

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. Why is there a need for Project Safe Home, a partnership between Crossnore School & Children's Home and Youth Villages?

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children in the United States is a growing public health crisis. This crisis disproportionately impacts young people served by the child welfare and mental health systems. Reliable estimates of CSE prevalence do not exist because of the hidden nature of the crime, the various definitions for CSE, the lack of tracking, and the lack of identification by professionals.

Project NO REST and Mecklenburg Count's Child Advocacy Center, Pat's Place, completed a specific study in 2018 in Charlotte, NC. Of the 242 individuals screened for CSE, 26% showed a clear concern for risk of CSE. Of those considered high risk, more than 92% identified as female. African Americans were also disproportionately represented in all three categories of risk. Fifty-three percent of the individuals screen reported a history of child welfare involvement and 56% reported a history of child sexual abuse.

This is a small sampling from one county. Crossnore and Youth Villages believe this data sample is representative of the children and families each organization serves.

### 2. Who is Crossnore and what is their experience in child welfare?

For more than 100 years, Crossnore has provided a sanctuary of hope and healing for children in North Carolina. Using a nationally recognized model of trauma-informed care, Crossnore holistically cares for and nurtures each child's mind, body, and spirit. Crossnore serves western North Carolina through three physical locations - one nestled on 86 acres in the Blue Ridge Mountains, a second located on a 212-acre campus on the edge of downtown Winston-Salem, and a third located in historic Hendersonville. On-site medical care, trauma-based clinical services, a wide variety of experiential programming activities, and educational services provide a unique approach to campus-based foster care services. Crossnore also provides an array of services within their local communities including community-based family and therapeutic foster care, school-based and outpatient therapy, independent living, and day treatment services.

### 3. Who is Youth Villages and what is their experience in child welfare?

For more than 30 years, Youth Villages has helped children and families live successfully by providing a wide range of programs utilizing evidence-based and research-informed interventions. Youth Villages serves 30,000+ young people a year in 24 different states. In North Carolina, Youth Villages serves more than 5,000 young people annually through community-based family services, high fidelity wraparound, and transitional living services. Youth Villages works to find

solutions using proven treatment models that strengthen the child's family and support systems and dramatically improve their long-term success. As a leader in the field of children's mental and behavioral health, Youth Villages earns its status as one of the nation's most promising results-oriented nonprofits, as recognized by Harvard Business School, US News & World Report, and the White House.

#### **4. What is the issue Project Safe Home will address?**

Until now, services offered for victims of CSE have focused on a young person after they were victimized and primarily focused on different curriculums or specialized residential services. There also has not been a way for agencies to screen and assess a young person who might be at risk of or already involved in CSE. This prevented early identification and service delivery to prevent future or further involvement.

Additionally, there is a lack of community-based services and interventions to specifically address and mitigate risk factors, while building up the protective factors that prevent a young person from being exploited. Project Safe Home will target and serve young people at risk of CSE from a continuum approach, moving from assessment to intervention to the ultimate outcome of long-term sustainability of protective factors, risk mitigation, and prevention of exploitation.

#### **5. How does Project Safe Home fit into the Families First Prevention Services Act?**

The Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) allows for appropriate residential care for extended periods of time for youth who have been or are at risk of trafficking. Crossnore's campuses allow for a home-like environment while also providing the necessary protective factors this population deserves. Protective factors for a young person include, but are not limited to:

- The presence of a stable adult figure and a close positive bond with at least one caring adult
- A strong support network, including positive friendships
- Job training and employment opportunities
- Positive performance in school
- Structure in the home and parental supervision
- Strong communication skills for caregivers, families, and youth
- The allowance for young people to "make mistakes" while receiving both consequences and love and care concurrently
- A sense of mastery with arts, athletics, and extracurricular activities
- A solid and realistic plan for the future

In addition, the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse rated Youth Villages' intensive in-home service, Intercept®, as "Supported" and is approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for federal Title IV-E funding under FFPSA.

#### **6. What is the CSE-IT and has Crossnore or Youth Villages utilized this tool in their work?**

Crossnore has been utilizing a scientifically, validated tool called the Commercial Sexual Exploitation – Identification Tool (CSE-IT) to assess their clients for risk factors for more than a year. In Crossnore's first year of assessment, November 2019 to November 2020, they screened more than 300 youth and found approximately 50% of these youth are at moderate-to-high risk of CSE or trafficking. In further evaluation of the sub-categories within the tool, they found that of their clients who are at moderate-to-high risk of sexual exploitation:

- More than 75% experienced prior abuse
- Almost 30% experience instability with their housing and/or caregiver
- 30% live in an environment, or had involvement in activities, that put them at risk
- Almost 40% of them exhibit signs of current trauma exposure

Similarly, Youth Villages has also recently adapted a screening tool from Shared Hope called Intervene. It is incorporated into their clinical protocols and interventions for the young people they serve.

## 7. What types of services will be offered to these youth?

**In-Home Family Preservation:** Crossnore and Youth Villages both provide various community-based services to help keep a family together and prevent them from becoming involved in the child welfare system. If a young person can be safely maintained in their home, in-home family preservation services are focused on strengthening a family's internal protective factors and teaching them to care for and protect their child in their homes and communities. This is the best first step in serving young people and mitigating risk of CSE because it prevents further trauma and develops skills to allow for long-term sustainability and stability of the family unit.

**Foster Care:** If a young person's biological or adoptive home is too unsafe for them to remain at home for a period of time, but their behaviors do not warrant a higher level of clinical care, foster care may be the best option. Crossnore's foster care program equips foster parents to provide a loving and supportive home which supports the child's journey of healing while they are away from their family. If needed, Youth Villages will also work with a young person and their family while the youth is removed to help address concerns and speed up the reunification process. For older youth (16+), transitional living services can also be provided through Youth Villages' LifeSet™ program to help prepare the young person to live independently once they turn 18.

**Residential:** If a young person's biological or adoptive home is unsafe and their behaviors warrant a higher level of clinical care than foster care, or is a sibling set large enough to prevent placement in a traditional foster home, residential may be the best option for a period of time. Crossnore's campuses provide 19 cottages with live-in cottage parents who work a 7-day on/7-day off rotation. This relationship model allows youth to build healthy relationships, while receiving the support they need to make progress toward their own goals. If needed, Youth Villages will also work with a young person and their family while the youth is removed to help address concerns and speed up the reunification process.

**Independent Living:** For older youth (16+), transitional living services can also be provided through Youth Villages' LifeSet program to help prepare the young person to live independently once they turn 18.

**Permanency:** Permanency, or a permanent, stable placement with a caring adult(s) for a young person to live, should be the goal of all services. The greatest protective factor of any discussed is healthy, loving interpersonal relationships. Once a young person discharges from services, effective supports must be in place to avoid re-entry or further involvement in other systems. Long-term sustainability of protective factors, risk mitigation, and prevention from exploitation is the goal.