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Advocacy Plan: Sexual Victimization Juvenile Justice Facilities

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At the national level, child sexual abuse is reported up to 80,000 times per year (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2008). Social workers are mandated by law to report instances of child abuse. What do social workers do, though, when the victimization is occurring in state run facilities? Under The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, the Bureau of Justice Statistics is required to analyze and review occurrences of rape in our nation's prison system each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). The first National Survey of Youth in Custody was conducted between June 2008, and April 2009.

In June of 2008, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) began surveying 195 juvenile justice facilities about sexual victimization. For the purpose of the study, sexual victimization was "defined as any unwanted sexual activity between youth and all sexual activity between youth and staff" (McCarthy, 2010). There was a sample size of approximately 9,000 youth, 91% male and 9% female. In a private setting, youth were asked to self-report any incidents of sexual activity occurring in the previous 12 months (McCarthy, 2010).

Once the BJS compiled the data from the study, they found staggering results. As many as 3,220 youth in state run, as well as locally or privately-operated, juvenile justice facilities reported one or more instances of sexual victimization. More specifically, 700 juveniles reported being victimized by fellow youth, and 2,730 reported that an incident had occurred involving a staff member (McCarthy, 2010). There were 626 youth surveyed in the state of Michigan. Juvenile facilities, including Maxey Training School, Oakland County Children's Village, Pioneer Work and Learn Center, Shawono Center, and Starr Commonwealth, Albion, were each investigated. Maxey Training School and Shawono Center reported appalling rates of sexual victimization. It was discovered that 23.4% of those surveyed at Maxey Training School, and 27.3% surveyed at Shawono Center reported incidents of sexual victimization. Maxey Training School

and Shawono Center were also two of the highest ranked facilities in the country for child sexual victimization (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010).

Advocacy Goals and Objectives

Social justice can be defined as conditions that grant all members of a society “equal rights, protections, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits” (Flynn, 1995). These are inalienable rights for all members of society, and advocacy must be involved when these equal rights are not upheld by those in power. Regardless of the circumstance, a person must be afforded equal protection under law. As simple and practical as it seems, many members of society have been failed by governmental bodies and those in power by being denied their rights. Many youth housed in juvenile detention facilities are in danger of sexual abuse by staff and peers. As explicitly detailed in the definition of social justice, advocacy must be implemented in situations when there is a need to reach those in power regarding the adversities faced by oppressed populations. Through this campaign for policy implementation, several advocacy goals and objectives will be put into practice to ensure that policy is enacted to create sustainable change in juvenile detention facilities.

- ***Goal A: To ensure the safety of the youth in state and private juvenile facilities against sexual victimization.***
 - Address legislative bodies about statistical reports of sexual victimization of youth in juvenile facilities.
 - Provide testimony to stakeholders.
 - Submit letter to the editor of local, state, and national newspapers.
 - Garner the support of youth that have been victimized and who would be willing to provide additional testimony to stakeholders.
 - Advocate for policy enactment that will ensure protection of youth from acts of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- ***Goal B: Have regulatory bodies assigned that will be responsible for youth protection at each juvenile detention facility.***
 - Negotiate with decision-makers to have a public entity that enforces rules and regulations in regards to the treatment of youth and conditions of juvenile detention facilities.

- Require that youth are provided with in-house staff and support to address reports of sexual abuse that can be immediately and confidentially reported.
- Ensure that individual and/or group counseling is available for victims.
- Request that youth have the option to be transferred to other facilities if there is an immediate threat of sexual victimization to youth by staff or peers.
- **Goal C: To obtain public awareness and support.**
 - Inform, on local, state, and national levels, of the sexual violations against youth in juvenile facilities.
 - Have residents contact their local and state legislators about the issue and find out what will be done to alleviate the problem.
- **Goal D: Train juvenile correctional facility staff members on sexual violation and abuse.**
 - Require that staff members are trained on sexual misconduct with thorough explanations of procedures on how to report violations.
 - Demand that ramifications of not reporting abuse are established and strictly enforced.
 - Demand that violations of sexual misconduct, by staff, results in immediate termination and mandatory jail time.
- **Goal E: Have youth educated on being victims of sexual abuse.**
 - Establish a juvenile program that would educate youth on the detriments of sexual abuse, how to minimize risk, and to protect themselves from such situations.
 - Provide resources that are needed to report abuse.
- **Goal F: Educate youth on not committing sexual misconduct against other youth.**
 - Define disciplinary action that should be taken against youth who are guilty of sexually victimizing another person.
 - Provide a rehabilitation program for youth in violation.
 - Educate youth on the damaging effects of sexual abuse, short and long-term consequences, and of enforceable disciplinary actions.

Social Work Values and Ethics

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has established a code of values, ethics, and principles that social workers refer to when promoting social justice for vulnerable and oppressed populations (NASW, 1999). This recommended plan of action attempts to address the ethical obligations that social workers have in attending to the needs of youth who may be sexually victimized in juvenile facilities. The following ethical principles and standards, defined by the NASW, have been integrated into this plan:

- ***Social Justice.*** “Social workers must challenge injustice” (NASW, 1999). Social workers should address the social injustices faced by the youth that are victims of sexual abuse in juvenile facilities. Youth should be provided with the resources they need in order to receive support, be protected, and have avenues for confidential disclosure in the event that they are victimized.
- ***6.02 Public Participation.*** In this policy advocacy campaign, effective use of the media will create public awareness and support. It is also suggested that individuals contact their local and state legislators about the high incidents of sexual abuse in juvenile facilities.
- ***6.04 Social and Political Action.*** Through social and political action, this campaign seeks to minimize and eventually eliminate youth risk of sexual abuse by way of policy change, implementation, and legislative action. We hope to provide the opportunity for youth to feel safe and free to report any sexual misconduct from staff and/or peers. We strive to guarantee that safety of the youth is no longer compromised, and that sexual exploitation is no longer a threat to youth in juvenile facilities.

Stakeholders

Identifying the key stakeholders for this campaign is essential for establishing the best strategies for creating an impact. Below are details concerning how each stakeholder is involved in the issue and what strategies would be most effective in engaging said stakeholders in this campaign.

Change Agents.

- **Department of Justice** commissioned a national report on Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities.
- **The Bureau of Juvenile Justice** provided the Special Report commissioned by the Department of Justice including statistical analysis of youth reported incidents of sexual abuse in juvenile facilities during the 2008-2009 timeframe.
- **Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency** has provided testimony to the Joint Appropriations Committee on Human Services regarding the report commissioned by the Department of Justice.
- **Department of Human Services** has addressed the specific cases requiring an intervention reported during the research study.
- **Victimized Youth in the Juvenile Justice System** gave self reports, in a research study, revealing the abuse taking place which could be used in a larger context to support implementing a change in the system.
- **Parents of juveniles in the justice system** are a primary group of individuals to engage in the process of creating a campaign to create a change in how incidents of assault are reported and addressed in juvenile facilities, as well as how staff who are in direct contact with youth are trained and held accountable.
- **Social Workers (NASW)** are also a primary group and organization to engage in organizing a campaign. The Social Work Code of Ethics creates an obligation for social workers to serve as advocates in circumstances such as these.

Targets of Campaign.

- **Michigan State Legislature** needs to be held accountable by their constituents for passing and implementing policies that protect youth placed in juvenile facilities.
- **Juvenile Detention Facility Staff** need to be trained and be held accountable for their behavior when interacting with youth in juvenile facilities.
- **Corrections Staff Members** need to be aware of their ethical obligations and important roles in providing safe environments for juveniles in order to implement and sustain change.

- **The Public** needs to be informed about the current situation and ways to influence a change. In addition, the public needs to hold its elected officials accountable for policies ensuring safety for young people in the state.

Advocacy Strategies

Effective strategies for engaging and influencing various stakeholders differ depending on the nature of their role and their current level of engagement. Additionally worth noting is the power stakeholders have to make specific changes and how to leverage different forms of power. Below are specific goals and the strategies that can be undertaken to achieve them.

Goal: Creating Public Awareness

- Individuals, including victimized youth and parents of youth who have been in the juvenile justice system, can write letters to the editor to share their experience.
- Organizers can engage the media in writing stories and reporting on the release of the study conducted by the Bureau of Juvenile Justice.

Goal: Educating Legislators

- Testimony can be provided at Committee hearings by credible sources such as representatives from the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency or advocates from NASW.
- Educational materials including the report written by the Bureau of Juvenile Justice and best practices for prevention can be provided to elected officials by the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Department of Human Services, and the Department of Justice to better inform legislators' decision making and voting.

Goal: Implementing a training and protocol of reporting incidents of abuse with Juvenile Detention Facility Staff

- Social workers can provide Corrections and Juvenile Detention Facility Staff with technical assistance in designing and implementing best practice prevention training for staff regarding sexual abuse in juvenile facilities.
- The Department of Human Services and social workers can also provide technical assistance for designing and implementing a

protocol for reporting incidents of abuse, including opportunities for youth to access resources or therapy.

- Terms and conditions for implementation for both the training and reporting can be negotiated with leaders of the campaign.

Evaluation of Advocacy Effort

When an intervention is put into place for a community, a tool also needs to be put forth to evaluate the intervention's successes and shortcomings. The proper evaluation techniques allow advocates to gauge how well an intervention is working to decrease sexual victimization within Michigan's juvenile justice facilities, as well as tailor it to be more effective if the intervention needs improvements.

First, the actions of the advocacy movement should be monitored. It is important to monitor data that is collected during the intervention because it allows advocates to determine what aspects of the plan are not showing the desired results in order to meet the objectives. In the beginning phases of the advocacy effort, advocates are encouraged to rely heavily on process and outcome measures to monitor data (Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, 2008).

Second, process measures will be used to evaluate the change action and direct actions that are taking place in the juvenile facilities and the community. Outcome measures will be used to reveal new initiatives that are created due to the advocacy effort. For example, a change in any policy at the state or institutional level surrounding sexual victimization and juvenile justice, as well as any possible changes in training and hiring practices at state facilities, are outcome measures (Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, 2008).

Additionally, it is also important for advocates to recognize what goals were achieved and which goals were not achieved. In order to do this, it is recommended that advocates develop a goal attainment report as an evaluation tool. "Reviewing the goals that your group has or has not completed can not only keep you focused on the big picture, but it can also help you feel proud and confident that you have taken steps, however small, in the right direction of your goals" (Section 6, Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, 2008). This will allow advocates to see how successful they were in meeting the objectives over the course of the campaign, and to help the coalition remain

on task with the initial action plan (Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, 2008).

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Lauren Cook is originally from New Jersey and graduated from the University of Michigan with her MSW in May of 2010. She is currently working at a group home in New Jersey working with homeless, teenager mothers, as well as mothers struggling with substance abuse.

My name is **Airika Crawford**, a graduate Social Work student at the University of Michigan studying Community Organizing in Communities and Social Systems. My future career goals and aspirations involve pursuing another Master's degree in Restorative Practices and also a

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Courtney Graham grew up in Northern Michigan and graduated from the University Of Michigan School Of Social Work in May of 2010. She is currently working with a consulting organization in the San Francisco Bay Area that promotes social and economic justice for vulnerable populations through evaluation, strategic planning, grant-writing and organizational development.

Cheri Pace received her BSW from Dalton State College. Prior to attending the University of Michigan's School of Social Work, Cheri organized a resource and advocacy group for the educational rights of children who have autism in north Georgia, provided case management and group treatment services for the Consasauga Drug Court, and was the Executive Director for Mercy's Chosen Children. She is currently completing her MSW, with a dual concentration in Community Organization and Community and Social Systems, and was selected as the 2008 Jim Wahlberg Scholar and a 2010 National Community Scholar.

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