day per youth, which is an incredibly worthwhile investment. A recent study by the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center, the University of Minnesota, and Indiana State University found that there is a \$34 return on investment for every \$1 spent on programs such as these. Providing appropriate safe places to stay and heal from trafficking when youth can't be safely reunified with family is the right thing to do for these youth."

The Minnesota Women's Foundation also invested in additional funding for all four agencies for their youth housing programs.

In addition to Safe Harbor shelter and housing grants, Breaking Free, the Heartland Girls' Ranch, and PAVSA received additional funding from the Minnesota Department of Health to provide regional navigators for their respective areas. As part of the Safe Harbor implementation plan, eight regional navigators around Minnesota will coordinate services for sexually exploited youth in their regions and ensure that government systems and non-profit agencies are appropriately trained and working collaboratively to identify and meet the needs of sex trafficked youth throughout the state.

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