

MY LIFE MY CHOICE AND COHANNET ACADEMY: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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OVERVIEW OF COHANNET ACADEMY

All girls, trauma-informed, Intensive Residential Treatment Program (IRTP)

Locked facility: more high-risk behaviors while also offering community access

Average length of stay and services

WHO COHANNET ACADEMY SERVES



- Female youth ages 13-18
- 15 beds for Massachusetts referrals
- Two out-of-state beds
- Many youth have DYS and DCF involvement

PROFILE OF A TYPICAL RESIDENT

- Youth diagnosed with mental health disorders, complex trauma histories
- May have experienced numerous hospitalizations, and/or have not been successful in less restrictive settings
- Presenting with high risk behaviors



ABOUT MY LIFE MY CHOICE



COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES



SURVIVOR EMPOWERMENT

Supporting survivors in rebuilding their lives, finding their voice, and becoming leaders.



PROFESSIONAL TRAINING & ADVOCACY

Educating service providers and law enforcement to impact policy and practice.



PREVENTION EDUCATION & SOLUTIONS

Empowering youth to protect themselves from the commercial sex industry and its predators.



THE MY LIFE MY CHOICE PREVENTION SOLUTION MODEL

A BLUEPRINT FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS WORKING
WITH VULNERABLE AND EXPLOITED YOUTH

COMPONENTS OF THE MY LIFE MY CHOICE PREVENTION SOLUTION MODEL

- 1. SHIFTS IN BEHAVIOR: EMPOWERING YOUTH**
Prevention Education and Support
- 2. SHIFTS IN PRACTICE & POLICY: NEW TOOLS & SKILLS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS**
Advanced Trainings and Policy Development
- 3. SUSTAINED PROGRAM-WIDE CHANGE: IMPLEMENTATION AND BEST PRACTICES**
Ongoing Support and Networking

SHIFTS IN BEHAVIOR: EMPOWERING YOUTH

IN-DEPTH SHIFT OF ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE, & SKILLS

Best Practices

- Not a “one shot deal”
- Includes adults who will be in it for the long haul
- Isn’t a “scared straight” methodology
- Builds relationships to build effectiveness
- Grounded in reality and led by survivors (real life stories & information)
- Doesn’t use hyperbole
- Gives opportunity for shared language and practice
- Gender-specific and culturally-competent
- Builds and/or shifts group & community norms
- Explores vulnerability

SHIFTS IN BEHAVIOR: EMPOWERING YOUTH SECONDARY AND TERTIARY PREVENTION



PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AMONG
ADOLESCENT GIRLS:
THE MY LIFE MY CHOICE CURRICULUM

WRITTEN BY LISA GOLDBLATT GRACE, AUDREY MORRISSEY,
AMY CORBETT & DENISE WILLIAMS

THIRD EDITION
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One Option:
**The My Life My Choice
Prevention Curriculum**

THE MY LIFE MY CHOICE PREVENTION CURRICULUM: RESULTS FROM A 3 YEAR EVALUATION

THREE YEAR NIJ EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY EXPERT RESEARCHERS AT
BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

- Knowledge about CSEC **improved for all participants**
- **CSEC decreased by half** immediately after group
- Participants were **2x less likely to report dating abuse** in the past three months
- **Youth were significantly more likely to give CSEC-related help** to a friend or other people
- Self-reported sexually explicit behaviors in the past three months **reduced by half** immediately after group.



Northeastern
University



SHIFTS IN PRACTICE & POLICY: DEVELOPING A CSEC POLICY

What is a CSEC Policy?



Why is it important?

SUSTAINED PROGRAM-WIDE CHANGE: IMPLEMENTATION AND BEST PRACTICES



Key Factors

- Ongoing connection and support
- Data
- Collaboration with strong partners

MY LIFE MY CHOICE SURVIVOR MENTORING

- Young people under age 18 referred to MLMC
- Assigned one-on-one mentor
- Survivors 5+ years post exploitation, full time staff
- At least once per week mentoring
- Relationship building, support and scaffolding services
- Monthly written communication with youth's support system
- Co-lead prevention groups in the community as needed
- As youth demonstrates ability to independently make positive decisions, structured visits decrease
- Relationship can continue indefinitely



CONGREGATE CARE AND MY LIFE MY CHOICE

STATE CUSTODY AND VULNERABILITY

88% of children reported missing to NCMEC who were identified as likely child sex trafficking victims were missing from a foster care or group home placement *(NCMEC, 2018)*

85% of youth referred to MLMC in 2017 were involved with the child welfare system *(MLMC, 2017)*

*“Foster care was **training ground** for being trafficked. She understood that she was attached to a check. And what she points out is that at least the pimp told her he loved her, and she never heard that in any of her foster care placements.”*

(NPR, 2013)

MY LIFE MY CHOICE AND COHANNET ACADEMY

- Cohannet and My Life My Choice partnership began in 2014
- MOU for a Strategic Partnership
- 2012-2014: Increasing referrals of youth with CSEC histories
- Cohannet is a trauma-informed facility, CSEC felt different

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

- Two 10-week Exploitation Prevention Groups each year
- My Life My Choice Survivor Mentors
- Ongoing trainings for Cohannet staff



WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Reframing the way staff view our youth

- Changes in language = changes in attitudes
- Altering view of “problem” behaviors
- Relationship-building

How we talk about our youth

- “Teen prostitute” vs. “Exploited youth”
- “Runaway” vs. “Missing from care”
- “Choice” vs. “Manipulated/exploited”
- “Victim” vs. “Survivor”
- “Unwilling to change” vs. “Overactive survival strategies”

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

More effective nursing
assessment and care

CSEC-informed therapy:
beyond trauma-informed

Advantages for
staff

- Decreased burnout
- Increased confidence to discuss CSEC with youth, leading to more effective treatment outcomes

INCREASING HOPE



Residents Feel:

- Empowered
- Safe
- Understood
- Supported
- Hopeful

Staff Feel:

- Empowered
- Safe
- Effective
- Connected
- Hopeful

LEAVING A LIGHT ON: CHANGING OUR MISSING FROM CARE PROTOCOL

- Initial response
- Protocol once youth is found
- Planning for the future



WE CAN'T PROTECT THEM FOREVER: DISCHARGE PLANNING

Enhance Individual/Family Sessions

Get New Team On Board

Review Community Risk and
Resources

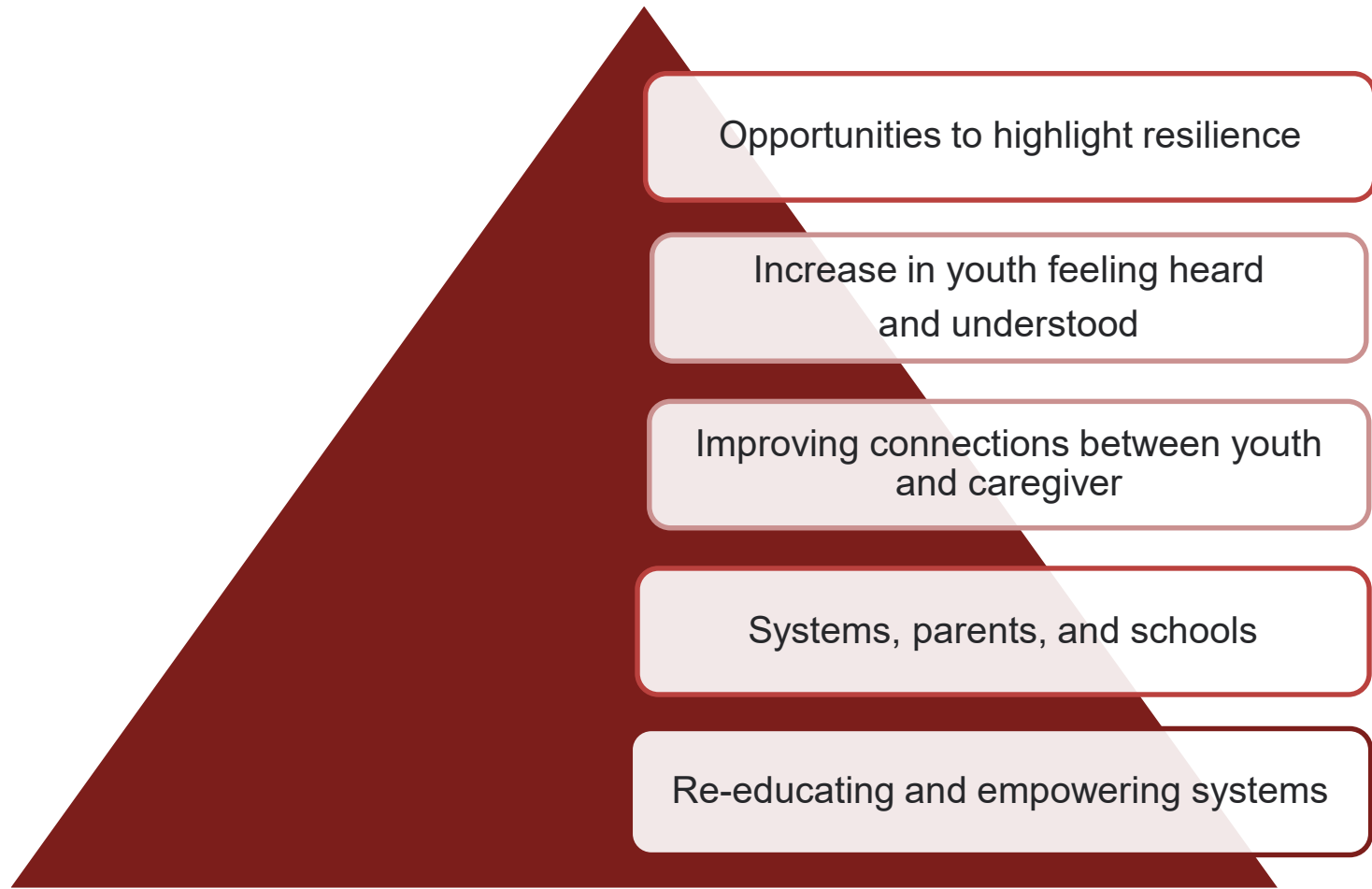
Introduce Social
Media/Technology/Phones

Limitations of the system

Empowering our teams: Create best
possible plan for success

Relapse/revictimization: How do you
ask for help?

SUSTAINED SYSTEM-WIDE CHANGE





**THE MY LIFE MY CHOICE
ADVANCED RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTE
ON SERVING
TRAFFICKED AND HIGH-RISK ADOLESCENT GIRLS:
A SIX WEEK ONLINE COURSE**

QUESTIONS

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“We are so lucky to have My Life My Choice here in Massachusetts. Not only do they provide critical support services to sexually exploited children in our state, they also provide outstanding training to law enforcement, schools, and others who work with young people.”

Maura Healey
Massachusetts
Attorney General

www.mylifemychoice.org