

**SAFER SPACES WHITE PAPER #5**  
**A REVIEW OF HOUSING  
MODELS FOR  
VICTIMS OF CSEC**



**YWCA**  
HALIFAX

NATIONAL ADVOCACY.  
COMMUNITY ACTION.

# INTRODUCTION

The intersection between safe housing and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth (CSEC) is impossible to ignore. A lack of safe housing is a risk factor that makes youth vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking; it is also a requirement for successful interventions to exit exploitative or human trafficking situations and for the long-term recovery and aftercare of victims and survivors.

In 2019, YWCA Halifax was awarded funding to pilot a “safe house program” for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Safer Spaces program was originally designed to fill a need identified by law enforcement and community for an emergency, crisis-based housing intervention for youth who were leaving a human trafficking situation.

After a challenging start finding an appropriate rental location for the program and opening at the beginning of the Covid pandemic, Safer Spaces began operating in a rented, 3-bedroom, semi-detached house in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in July 2020.

When the landlord announced in Spring 2021 his intention to sell the house, YWCA Halifax sought and secured financial support to purchase a property. In late 2021, the Safer Spaces program re-launched, this time incorporating many of the learnings from the first iteration of the program (V1).

Safer Spaces V1 was based on research with colleagues across the country running similar housing programs. Due to the small number of spaces (two) that could be provided at any given time, YWCA Halifax’s program was designed as a short-stay housing program for stabilization and preparation to enter longer-term supportive housing programs or independent living. The Safer Spaces coordinator would also act as a housing locator for individuals who were in need of other housing interventions and who were accessing the YWCA’s CSEC team more broadly.

When building Safer Spaces V1, YWCA Halifax’s peer staff and partners provided input into the design based on the emergent housing needs they were observing and working through with participants. However, we quickly learned that the program was not adequately resourced to provide appropriate crisis-based emergency housing. While the funding was enough to secure a coordinator and the physical space to carry out the program, it was not enough to fully staff and address the complex needs of someone in crisis and requiring emergency shelter due to human trafficking.

We learned that a housing program for CSEC victims in crisis requires a 24-7 staffing model and programming guidelines that would invariably restrict people’s movement and freedoms. This challenged us to reconsider and revise the program from its original vision.

**This White Paper will discuss the meaning and importance of safe housing in the prevention, intervention, and aftercare of victims of CSEC and review the various types of housing models implemented across this spectrum of need. It will also discuss the benefits and challenges associated with aspects of housing victims and provide insights gained through previous research conducted by YWCA Halifax and V1 of Safer Spaces in designing a housing program for victims of human trafficking.**

Safer Spaces White Paper #5  
Charlene Gagnon – YWCA Halifax

© Copyright 2022 YWCA Halifax

For more information about YWCA Halifax please visit [www.ywcahalifax.com](http://www.ywcahalifax.com)  
Visit us on    @ywcahalifax

We would like to thank The Canadian Women’s Foundation for supporting the TESS Partnership and The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women for supporting this research

For more information about the TESS Partnership visit [www.tessns.com](http://www.tessns.com)

# HOUSING NEEDS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

## PREVENTION

The empirical link between homelessness and sexual exploitation or human trafficking has been established through decades of research done with homeless youth across the country (Fogel et al., 2017; Greene, Ennett & Ringwalt, 1999; Greeson et al., 2019; Heerde & Hemphill, 2016; Middleton et al., 2018; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Youth who become homeless have many pre-existing risk factors for sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Their pathway to homelessness could be influenced by a variety of factors such as: experiences of violence and trauma within the family home; community or cultural isolation; their dependency on substances; socio-economic status and involvement with the Child Welfare and Youth Justice Systems.

Youth who do not have access to safe and secure housing where they feel loved, respected, and valued are vulnerable to third party

exploitation in a variety of ways. In cases of human trafficking, where a third party can fill the physical need for shelter and the emotional need for love and belonging for a youth in exchange for the profits of their sexual labour, the trafficker creates a dependency which becomes difficult to replace the longer they are filling those needs. In cases of exploitation, where a third party can fill the physical need for shelter in exchange for sexual acts by the youth, the exploiter is taking advantage of the youth's lack of housing options.

While this White Paper focuses on housing related to intervention and aftercare, housing providers working with vulnerable populations in the context of shelters can also play a role in the prevention of commercial exploitation by developing strategies to identify peer recruiting and reduce vulnerabilities generally.

## INTERVENTION

Appropriate and effective interventions with victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation will require community agencies, or the state, to disrupt the dependency of the youth on the trafficker or exploiter. This means that the provision of safe and secure housing is key to a successful exit from the situation.

Depending on the severity of the situation, and the criminal involvement of both the trafficker and victim, the definition of safe and secure goes beyond issues of affordability and stability. For some victims, safety has life-or-death implications and security measures needs to involve law enforcement, surveillance systems, and restriction of the victim's movements and freedoms.

Many victims, however, will not be exiting by making a complaint through the Criminal Justice System, even if the risk for leaving their trafficker is high. They may not even identify as being victims of a crime and be unwilling to have their movements or freedoms restricted under the pretense of their own safety.

## AFTERCARE

Without long-term safe and secure housing, it is very difficult to get on the road to recovery. This can be particularly challenging for youth who were involved with the Child Welfare system, who can "age out" of access to well-funded housing and care placements.

Maintaining housing is a prerequisite for any type of personal growth, be that economic or emotional. Once immediate risks to physical safety are removed, emotional safety becomes the key defining factor of recovery, and security becomes a matter of economic stability.

The housing crisis in Nova Scotia is impacting people's ability to heal and recover from trauma. If affordable housing is to be found at all, it is often in locations where survivors are surrounded by triggers and reminders of their experiences of sexual exploitation and trafficking, which often draw people back into the sex trade.

# MODELS OF HOUSING CSEC VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

## SECURE FACILITIES

A secure facility is a locked residential facility that has been designed to restrict the movement and activities of children and youth held in lawful custody. There are two secure youth facilities in Nova Scotia, Woods Street and Waterville.

Secure facilities house CSEC victims who have behavioral disorders and are also offenders of crime or even perpetrators themselves. Due to the nature of these institutions, they cannot be considered trauma-informed care providers, although in NS they try to adopt restorative practice in their policies and programming. As there is a lack of externally available data and longitudinal analysis on the outcomes of youth who have been sheltered or housed in Nova Scotia's secure facilities, it is unclear whether such a model of lockdown is effective in addressing CSEC. Data from the housing sector and adult justice system, however, indicate that youth who spend time in secure facilities

eventually end up in other systems when they "age out" of care (Harrison et al., 2020).

Secure facilities are only one type of model implemented by the Child Welfare System, and arguably should not be considered "housing" at all, as their sole purpose is not to provide shelter, but to incarcerate, punish or reform youth deemed deviant or delinquent by the state.

## GROUP HOMES

Group homes provide housing to youth in-care and vary depending on the availability of beds as well as the youth's circumstances. In Nova Scotia, the Department of Community Services has developed a placement strategy for victims of CSEC who are in the care of the province, which recognizes the various levels and types of sex trade engagement among young people.

As with residential facilities, the lack of externally available data and evaluation of

these approaches makes it difficult to understand the efficacy and benefits of this strategy. Persistent data from the housing sector, and stories from current and former youth in-care, also indicate that a young person's likelihood of aging out into homelessness or criminalization, is high. (Transitions from Child Protection | The Homeless Hub; Exploring Youth Outcomes After Aging-Out of Care | The Homeless Hub)

## "SAFE" HOUSE

A Safe House is a space designed to provide emergency sanctuary for individuals who are at risk of harm or retribution from their perpetrator. In the context of CSEC, safe houses would typically be used for victims who were fleeing violent perpetrators and/or have reported them to police and therefore security protocols resemble those of a secure facility. In trying to keep residents safe, their movements and activities also need to be controlled to a certain extent. The Safe House model overemphasizes environmental and physical safety and is designed to eliminate the

risk of harm for residents. Safe Houses are generally in undisclosed locations and staffed 24-7. This has budgetary implications for Safe House programs and their sustainability, which will be discussed more in depth in the next section.

Although there are many housing programs that are "safer" than others due to a mix of policies and security protocols, there is currently no Safe House for victims of human trafficking in Nova Scotia that fits this model as it is used in the Justice System to protect witnesses to these high-risk crimes. Community agencies should note that the term Safe House has very specific connotations among survivors that is generally linked to Police and the Criminal Justice System, which may make them reluctant to come forward to access supports. Deborah's Gate in Vancouver is the only first stage program in Canada with a high security element and does not require a first stage of stability. Deborah's Gate serves ten individuals at once and an average of 24 to 28 individuals engage in the program each

year. Individuals who cannot be taken on by the program are waitlisted. The program works with a full-time 24/7 outreach team that provides case coordination and case management for any individual who is waitlisted. The program has served individuals from Nova Scotia.

## **EMERGENCY HOUSING**

Emergency Housing is for individuals that do not have their own housing or cannot return to the place they were sleeping the previous night due to risk of violence or harm. Emergency Housing programs are generally low-barrier and time limited. Rules and policies of each individual program will influence participant inclusion and the types of programs that are available on-site.

The main safety considerations surrounding the Emergency Housing Model relate to peer-based traumatization and recruitment. Emergency Housing generally consists of communal types of living environments housing the most vulnerable people in our community can consequently

become a preying ground for all manner of exploitative behaviour.

Emergency Housing programs can also be considered stabilization housing, a preparatory step towards Transitional Housing, Residential Recovery Programs or Supportive Independent Housing.

In Nova Scotia, there are limited emergency shelter options for all youth across the province, particularly in rural NS. For victims of CSEC these options are fewer, particularly if they have added safety threats related to their traffickers, are substance dependent, or are continuing to engage independently in the sex trade after having left their trafficker. Elsewhere in Canada, there are examples of emergency housing programs such as Covenant House in Toronto, which provides 24-7 crisis shelter for at-risk, homeless, and trafficked youth. The shelter reserves three beds for survivors of human trafficking who are in emergency/crisis-situations. These beds are a part of an emergency response protocol that is supported by the Toronto Police Human Trafficking

Enforcement Team, Victim Services, and other community partners.

Covenant House also runs Avdell House, which provides shorter term crisis-based residential services to female-identified victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking and forced marriage – aged 16-24 – for a period of up to six months. The program is low barrier. Individuals are provided with comprehensive wrap-around support and access to safety planning, health care, legal support, mental health and substance use support, and education opportunities as well as job training.

## **TRANSITION HOUSES**

In Nova Scotia, there are a variety of transitional housing programs for victims of intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence. Many of these programs are gendered and may not work with cis or trans-men victims of human trafficking or sexual exploitation. Additionally and anecdotally, we have heard from survivors that Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and services do not always feel like welcoming and non-judgemental

spaces if a disclosure of sex trade involvement is made. Transitional housing programs vary based on the rules and policies of the individual programs, as will the levels of support and intensity of programming. Because agencies that operate transition houses are balancing a variety of participant needs and safety issues related to children, the rules and policies around substance use, curfews, and even programming and chore schedules can be barriers for victims leaving a partner who has been trafficking or exploiting them.

If a victim has substance dependency, transitional housing will likely not be a viable housing option for them.

## RESIDENTIAL RECOVERY

Residential recovery programs provide housing for individuals to live while they receive intensive programming to deal with their trauma and focus on recovery from substance dependence.

In Nova Scotia, free residential recovery programs for substance dependency, such as The Marguerite Centre in Tantallon, are difficult to access due to long waiting lists. Private options are costly and inaccessible to most victims of CSEC. Victims who are looking for long-term recovery from the trauma of their experiences have one option through TREY (Trauma Recovery for Exploited Youth) a rural residential program in Colchester County.

Outside of Nova Scotia, there are a few examples of residential recovery centres that serve exploited youth & adults. The RESET Society of Calgary provides residential services for women who have been sexually exploited or trafficked. The service is available for those who are female or transgender, 16 years of age and over. The program is culture non-specific, and

has capacity for twenty-four women at a time, with a waitlist for those who cannot be served by the program at the time. The program is open to referrals outside of Alberta and has served individuals from Nova Scotia.

RESET has three phases: stabilization and observation, residential life skills, and follow-through care. The first phase is four weeks long and the focus is on looking after individuals' immediate needs such as seeing a doctor, addressing legal matters, and applying for social assistance. Basic programming is implemented at this time, and residents observe a sleep and eat schedule. Cell phones and internet use is not allowed during this time. The second phase is a yearlong residential life skills program. The third and final phase is six to twelve weeks of follow-through care where individuals work with a community team to gain support in pursuing education or employment. While some may remain in the residential program, others have moved on to independent living during this phase. The program receives some federal funding as well as donations to cover operations.

New Directions in Winnipeg provides residential services designed for young people – female and transgender – aged 16 to 21 who are transitioning to second stage housing and are further along the path of recovery. The program has room for six individuals and those whose needs cannot be met are waitlisted. The program has not encountered individuals from Nova Scotia and is funded through the provincial government.

## INDEPENDENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Independent supportive housing models, such as YWCA Halifax's WISH program, are typically inaccessible to those under the age of 18. These models provide or assist individuals in accessing affordable apartments and/or rental subsidies through the Nova Scotia Government. These models are most effective for people who are facing barriers to accessing housing through the market, have enhanced safety needs, do not need on-site support, and are ready for independent living.

For many victims of CSEC, this type of housing can provide a certain level of safety and stability and will be the preferred option – a private space where they have independence and control over their own environment. It is based on principles of trauma-informed and harm-reduction practice.

# CHALLENGES

Each of the housing models identified above have their own unique benefits and challenges, for both operators and the participants. Service providers who are looking to either create specialized housing programs for CSEC victims or adapt their existing housing programs to accommodate CSEC victims will need to consider the following challenges for the provision of safe and secure housing for this group.

It is important to remember that people who have engaged in and experienced trauma in the sex trade are diverse. There is no single program or service which will accommodate the needs of all victims or survivors. In fact, labeling a program for “victims” can create barriers to access for those who do not use the language of victimization or identify their experiences to be victimizing. Therefore, it is important to have a robust and diverse range of housing options for all.

## PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

As learned through V1 of YWCA Halifax’s Safer Spaces program, finding a location can be a challenge for agencies looking to provide specialized housing programs for CSEC victims. If the agency is dependent on the rental market for the location, these challenges can be exacerbated by relationships with landlords and their willingness to allow such a program to run on their property. Even with a well-funded budget for rent and property maintenance, the fear of police presence and neighborhood disruption will make it a hard sell to potential landlords. In the case of Safer Spaces, after a lot of looking, eventually the program secured a location in a middle-class suburban neighborhood. Also of consideration with location is proximity to places that may be triggering for participants, this can be true in suburban neighborhoods as well as urban hotspots; one former resident of V1 of Safer Spaces noted that the location of the house

was near a “client” they would see, who lived on the same street about 5 houses down.

## AMENITIES/SUPPORTS

Location considerations also need to be made in relation to both the safety and convenience of participants. It is important to balance this with the need for removal from the environment where the youth was trafficked or exploited, as well as the need for accessible transportation and mobility. The inaccessibility of remote and isolated locations may have benefits for some program participants; however, it will be a barrier for others who wish to maintain a level of autonomy in their movements. Also, for consideration with remote locations, is the proximity to emergency services such as police or paramedics, in the event of a security breach or health crisis such as an overdose.

In their study of residential facilities, Clawson & Grace (2007) found that three out of four of the residential programs were located in urban areas, away from areas known for prostitution. One program was located in a rural area. Participants in the study suggest that this enables greater access to support services. Further, they suggest that recovery can only occur in the context of the victim’s triggers and that victims must learn how to navigate the environment that they will be returning to (p. 5). Others believe that those with PTSD, such as human trafficking victims, are better able to recover away from daily triggers such as areas of exploitation.

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2018)*

## STAFFING LEVELS

Staffing levels at the location will also need to be considered, depending on the type of model being implemented. For low-barrier, emergency, or crisis-based housing programs with high acuity participants, or with victims facing threats of harm and retaliation from their traffickers, having trained staffing on-site 24-7 is required to be available to respond to safety risks as they emerge. This may take the form of a live-in staff person, or through a roster of permanent and/or casual housing staff.

In a survey with V1 Safer

**In terms of risks to staff, the need for staff self care, proper training, debriefing, check-ins, and flexibility were highlighted. Providers pointed to the impact of “intense” relationships formed while working with individuals with high acuity and the likelihood of vicarious trauma and staff burnout**

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2018)*

**For most providers, keeping the location private was a “matter of trust” with participants. More than one provider spoke about the difficulties encountered when participants were required to provide an address while working with government systems (i.e., getting a new ID, applying for income assistance)**

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2018)*

Spaces participants, former residents indicated that relationships with staff were key parts of their experiences. Staffing changes affected the residents. While all residents felt respected and valued by Safer Spaces staff generally, when new staff were introduced, it often came with changes to the “rules” and residents noted the inconsistency as a challenge.

Another practical challenge for housing providers is keeping locations private and undisclosed to the public.

## Best practices in keeping locations private

- Confidentiality waivers to be signed by participants and anyone coming in to the program
  - Unmarked buildings
  - Secure buildings
  - Use of PO Box for mail
  - Not allowing visitors or tours of the facility
  - Separate programming location in instances when service providers offered more than one program
  - Holding meetings with other service providers at a main office or in the community
  - Providing as many services in-house as possible
  - Safety planning
  - Keeping programming out of notoriously dangerous areas
  - Briefing clients on what to do if they are questioned about where they live (i.e., what do you do if you are in an emergency room and need an address?)
  - Should a participant intentionally disclose, they may be required to leave the program for a time
- YWCA Halifax’s Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT 2018**

## GUARANTEEING SAFETY

A conversation about the concept of safety for CSEC victims occurred early in the Safer Spaces program development and resulted in the deliberate use of the word “Safer” instead of simply “Safe.” As discussed in the section on the “Safe” House model above, the level of security protocols and resources to be able to guarantee safety to those facing harm or retaliation from their traffickers needs to be intense and requires participants to release some of their personal freedoms.

A trauma-informed approach places safety at the centre of practice, however, it also provides space for participants to regain control and consent in their lives and begin to build their sense of independence. The elements needed to enhance their physical safety, such as surveillance systems and limiting their movements and communications with the outside world, may not enhance their sense of emotional safety or help them feel like they are in control of their own lives.

When housing programs are communal, and bring together multiple CSEC victims, safety measures also must be taken in screening residents and ensuring that all of those living in the program are relatively in the same place in their exit, or stage of change. People will have had a diversity of experiences in the sex trade and bringing together those experiences under one roof can create challenges.

It should never be assumed that just because people share experiences of being sex trade engaged, being trafficked, or being exploited, they will get along and be safe for one another. People who identify their experiences in different ways (i.e., as a victim of human trafficking vs. a sex worker) may inadvertently trigger or re-traumatize one another as they talk about and frame their experiences.

Communal housing programs must also stay vigilant when it comes to the issue of peer recruiting, where those who are victims of human trafficking also are offenders who recruit and

Overall, housing providers did not perceive a high level of risk to safety of participants. However, more than one provider discussed the potential for risk to safety when mixing high-risk and low-risk individuals in terms of further victimization. One provider described dealing with some territorialism among participants as a result of someone new entering programming. Concerns were raised about the potential for risk to safety when working with individuals who are using substances to cope and are not yet able to self-regulate. For one provider, the two major areas of risk were related to housing location being revealed as well as peer recruitment. Providers highlighted the risks for program participants who accessed educational and employment opportunities off-site. This was mediated by offering as many programs and supports on-site as possible and accompanying individuals to and from services in the community.

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2018)*

exploit other vulnerable youth either on behalf of a third-party trafficker, or independently. In the Safe Landing research, housing providers described varying levels of peer recruiting within programs. Some programs had not yet or rarely encountered issues related to peer recruiting while others cited ongoing issues.

#### Best practices in dealing with peer recruiting:

- Sensitivity to the possibility of peer recruiting during the screening and intake interview, as well as asking contextualized questions
- Staff monitoring of participant conversations
- Being aware of behavioural dynamics of participants
- Engaging in ongoing conversations with program participants regarding peer recruitment
- No use of group therapy
- Information sharing with agencies, such as police, who would be aware of individuals who may be involved in peer recruiting

YWCA Halifax's Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT 2018

## PROGRAM RULES

For some participants, rules around restricting movements, technology use, and substances can be barriers to access. Service providers must consider balancing rules, safety, and liability with participant autonomy. Most housing programs implement some level of house rules. Examples from the Safe Landing research included:

- Rules around physical and emotional harm
- No weapons
- No sex or sex work on-site
- Designated smoking areas
- Participate in chores
- Permission needed for visitors
- Program participation
- No entering other participants' rooms
- Personal hygiene
- No abusive language or physical abuse
- No threats to others' health, safety, or wellbeing
- No substance use (drugs or alcohol) (3)
- No dealing in substances
- Curfew (4)

In terms of what may lead to program exit, more than one provider pointed to situations or behaviour of an ongoing (i.e., persistent) and serious nature. One program operated using a three strikes rule. This means that a participant could be removed from program for any behaviour that was considered harmful to themselves or someone else such as swearing, disrespect, or stealing. In another program, participants were forbidden to be in contact with their trafficker during the first month of the program. If they were to be in contact past the first month, they would be exited from the program and start again. This rule also applied if a participant were to use drugs or alcohol. Three providers suggested that violence was not tolerated and would result in a program exit. One provider highlighted that revealing the location of the housing would lead to an exit, as well as peer recruiting.

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2018)*

Residents of V1 of Safer Spaces all noted that the house rules around curfews were challenging for them. They noted not liking feeling like they were “locked down” and wanted more autonomy in their coming and going of the house.

## TECHNOLOGY

Agencies providing housing to CSEC victims will have to consider policies around technology access and use among participants. While ubiquitous and affordable smart technology can enhance systems of surveillance and safety among residents, securing personal devices may be challenging.

The majority of housing providers interviewed for the Safe Landing research used some form of surveillance technology or other technology related to safety such as security cameras on the exterior or interior of the housing; video and audio security systems; motion lights; intercoms; code door or keyless entry and a peek hole.

“Facilities studied in Clawson & Grace’s (2007) study utilized safety measures including: undisclosed locations, security cameras and alarm systems, 24-hour staffing and presence of security guards, unannounced room checks and drug screens, limited phone use, supervised or no access to the Internet, locked

doors at all times with staff and residents buzzed in and out of the facility, and pre-approved/screened contact lists. As well, the facilities maintained close relationships with law enforcement and provided ongoing training for staff and residents.

Housing providers described ongoing struggles in monitoring participants’ cell phone and internet use as to ensure safety and prevent further victimization. All providers were aware of how trafficking is facilitated through social media apps and through the use of the internet. At the same time, housing providers acknowledged that participants who attended school would need access to internet and so more than one provider provided participants with Wi-Fi. Most providers reflected on the importance of building trust with participants in order to ensure cell phones were being used in a safe manner. As well, this was done so that clients would feel more comfortable and would be more likely to report if they had been contacted by their exploiter.

More than one provider described an initial period of time after an individual entered programming in which cell phone and internet access were prohibited which was referred to as “digital detox.” One provider described not providing access to the internet at all.” (YWCA Halifax, 2018)

### Best practices around cell phone and internet use included:

- Turning the location feature off
- Providing computer access in areas of the house where there is lots of activity and opportunities for supervision
- Using filters to limit internet access; blocking access to some social media outlets
- Monitoring cell phone activity
- Should participants be responsible for paying for their cell phones, have them provide a budget which demonstrates that they are able to afford the cost
- Determining access to cell phone and internet based on a participant’s progress in the recovery process
- The use of ‘spot checks’

## EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

As highlighted in YWCA Halifax's *When the Roof Falls* In research project, creating inclusive spaces for diverse populations can be difficult for all housing providers, especially if programs have not been designed with deliberate and meaningful policies for inclusion of gender and racial diversity.

BIPOC women experiencing violence do not receive the support they need due to dominant ideals of whiteness and Eurocentricity within the supportive housing systems. Participants described BIPOC women as less likely to access the shelter system due to lack of racial and cultural inclusivity. BIPOC women may not access support services because there simply aren't any services specific to BIPOC communities or BIPOC folks providing frontline and housing support. There is an overall lack of staff diversity within agencies serving women experiencing violence and housing insecurity, and

limited culture-specific supportive resources, contributing to the many barriers for BIPOC women accessing services. It is very difficult to access housing without a housing support worker, and yet there are very few BIPOC housing support workers or culture-specific supportive housing programs. Programming within agencies is typically Eurocentric with participants identifying few culture-specific programs surrounding gendered violence for BIPOC women. Culture-specific programming is important as BIPOC women experience differing intersections to gendered violence and may not feel comfortable speaking openly about experiences of violence. Working with women from their own cultural backgrounds to meet their healing and safety needs is essential in providing anti-oppressive and holistic care to survivors of violence.

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2021)*

Most housing programs available in Nova Scotia that are equipped to house victims of violence experienced through the sex trade, do not currently have policies in place to appropriately serve gender-expansive folks. Their mandates are primarily oriented for cis-gender women. The organizations which do include gender-expansive participants, may not be able to fully support their unique experiences, support needs, and safety requirements. Further, there are currently no housing programs available for cis-gender boys and men who have experienced sexual exploitation or human trafficking.

"Gender expansive individuals and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community are additionally vulnerable to violence and housing insecurity, sometimes experiencing gendered violence in adulthood as a continuation of childhood violence (Gaetz et al., 2016). Additionally, discriminatory policies within supportive and crisis housing services contribute to the exclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in

spaces that support survivors of gendered violence (Schwan, et al., 2020). Research indicates that policies and mandates within housing and shelter programs are largely designed for cisgender individuals, excluding trans and gender expansive folks from accessing services (Abramovich, 2017). A lack of services and support specific to and inclusive of gender expansive and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members contribute to the systemic violence faced by those experiencing gendered violence and housing insecurity.

As evidenced in the literature, trans-folks experience increased incidence of violence compared to cis-women; yet participants could not identify any crisis or supportive housing resources specific to trans and gender-expansive folks experiencing violence. Additionally, there are few organizational policies addressing the need for gender-expansive inclusion in organizational mandates. Participants describe attempts to provide services to gender-expansive folks

in the community, such as through outreach and referral services. Organizational policies and mandates inclusive of gender-expansive folks creates physical safety, increases education and tolerance of gender-expansivity, and creates open, non-judgemental housing support for everyone experiencing violence.” (WTRFI, YWCA Halifax, 2020)

## HARM REDUCTION

Agencies offering housing, and other types of residential or supportive housing programs, must always balance risk and liability with the efficacy of their programs and services. When providing services to people who have experienced long-term and complex trauma, rigid substance use policies create an immediate barrier to access for many youth and adults looking for housing support.

Some women may use substances to cope with their experiences of violence; the interconnected nature of trauma and addictions increases the risk of housing destabilization for women experiencing violence. One participant explained that “when you treat addictions, you are really treating trauma.” For some women, substance use has been their coping mechanism for their experiences of violence and the related impacts on their mental health. Women may be living in “survival mode”, trying to survive their traumatic experiences through substance use. Securing housing for those living with addictions can be difficult due to landlord bias, financial insecurity, and organizational policies. Further, many crisis and supportive housing programs require women to stay consistently on site which is a barrier for women living with addictions. Further, most supportive housing programs do not allow substance use on site or within their programs. Women living with addictions have unique safety requirements that cannot be met without harm-reduction and trauma-informed policies within supportive housing agencies

*(YWCA HALIFAX, 2021)*

There are currently no housing programs for youth, or women, that allow on-site consumption so most participants with active addictions are being sheltered in hotel rooms or are living in unsafe situations in community. In Nova Scotia, hotel rooms have become the housing solution for victims and survivors of human trafficking with substance use issues which precludes them from all housing programs available through the systems.

Most housing programs will have elements of harm-reduction practice with regards to substance use, which would look like supporting and encouraging participants to work towards lessening use. In some cases, programs will allow use, but only if it is off-site and have guidelines around the storage of substance use paraphernalia. Participants may be required to have a ‘base’ of sobriety or participate in taper-off sobriety (i.e., replacement therapies). Also, considerations need to be made to accommodate participants with medical marijuana prescriptions in relation to program’s rule restricting on-site substance use.

Harm reduction practice can also be implemented with regards to sex work – if a participant leaves their perpetrator but has not been able to secure an alternative form of income, there may be an ongoing reliance on seeing clients. While most housing providers will prohibit engaging in sex work on site, independent supportive housing programs, such as YWCA Halifax’s WISH program, may not monitor or surveill activities of people’s private homes.

### Best Practice for Harm Reduction:

- Providing safety bins for needles
- Daily check-ins
- Formulating safety plans
- Naloxone training
- Staff accompaniment to clinic

YWCA Halifax’s Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT 2018

## YWCA Halifax's Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT 2018

For some, such as those in recovery or seeking change, programs with elements of harm reduction can also be a barrier for their success within them; simply being around other people that are still using substances can be a trigger for relapse, even if it is happening off-site. There are very few effective detox or recovery options in Nova Scotia which are available through the public system. Recovery programs that are offered through community are generally operated by faith-based organizations which creates barriers for people with histories of inter-generational trauma by the church. Private options for detox and recovery programs are available in Nova Scotia, however they can be very costly, reaching upwards of \$20,000 for 3–6-weeks of treatment.

## WORKING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

Agencies who are housing victims and survivors of human trafficking will have added safety concerns related to the individual's exit from a criminal sub-culture. Disrupting human trafficking also means disrupting profitable criminal enterprises, and in the cases where victims are bringing criminal charges forward against their trafficker, the risks to them and the service providers supporting them, can be high. It is important for housing providers to establish and maintain trusting relationships with police and RCMP as they will become integral to the protection and safety of participants, staff, and the property.

Most housing programs which support victims of trafficking will have to work closely with municipal, provincial, or specialized law enforcement. However, staff turnover can be a challenge when officers moved or transferred out of positions even after relationships have been established.

### Best Practice for Working with Law Enforcement

- Information sharing
- Providing tours for trusted law enforcement
- Working relationships and open lines of communication with police working in trafficking
- Providing training in sexual exploitation and trafficking for police in areas of indicators and questions to ask
- Asking Law Enforcement to provide safety education for program participants
- Assisting program participants with legal matters (e.g., dealing with warrants, escorting women to court)
- Working together to build relationships with people who are being trafficked through community groups

YWCA Halifax's Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT 2018

In V1 of Safer Spaces, Halifax Regional Police provided a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) assessment of the rental property and advised YWCA Halifax about the safety risks related to the built form and landscaping of the property. Through that assessment, YWCA Halifax was able to reduce risks of potential threats and enhance the property safety for participants and staff. Halifax Regional Police also had the address of the property flagged for priority response. If a call came in to 911 about the location, the responding officers would know that there was an increased risk of harm or violence.

Working with law enforcement can be a tricky balance though, and for some people, knowing that police are associated with the program may be a barrier for access. This is particularly relevant for BIPOC participants, who have additional cultural and community pressures to not trust or interact with the police.

“BIPOC women have unique experiences with gendered violence due to cultural, community, and systemic factors. BIPOC women experience additional barriers to safety due to fears of rejection from their community and inability to safely access police services. Participants described fears of being “labelled a rat” and feeling unwelcome in their community following experiences of violence. Additional fear of reporting violence and accessing systems of support are present as BIPOC women do not want to “feed into racialized stereotypes” of their community, both with regards to violence and poverty. These considerations create additional barriers to accessing safe housing as BIPOC women may not be comfortable returning to their community due to fears of rejection.

BIPOC community mistrust of agency actors and larger institutions impacts women’s ability to seek and receive support when violence does occur, with many women opting not to involve police or work with supportive housing

agencies. BIPOC women may be discouraged from involving the police for fear of being charged themselves due to stereotypes associated with BIPOC women. For example, a participant described an African Nova Scotian client who was charged with assault despite being the victim because they were “the loudest.”

Participants identified the need for community responses to violence that do not involve the police to increase safety for BIPOC women. Given the mistrust of police within BIPOC communities, the police do not create safety for BIPOC women, and BIPOC women report experiencing further victimization by the justice system. Many of the laws that are supposed to be protecting women are in fact causing harm. Participants describe multiple instances in which pro-charge laws failed women experiencing violence by aggravating the situation or charging the victim with assault.” (YWCA 2021)

# PROGRAMMING

Most housing programs for victims of CSEC allow for a period of rest upon the intake of new clients, which can range from one day to a few weeks. In this period, participants are not required to participate in any programming. Housing programs may or may not implement mandatory programming and overall participation in rehabilitative programming and supports. One former resident of V1 of Safer Spaces indicated that there was not enough programming or activities happening at the house, which led to boredom and feeling isolated. They recommended more opportunities for in-house programming and off-site activities with staff and other residents.

There are a variety of supports and services that could be offered in-house to program participants which are facilitated by program staff or community partners on-site. Offering supports in-house is best practice for service provisions to facilitate participant follow-through and to mediate safety concerns related to travelling off-site.

On-site services and supports can include:

- **Intensive case management**
- **Clinical support**
- **Clinical work**
- **Counselling**
- **Safety planning**
- **Healthy relationships & boundaries**
- **Leadership mentoring**
- **Support through legal processes**
- **Physical and mental health care**
- **Trauma-based services**
- **Psychosocial rehabilitation**
- **Employment training**

In addition to practical supports related to recovery, housing programs can also facilitate leisure and recreation activities on an individual basis or with group programming. In the 2020 Hearing Them consultation, survivors identified several leisure and recreation activities that interested in participating in. Many of the activities identified were related to arts and crafts (beading, writing), animals (dog-training, horseback riding), or getting out into nature (canoeing, picking medicines).

Housing providers interviewed in the 2018 Safe Landing research indicated that they offered leisure and recreation programming in the following areas:

- **Beauty and self-image**
- **Music**
- **Equine therapy**
- **Cooking classes**
- **Alternative therapies (e.g., art therapy, pet therapy, equine therapy)**
- **Gardening**

“In terms of best practices, the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (2010) has identified effective NGO victim service programs that have been successful in rehabilitating trafficking victims. The first program falls into the category of ‘survivor leadership and mentoring’. A report prepared by the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (2010) highlights the Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (or GEMS), a program based in Harlem in New York City. The program provides services to commercially sexually exploited and domestically trafficked youth

and served approximately 280 girls or young women between the ages of 12-21 in 2009 (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010).

The report suggests there are two aspects that contribute to the program’s success: survivor leadership and mentoring program. GEMS suggests that survivors need to be at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement as the voices and experiences of survivors are integral to the development and implementation of the programs designed to serve them (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (2010). Further, when victims are able to see those who have experienced and overcame the challenges they too face, they can be empowered to make the transition themselves (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010; Clawson & Grace, 2007). Secondly, GEMS services are geared towards empowering girls to develop their individual skills in a strengths-based environment (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and

Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). In this way, girls are able to grow and build leadership qualities that are best suited to her individuality (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). Some examples of the leadership activities in which girls have been able to participate with their mentors include:

- **Speaking on sex trafficking at national and local conferences;**
- **Testifying at city council hearings and legislative briefings;**
- **Advocating against sex trafficking in the media, and;**
- **Provided education and intervention to at-risk girls.**

Providing vocational training to trafficked persons through programming can help to protect victims (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). Extreme poverty and lack of employment opportunities in home countries paired with economic circumstances of trafficked persons in their destination countries contribute to a reliance on traffickers. Vocational training can help to address these factors

by aiding with immigration stats and economic prospects (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (2010) highlighted the Italian NGO program “On the Road”, which provides job training in its services to trafficking victims to help them reintegrate in society through employment, resulting in economic independence. The program provides renewable six-month residence permits for trafficked victims which enables access to health, education, and the labour market. More specifically, the program provides counselling to address the psychological impact of prostitution and victimization as well as education methods that emphasize social inclusion and individual autonomy through vocational training (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). “On the Road” arranges employment agreements with companies from various sectors and covers all costs during the trainee program, including a salary. The program emphasizes

autonomy through employment by avoiding employment sectors, such as domestic work, that may leave trafficked persons vulnerable to revictimization (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010). The program reports that 90% of trafficked persons who have been assisted through the program have found employment and have become economically independent (International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, 2010, p. 40).” (YWCA Halifax, 2018)

# CONCLUSION

Housing is imperative for the elimination of CSEC at all points of the services spectrum for prevention, intervention and aftercare of victims and survivors. In Nova Scotia, there are few housing options which consider the unique needs of the population. This gap is even greater for individuals from the Indigenous, African Nova Scotian and 2SLGBTQ+ communities who may not trust or access programs that work with police, are lacking staff diversity, and do not offer culturally specific supports.

Victims and survivors of CSEC will have a diversity of needs and be in various stages of change when they are seeking emergency or supportive housing programs. Depending on the age of the youth, and if there is Child and Family Services involvement, youth will have fewer choices in the type of housing they can access than the adult population. Further research is needed on the outcomes of youth who are mandated to secure facilities and

group homes operated by Child and Family Services. The best available information indicates that many youth who age out of care in Nova Scotia end up in the homelessness to prison pipeline, reproduce systems of poverty, vulnerability, and inequity.

Community-based housing programs can be more flexible and offer trauma-informed housing options which are participant-led and enhance independence and self-determination. However, agencies which house CSEC victims, either exclusively or within existing housing programs, will face a variety of challenges and must consider the additional support needs related to safety and programming required by this specific population. The housing model implemented will determine the level of staff, resources and specialized programming required to make the program a success.

The location and structure of the housing program will need to be carefully considered, and agencies

will have to work with participants to find the balance of client autonomy and self-determination with house rules and policies.

While there is a great diversity in the types of housing (and related policies, procedures & programs) that can be made available, to survivors & victims of CSEC, some core elements have demonstrated success and should be included;

- **peer support membership**
- **location security**
- **in-house programs & services**
- **culturally specific supports**
- **24-7 staff support**
- **opportunities for independence and choice**
- **low-barrier rules & policies.**

# REFERENCES

Fogel, K.F., Martin, L., Nelson, B. et al. "We're Automatically Sex in Men's Eyes, We're Nothing But Sex..." Homeless Young Adult Perceptions of Sexual Exploitation. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* 10, 151–160 (2017).

Greene, J. M., Ennett, S. T., & Ringwalt, C. L. (1999). Prevalence and correlates of survival sex among runaway and homeless youth. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(9), 1406–1409.

Greeson, J., Treglia, D., Wolfe, D., Wasch, S., & Gelles, R. (2019). Child welfare characteristics in a sample of youth involved in commercial sex: An exploratory study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 94, 104038.

Harrison, A., Jakubowski, J., Abram, K., Teplin, L., & Welty, L. (2020). Patterns of incarceration among youth after detention: A 16-year longitudinal study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104516.

Heerde, J., & Hemphill, S. (2017). The role of risk and protective factors in the modification of risk for sexual victimization, sexual risk behaviors, and survival sex among homeless youth: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and*

*Offender Profiling*, 14(2), 150-174.  
Middleton, J., Gattis, M., Frey, L., & Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2018). Youth Experiences Survey (YES): Exploring the Scope and Complexity of Sex Trafficking in a Sample of Youth Experiencing Homelessness. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 44(2), 141-157.

Tyler, K., & Johnson, K. (2006). Trading sex: voluntary or coerced? the experiences of homeless youth. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43(3), 208–216.

YWCA Halifax (2018) *Safe Landing Review of Housing Practices for Victims of HT*. Marless Jordon

YWCA Halifax (2021) "She doesn't just need housing; she needs safe housing" *When the Roof Falls in* · Research Report. Catherine Flindall.