

# StreetWorks Greater Minnesota Focus Group Summary: Youth Experts and Service Professionals

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*Research for StreetWorks Training Curricula and  
Regional Training Needs in Greater Minnesota*



**WALKING ALONGSIDE YOUNG PEOPLE**  
*Acknowledging and Honoring their Individual Journeys*



***StreetWorks Safe Harbor Project Team:***

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### ***Acknowledgment***

It is with sincere gratitude that we acknowledge and thank the youth who shared their expertise and experiences throughout this project.

Your honesty, courage and desire to help other young people by sharing your experiences is an inspiration.

Additionally, we thank Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota professionals and other community professionals, who contributed their time and expertise to help others understand the unique aspects of serving youth in Greater Minnesota.

***Thank you.***

# INTRODUCTION

Youth experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of sexual exploitation. To expand support for youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota, The StreetWorks Collaborative (StreetWorks), a Program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, conducted focus groups at five sites in Greater Minnesota. The goal of these focus groups was to determine needs of youth and youth workers in rural areas, and to gauge whether the StreetWorks Outreach Worker Curriculum designed for use in the Twin Cities could be adapted for use in Greater Minnesota. The focus group sites were Willmar, Duluth, Mankato, Brainerd, and Rochester, and took place between March and May of 2018. This report shares findings from the five focus groups.

The purpose of the research was to compare StreetWorks knowledge of youth outreach in the Twin Cities area to the needs and resources available in Greater Minnesota. Based on the findings, there is a significant need in Greater Minnesota for an effective training process for providers and other professionals who encounter youth in their work.

StreetWorks currently provides training and technical assistance to StreetWorks Outreach Workers, community partners, and other youth-serving providers in the Twin Cities metro area, and plans to modify its current curriculum to better serve Greater Minnesota.

## ***Background***

StreetWorks was established in 1994 as a collaborative of youth-serving nonprofits who provide street-based outreach to youth experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities metro area. In 2015, StreetWorks was awarded a Safe Harbor grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services Office of Economic Opportunity (DHS O.E.O.) to develop a training curriculum and tools to ensure consistent and effective training for youth outreach workers. The focus of this grant was specifically to build capacity for working with youth at-risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation who are also experiencing homelessness or housing instability. The certification process trains youth workers in best practices to support this population and began with a focus in the Twin Cities metro area. StreetWorks is now adapting and expanding its work to Greater Minnesota service providers and professionals who encounter youth in their work.

Minnesota's Safe Harbor law went into effect in 2014 and has since increased awareness, understanding, and identification of the commercial sexual exploitation of youth across the state. In Minnesota, sexually exploited youth are no longer treated as criminals, but instead viewed as victims in need of services. [[http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/legislative\\_timeline.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/legislative_timeline.html)]

## PHASES



***The StreetWorks Safe Harbor Project began with two outlined phases:***

***Phase 1 (July 1, 2015 – June 20, 2017)***

***Phase 2 (July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2019)***

### ***Phase 1***

The first phase of this project resulted in the development of the following training materials and tools utilized to train outreach workers in the Twin Cities metro area:

- The StreetWorks Outreach Worker Certification Training Curriculum, the Facilitator's Guide, and a Trainee Workbook;
- An accompanying Supervisor's Guide;
- The "What Youth Say" Report – a culmination of focus group feedback from youth at-risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation;
- Eight "Crash Course" training videos on a variety of topics useful for anyone working with youth (videos available at <http://www.streetworksmn.org/video-cats/streetworks-crash-course-training-videos/>); and
- A series of in-person trainings for youth workers (videos available at <https://www.streetworksmn.org/video-cats/sh-training-videos/>).

## Phase 2

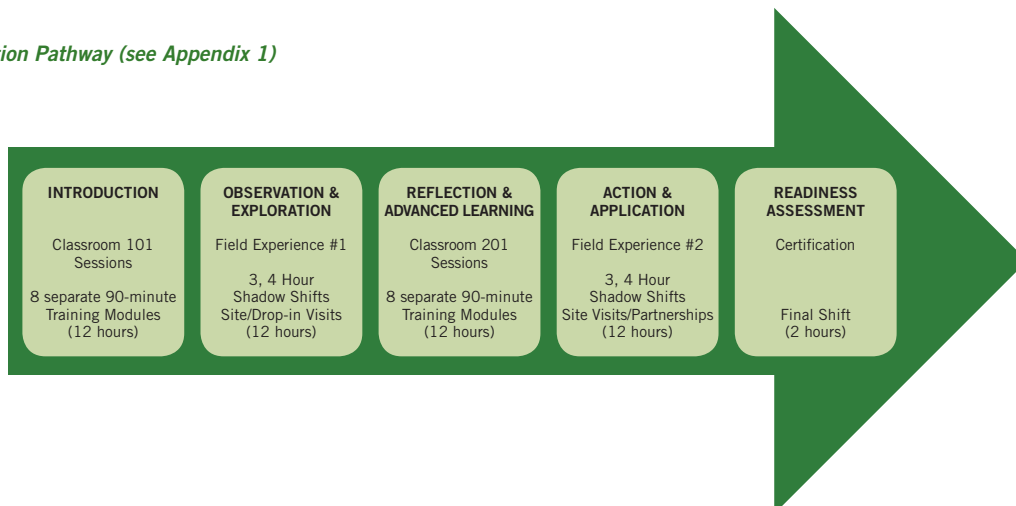
In the second phase of this project, StreetWorks began piloting the curriculum in the metro area (2017–2018) and received additional funding from DHS O.E.O. to develop a specialized Twin Cities Outreach Team, called the ACE Squad, focused on serving sexually exploited youth. Phase 2 work also included conducting focus groups with youth and youth workers (completed in 2018), developing and adapting the training curriculum and resources for Greater Minnesota based on focus-group feedback, and the production of three regional trainings in Southwest, Southeast, and West Central Minnesota in 2019.

### *StreetWorks Outreach Worker Certification Training Curriculum*

The pilot version of the StreetWorks Outreach Worker Certification Training Curriculum, currently being used in the Twin Cities, is the foundation for adapting a relevant curriculum for Greater Minnesota. The certification process ensures consistent, up-to-date, best-practices, training, legitimacy for outreach workers, and improved service delivery. The certification includes the following five steps:

1. **Introduction:** (Classroom 101 sessions) Trainees learn relevant module content from eight modules in an in-person, classroom style setting.
2. **Observation and Exploration:** (Field Experience 1) Trainees job shadow veteran outreach workers and visit other youth-serving agencies in their communities. This step includes journaling and homework assignments.
3. **Reflection and Advanced Learning:** (Classroom 201 sessions) Trainees come back to the classroom after completing job shadowing and site visits to discuss each of the eight modules in more detail and apply what they learned to the experiences they had during those shadow shifts and site visits.
4. **Action and Application:** (Field Experience 2) Trainees once again work with veteran outreach workers. In this second field experience, trainees take the lead, doing more outreach work to practice what they have learned while receiving feedback from the veteran worker. This step also includes journaling and homework assignments.
5. **Readiness Assessment:** (Certification) Trainees meet with their supervisor to present their homework and have a final follow-up shift with their supervisor and the StreetWorks Senior Training Manager to show learning and to gain any other feedback before graduating from the certification program.

### *StreetWorks Certification Pathway (see Appendix 1)*



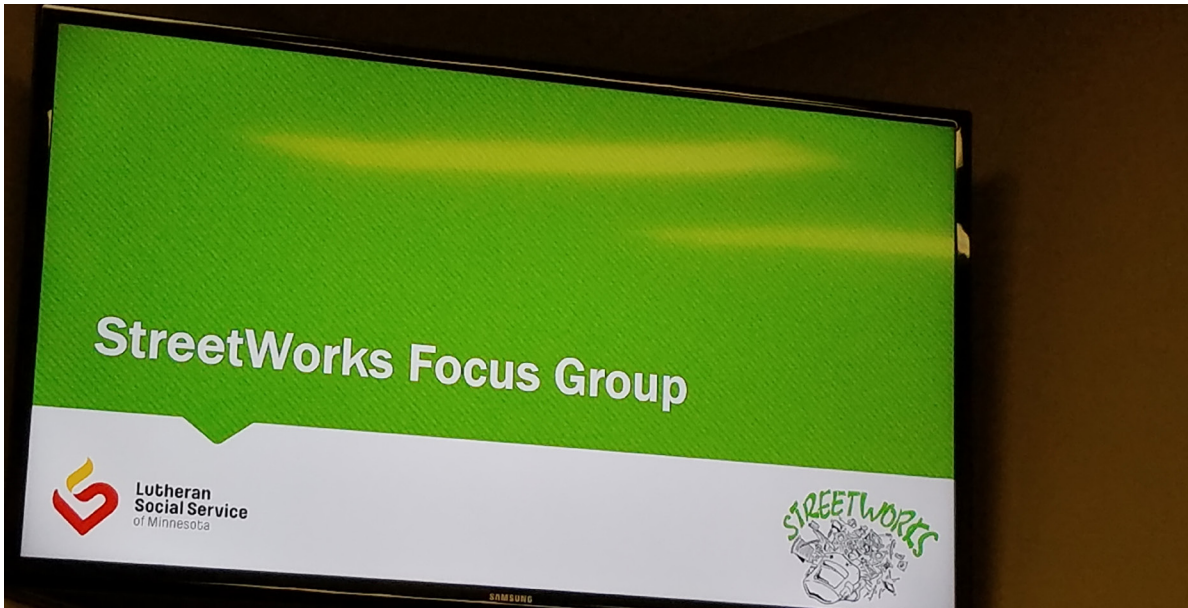
## STREETWORKS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Organizations and individuals who successfully support youth experiencing homelessness or sexual exploitation take a principles-based approach to their work, rather than a rules-based approach. Principles provide guidance and direction to those working with youth experiencing homelessness or sexual exploitation. They provide a framework for how we approach and view youth, engage and interact with them, build relationships, and support them.

The challenge for youth workers is to meet and connect with each young person where they are and build a supportive relationship from there. Principles provide the anchor for this relationship-building process. The StreetWorks Outreach Worker Certification Training Curriculum is significantly informed by the StreetWorks Guiding Principles, listed below [*Source: 9 Evidenced-based Guiding Principles to Help Youth Overcome Homelessness, 2014*]:

1. ***Journey-Oriented:*** Interact with youth to help them understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future as they decide where they want to go and how to get there.
2. ***Trauma-Informed:*** Recognize that most homeless youth have experienced trauma; build relationships, responses, and services on that knowledge.
3. ***Non-Judgmental:*** Interact with youth without labeling or judging them on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors.
4. ***Harm Reduction:*** Contain the effects of risky behavior in the short-term and seek to reduce its effects in the long-term.
5. ***Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships:*** Build relationships by interacting with youth in an honest, dependable, authentic, caring, and supportive way.
6. ***Strengths-Based:*** Start with and build upon the skills, strengths, and positive characteristics of each youth.
7. ***Positive Youth Development:*** Provide opportunities for youth to build a sense of competency, usefulness, belonging, and power.
8. ***Holistic:*** Support youth in a manner that recognizes the interconnectedness of their mental, physical, spiritual, and social health.
9. ***Collaboration:*** Establish a principles-based, youth-focused system of support that integrates practices, procedures, and services within and across agencies, systems, and policies.

## METHODOLOGY



Focus groups were held to gather feedback to help formulate pilot curriculum, supplemental resources, and regional trainings relevant to Greater Minnesota. StreetWorks and LSS collaborated to convene focus groups in five cities: Willmar, Duluth, Mankato, Brainerd, and Rochester. These cities were selected because they include other LSS program sites and align with the Safe Harbor regional division of the state.

StreetWorks and LSS recruited local experts, which included both professionals in youth-serving organizations and systems (outreach workers and others providing services for youth) and youth (ages 18-24) who had been or were currently experiencing homelessness. Two focus groups were held in each area—one for the professionals and one for the youth. LSS Program Directors from each geographic area were able to use their expertise and knowledge of their local communities to invite appropriate local community partners to give their input to the project. Most of the youth who attended the focus groups were recruited by LSS staff who have worked, or still are working, with them.

To supplement the focus groups, the methodology included a pre-focus group and post-focus group survey for the professionals. The pre-focus group survey helped the facilitators gain insight into youth homelessness and resources in each area of the state. A summary of the pre-focus group survey was given to participants during the professional focus group session. After the background information of the project and a review of the current curriculum was presented, the facilitator of the focus group reviewed participant survey answers with the group and asked clarifying questions. The clarifying questions were different for each group, and were based on what was found from the surveys to be significant or unclear for that region. The follow-up survey was sent to further define regional training needs, partnerships, potential locations, and recommended timeframes for trainings.



## *Professional Focus Groups*

The majority of survey respondents (but not all) were in attendance at the in-person meetings. There were 45 professionals who attended the professional focus groups, 47 who completed the pre-focus group survey, and 36 who completed the post-survey. It should be noted that because LSS hosted the focus groups, LSS staff made up the majority of participants in this group. Job titles and occupations of the professional participants included the following:

- Outreach workers and youth workers from LSS, and other nonprofit agencies
- Safe Harbor Regional Navigators
- Case managers
- Program directors, managers, and coordinators of youth programs
- Health practitioners (RN)
- Supportive housing and shelter workers
- Youth workers who specialize in working with LGBTQ+ youth
- County attorneys
- School social workers
- County social service workers
- Youth workers who specialize in working with the refugee community
- Women's shelter directors

The pre-focus group survey was designed to gather a baseline understanding of the available services and resources for youth, as well as training needs of professionals in that region. The objectives of the pre-focus group survey were to:

- Understand how youth homelessness and sexual exploitation presented in each region;
- Gain insight into available resources for youth experiencing homelessness in each region (including gaps in services and community partners);
- Understand how outreach services are currently being provided in each region and within each focus group participant's own organization; and
- Identify current training needs in each region.

The in-person focus groups were two to three hours in length and conducted by the StreetWorks Safe Harbor Project Team. The agenda consisted of a presentation and overview of the project, a summary review of survey results, and further discussion about training needs and challenges in the region. The objectives of the in-person professional focus groups were to:

- Present the current curriculum topics and the Pathway to Certification process to gain feedback on the relevancy of the topics and whether it would be beneficial to their organization;
- Gain insight on how this curriculum could be delivered and trained, including regional differences in culture and available resources;
- Clarify and further understand responses given in the pre-survey; and
- Identify current regional training needs, location possibilities, and delivery options for 2019 trainings.



### *Youth Focus Groups*

The youth focus groups took place in the afternoon, after the professional groups. A total of 49 youth attended the youth focus groups. These participants were ages 18-24 and were currently experiencing or had previously experienced homelessness. Participating youth were provided lunch and each was given a stipend in the form of a \$50 Visa gift card. All information gathered was anonymous and no identifying names were provided to the group facilitators or team.

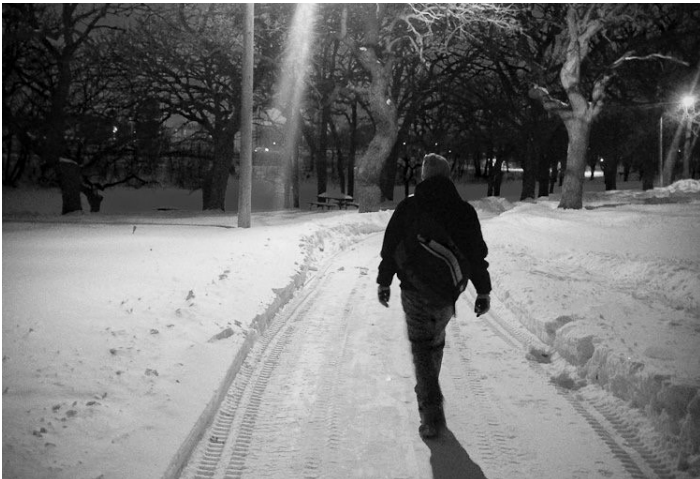
The objectives of the in-person youth focus groups were to:

- Understand how youth homelessness is experienced in each region;
- Gain insight into available resources for youth experiencing homelessness in each area (including both gaps in services, and community resources that are currently available and utilized);
- Gauge youth knowledge and understanding of available resources, Safe Harbor, and sexual exploitation; and
- Gain expert knowledge from youth on what youth workers should know to facilitate positive outcomes with youth.

## FINDINGS & RESULTS

As a result of holding the focus groups and reviewing survey data, StreetWorks was able to determine similarities and differences in how youth experience homelessness in Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

*Throughout all five communities, participants shared concerns about the lack of available resources for youth experiencing homelessness. Both professional and youth focus group participants shared that youth who are experiencing homelessness in their area are often couch hopping, doubling up, participating in survival sex, and/or sleeping in various outdoor places such as under bridges, in cars, at parks, etc.*



Both professional and youth focus group members described increased vulnerabilities for youth experiencing homelessness. These included encountering overt and covert racism, homophobia, and discrimination due to their age. Another vulnerability of note is that nearly every young adult, in every city, acknowledged having been involved with “systems” as a minor, including foster care or Juvenile Detention.

Most participants believed the Twin Cities metro area had more resources available to youth, such as shelters and transitional housing programs, than their areas did not have, and that it was easier to serve youth in the Twin Cities as a result. This feedback will inform how StreetWorks proceeds with modifications to the curriculum to account for regional differences.

*“Homelessness is pretty much invisible here, and it’s so cold. A lot of them [youth] are doubled up and just aren’t on the street. Officials say it’s not a problem.” —SERVICE PROVIDER*

## PROFESSIONAL GROUP SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS:

Professionals who participated in the pre-focus group surveys and focus groups provided the facilitators with an understanding of the situation, problems, and resources in each area. The surveys and focus groups also identified the following topics and concerns relating to specific regions.

### **Safe Harbor**

*Professionals said they did not believe most young people had heard of Safe Harbor. This was confirmed when the facilitator asked the youth focus group. Lack of awareness about Safe Harbor amongst systems professionals, health care workers, schools, and other professionals who may encounter youth at-risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation was noted in every professional focus group.*

### **Community Partners**

The professional group overwhelmingly reported that in smaller communities, other professionals who did not regularly work with youth and general community members did not believe homelessness or sexual exploitation was a problem in their area. The professionals believe that because community members do not physically see people who are homeless on the streets, they do not have any awareness that this is happening in their community. Participants expressed a need for more training for community partners on these issues.

Some areas reported more positive and intentional collaborations with other community partners than other areas. For example, Mankato professionals believe that because of Safe Harbor, and the collaboration that has happened since Safe Harbor was passed, there are greater connections in their community. The professionals in that area, and LSS staff specifically, explained that they are constantly working to include the community and other professionals to increase coordination, collaboration, and services for youth. Professionals in Duluth, on the other hand, believe there is much work to be done to be more collaborative when providing services to youth. In Willmar, LSS is the only agency that provides services specifically to youth. This has required them to work extensively with adult-serving agencies to help develop and recommend services for young people.

Professionals in a few groups mentioned they have a hard time reaching out to members of culturally-specific communities, including Native Americans and members of the Somali and Hmong communities. They expressed a desire to build better community partners and better relationships with these communities.

## ***Outreach Services***

One thing heard consistently from professionals is that youth-serving agencies in Greater Minnesota understand and practice outreach work differently than youth-serving agencies in the Twin Cities metro area.

One example of this difference is that there are few agencies practicing traditional “street outreach” in Greater Minnesota. A reason for this lack of street outreach in Greater Minnesota is that there are fewer youth experiencing homelessness in these areas who are visible on the street. Several professionals mentioned that youth who are experiencing homelessness do not necessarily hang out or live in larger camps together in groups, instead they are necessarily more hidden and tend to be together in smaller groups of two or three.

Another characteristic of these communities that can make street outreach more difficult is the large geographic territories each agency covers. Some of the agencies provide youth services for several counties. In Willmar, for example, LSS provides youth services for seven counties. Instead of street outreach, agencies in these cities tend to find youth in need with a more site-based approach, or through referrals. Youth workers might work with other professionals in places like schools or libraries, but most of the youth find agencies through word-of-mouth from other youth and through referrals from county agencies or other youth service providers.

Many professionals considered youth outreach work in terms of educating the public and other youth workers on issues surrounding homelessness and sexual exploitation, or as a form of case management and/or advocacy work. Professionals also mentioned that they do not refer youth to some shelters because grooming and recruitment that leads to sexual exploitation occurs in them.

## ***Professional Training***

Most agencies, outside of governmental agencies, acknowledged they did not have a structured training program for their youth workers. Often, they rely on having new workers job shadow veteran youth workers, or “jump in” to their work and figure it out on the job. They also rely on training resources from outside of their agencies, such as Youth Intervention Programs Association (YIPA) and relevant in-person trainings that might be available throughout the state. LSS staff mentioned using the online StreetWorks Safe Harbor training sessions (developed in Phase 1) for new staff.

From the in-person professional focus groups, it was determined that participants would be interested in a structured StreetWorks training if it were available. In addition to being beneficial within their own organization, most believed the outlined topics would be relevant and useful to all youth workers, and those who encounter youth as part of their work (this may include health care professionals, educators, librarians, coaches, other systems professionals etc.).

Participants noted many community partners in Greater Minnesota who could use training on both youth homelessness and sexual exploitation, including:

- Health care workers
- Law enforcement officials
- Judges and county attorneys
- Legislators and county commissioners
- School staff members
- Nonprofit and social service organization youth workers

Professionals also identified several training topics they have a need for and would be interested in, including:

- Intake process—if an employee serves as the first contact a young person has with an agency, what should their intake look like and what questions should they be asking?
- Trauma-informed care
- Harm-reduction
- Clear referral process for trafficked youth (protocol development)
- How agencies can collaborate better
- Cultural sensitivity
- Bystander intervention
- Nonverbal communication
- Stress-reduction/Self-care
- How to use social media to communicate with youth, and other social media issues
- Sexual exploitation, survival sex, and sex trafficking identification and prevention
- How to talk with youth who have experienced exploitation
- Ethical dilemmas/boundaries
- Primary prevention for primary school age
- Special considerations when working with LGBTQ+ youth
- Gangs
- Mental health and suicide interventions
- Available resources in the area
- Training designed specifically for youth
- Raising awareness and education in the community (including parents)



*Professionals explained they would like to have a structured training for new staff but were unable to do so because there is no standard curriculum for them to use. They also said the main reason they are unable to provide structured training is because they do not have staff dedicated to training and do not have the time to train new staff themselves on such a deep level.*

Suggestions on using this curriculum to train youth workers in their area included:

- **Creating a train-the-trainer option:** This would involve training an organization staff member who could then serve as a training resource to the rest of an organization's staff. Most participants did not believe they would be able to implement this option because they do not have the infrastructure in their agencies to support this.
- **Completely online:** All curriculum would be taught using an electronic training platform. Due to the complexity of the training and the nuances in each region, most thought this would be extremely difficult to design in an effective way.
- **Hybrid option:** All classroom sessions would be available online, some designed for staff to work through alone, and some that require more discussion and critical thinking would be conducted via online meeting tools or software with a StreetWorks trainer facilitating.
- **In-person:** StreetWorks would offer regional certification trainings held throughout Minnesota at specific times throughout the year, in a cohort format.

Participants relayed that due to the depth and breadth of the training needs, it would be most beneficial if the training were delivered in-person, with a cohort if possible, and with some pre/post work, as well as available support from StreetWorks during the process. Consistently, they stated that training from a StreetWorks trainer would be necessary, as their organizations did not have training staff, or other professionals in the area, who would be available or able to deliver this content.

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS:



*StreetWorks believes that youth are the true experts in their own experiences, needs, and identification of available resources.*

During the youth focus groups, StreetWorks heard from individuals about the realities they face, the needs they have and what the adults they encounter could do to improve services. It is important to note that most youth who attended the focus groups were recruited by LSS staff who have worked, or still are working, with them. Youth

who attended these focus group sessions may have a different view of some of the available resources than youth who have not been in contact with LSS youth services.

The youth in all regions described constantly feeling unsafe, being hungry, battling addictions, and struggling with their own mental health. They shared feelings of hopelessness and depression, and thoughts of suicide. Several young people agreed that not having anywhere to go or anything to do during the day caused boredom and increased their chances of getting into trouble. Many expressed wanting to work but finding it difficult to get a job. Employment barriers identified by youth included lack of clean (or appropriate) clothes, having nowhere to shower, being without transportation, and lacking a legal address.

In several cities, but especially in Brainerd and Willmar, youth talked extensively about how having drugs and their bodies to use as bartering tools were more valuable than having money when they needed a place to stay or to sleep. Young people also mentioned that when there is not a safe place to sleep, it can be necessary to move around and keep walking during the night to stay safe. A few participants mentioned that even though they did not consider themselves drug users, they would turn to drugs to stay awake all night because it is safer to be awake than asleep when on the streets, in parks, or in camps. They said they also go to businesses that stay open 24-hours, such as Walmart or Cub Foods.

Youth in each of the communities (except Rochester) agreed that people in smaller communities know almost everyone in the area. As a result, they said homelessness is more noticeable, and the shame associated with it makes it less likely that youth would access public or community resources for help. For example, one youth explained that the food shelf in their area is on a main street and it is often busy. If they want to get food there, they must stand in line on the street where people who they know will see them. Additionally, most youth in smaller communities agreed that other youth, members of law enforcement, local businesses, and other community members were likely to judge them unfairly based on their last name and assume their character is the same as others who share that name.



## ***Shelter and Housing***

The major complaint in all areas is the lack of shelter and housing—especially for young people under 18 and single males. Youth under age 18 cannot stay at a hotel or get their own apartment, and services for single males are more limited as fewer organizations offer services to these young men. Several towns offer host homes, but youth often do not want to stay in those places because it feels like a foster home. Professionals mention that with the lack of housing and other resources, there is a need for professionals to be able to think critically and creatively to create positive outcomes for youth. In several cities, youth did not feel safe going to shelters that also served older adults. Drugs, dirty facilities, and people with severe mental health issues were mentioned as reasons why youth do not feel safe in some shelters. Strict rules such as those limiting cell phone use were also mentioned.



Professionals mention that with the lack of housing and other resources, there is a need for professionals to be able to think critically and creatively to create positive outcomes for youth. In several cities, youth did not feel safe going to shelters that also served older adults. Drugs, dirty facilities, and people with severe mental health issues were mentioned as reasons why youth do not feel safe in some shelters. Strict rules such as those limiting cell phone use were also mentioned.

Youth experts reported the following additional barriers they faced due to homelessness:

- No safe place to keep their belongings
- Inability to maintain hygiene
- Don't want to be a burden on people they know, so they often do not ask for help
- Places that require appointments and don't offer walk-in services can be extremely difficult to utilize, especially if the young person does not have reliable transportation
- Find it hard to trust anyone and often avoid law enforcement and county services
- In small towns, everything shuts down around 9:00 p.m.
- People who do drugs are treated poorly
- Finding resources can take all day
- Feeling like they are being judged
- There is nowhere to get water
- Sleep deprivation because they cannot sleep well anywhere
- Lack of childcare

*“If you don't have anywhere to go, you feel like a burden to everybody, it's hard to make sure you don't bother everyone.” —YOUTH*

### ***Drop-In Centers/Safe Places***

Young people described a lack of safe housing, drop-in centers, or other safe places to go during the day. Where there are drop-in centers, young people said the hours needed to be extended so the centers remained open all day and into the evening. They also said it would be helpful to have drop-in centers for different age groups. A few youth mentioned that drop-in centers should be age-specific (18 and under and 18+), to account for maturity level differences and concerns for the safety of younger youth.

### ***Transportation***

Lack of transportation was a consistent issue for youth experiencing homelessness in all five communities. The Rochester area had fewer transportation issues, but expressed concern about how difficult public transportation can be. In some areas, especially the towns further away from larger cities, public transportation does not exist. In areas where there is public transportation, the following issues were discussed by both youth and professionals during the focus groups:



- Inconsistency/frequency of the pick-up and drop-off times makes it difficult to plan for meetings, appointments, and jobs.
- Public transportation options often ended early in the day, so they could not use the bus after work if they had a night job.
- If a person lived in a smaller town because the smaller town had affordable housing, but the town they lived in did not have jobs available, they would have to work in the larger city but there is no public transportation traveling between the smaller towns and the bigger cities in the area.
- The cost was too high.
- Youth had to be accompanied by an adult (some drivers would not allow unaccompanied youth on the bus).
- Limit on how many items people could carry on the bus.
- It was also mentioned in Brainerd that the only available taxi company is known for abusing and exploiting vulnerable youth.

Since there are such limited options for transportation in all areas, youth will try to find rides with friends but will usually have to come up with gas money.

## **Food**

Many youth mentioned how hungry they are when homeless. In some areas, there were no options for cooked meals. Many young people also mentioned the food shelves would often have bad or expired food.

## **Youth-serving Agencies**

Youth talked highly of LSS staff and said they were grateful to have had LSS services to help them get through tough times. Young people talked about traveling between cities and towns to get their needs met. The young people who had traveled to the Twin Cities area mentioned that in the smaller communities, they received more one-on-one time and were able to meet with staff who seemed to care about them individually and wanted to help them. Some youth intentionally left the Twin Cities to receive what they perceived to be a more personal connection with youth workers.

## **Safe Harbor and Sexual Exploitation**

*Most youth had not heard of Safe Harbor, except for a few who had been in a Safe Harbor housing facility. One youth mentioned that she had seen posters in the bathroom at the drop-in center that talk about sexual exploitation so she knows that if she had a problem with sexual exploitation, she could talk to the staff there about it.*

None of the youth in the focus groups were asked to disclose personal experiences of being sexually exploited. Several of the participants acknowledged that it is not uncommon for youth to trade sex for food or a place to stay, but many did not necessarily equate “survival sex” with exploitation.

*“People are selling their bodies all the time, so they have a place to sleep. It isn’t always laid out like a contract, it’s just understood. People don’t want to discuss the subject with a worker.” —YOUTH*

As noted previously, many participants stated that they were unaware of what Safe Harbor was, or what services are available for young people who may be at-risk of, have experienced, or are currently experiencing sexual exploitation, despite having received services from a Safe Harbor funded program. In general, participants talked about knowing a “friend” who was involved in “prostitution”, but only one participant self-disclosed previous commercial sexual exploitation.

In each youth focus group, the final question at the end of the session was, “What should youth workers know?” After analyzing the responses, the following themes emerged as either being mentioned by most focus groups or deemed insightful for youth workers:

- *People in this situation can't wait so long for help, allow walk-ins, stop making appointments.*
- *Don't give up on us, give us many chances, be patient, keep checking up on us.*
- *Be around more—we want more one-on-one time.*
- *Even if I have done something wrong, still help me and treat me with respect.*
- *Don't be on the cop's side.*
- *Don't assume things—ask, and then hear what I am saying.*
- *Be okay with my story (there is probably even more going on than I tell you at first).*
- *Don't be superior, be respectful, be sincere, don't judge.*
- *Don't just do things for me, teach me.*
- *Build the relationship so we feel like we can open up to you.*
- *We need guidance, and step-by-step instructions on how to get things done and help setting goals.*
- *Build confidence so we believe we can do things—recognize how hard we are working, recognize the things we are doing right.*
- *The blame should not always be on the young adult, it has more to do with society, the government and their family.*
- *Social workers put us into a lot of situations that are dangerous, like into foster homes.*
- *We don't want to get high and be homeless, but you don't want to be homeless and not be high.*
- *Programs should do more about youth homelessness awareness.*
- *Hire the right person to work with youth, it is the worker who makes the experience good.*



## DISCUSSION



While there are slight differences in how youth experience homelessness in smaller communities throughout Minnesota, many experiences are extremely similar to youth experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities metro area. Experiences such as finding shelter, feeling unsafe, being hungry/thirsty, looking for something to do, experiencing discrimination, working all day to find resources, and having issues finding and maintaining employment are similar throughout the state. This information tells us that the foundational best practices of StreetWork’s current curriculum are relevant for all youth workers throughout the state.

The StreetWorks Outreach Worker Curriculum has been standardized and offered to pilot site participants in the Twin Cities. Based on the input received from focus group participants—the current curriculum is relevant for Greater Minnesota with some modifications by region. To proceed in Greater Minnesota, StreetWorks should modify the format and update the content of the Twin Cities version with adaptations for suburban and rural youth workers.

The community response to homelessness in Greater Minnesota presents differently than the response in the Twin Cities. Most youth-serving agencies do not have street-outreach staff, which is why an adaptation for Greater Minnesota should focus on training all youth workers and systems professionals who encounter youth, not just street outreach workers.

Identifying youth experiencing homelessness is an issue, so communities in Greater Minnesota may not be sufficiently trained to identify and serve youth. StreetWorks will need to provide training because the focus group participant organizations do not have trainers on staff. The focus groups made comments about the resources in the Twin Cities compared to Greater Minnesota that highlighted a difference in perception versus reality when it comes to resource availability. While it is true that the Twin Cities has more resources, there are also more youth who need assistance in the Twin Cities. As a result, Twin Cities youth workers are faced with the same problem of not having enough resources as those in Greater Minnesota.



The curriculum should be updated to encourage creative solutions because of a consistently similar need for more resources throughout the state, regardless of location.

Youth seeking services in Greater Minnesota may be afraid to reach out to available programs or use community resources due to concerns that workers might know who they are and talk to other community members about their situation, or that the workers might judge them or discriminate

against them based on what they know about them. This context and information on how to overcome this challenge should be added into the boundaries and confidentiality sections of the curriculum.

Transportation differences exist between youth experiencing homelessness in smaller communities and youth experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities area. It costs money for transportation no matter where a youth is located, which is problematic, but when it comes to transportation in smaller communities there are far fewer public transportation options, and youth need to travel farther to resources compared to youth who are located in the Twin Cities area. The curriculum will be updated to help workers think through transportation challenges, and develop strategies for addressing them and identify potential resources that work best in their community.

Community partnerships and effective collaboration skills were identified as being needed throughout the five areas. Some communities are doing this very well, and some believe they need to focus more effort on collaboration and building community partners. This validates that community partners modules in the existing curriculum are relevant for people in Greater Minnesota as well as in the Twin Cities area.

This research demonstrated that outreach work is viewed, practiced, and labeled differently between agencies and throughout different communities. Outreach services throughout Minnesota are practiced on the street, at different sites, through community education, as case management, and as advocacy work. This new understanding of how professionals view outreach services shows a need to expand the current curriculum to include not only workers labeled “outreach workers” but all youth workers as well.

Participants in the professional focus groups liked the structure and the content of the curriculum and thought it would be a great tool to use for their staff. The only concern about using this curriculum was the lack of infrastructure in their agencies to support more in-depth training. Based on the feedback about limited training capacity of Greater Minnesota partners and the critical importance of in-person trainings and personal expert mentorship for youth workers, StreetWorks will begin to research training options beyond train-the-trainer

models or trainings held in the Twin Cities. The proposed solution will be to offer an ongoing traveling StreetWorks Certification Training in the different Safe Harbor regions throughout the state, supplemented by an online video conference platform to provide consultation and coaching during the certification process. This new training curriculum will provide foundational best practices for working with youth experiencing, or at-risk of experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and/or sexual exploitation. For more information about the proposed training model for Greater Minnesota (see Appendix 2).

### **Looking Ahead**

As part of the DHS O.E.O Safe Harbor Phase 2 Project, in the Spring of 2019, StreetWorks will coordinate and produce Regional Safe Harbor Trainings in three of the Safe Harbor regions: Rochester (South East), Alexandria (West Central), and Mankato (South West), all of which will be open to the public and targeted towards youth workers and youth-serving professionals in the region.

Co-hosted by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, *Beyond the 101: A Regional Multi-disciplinary Safe Harbor Conference* is designed for advocates (youth and adult), youth-workers, systems professionals, and other professionals who encounter youth in their work. The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity for multidisciplinary professionals to participate in skills-based learning through a full day of engaging plenary sessions, workshops, and panel discussions focused on best practices when serving youth who are at-risk of and/or have experienced sexual exploitation and/or homelessness. The trainings will also provide an introduction to the new StreetWorks Certification Curriculum and its adaptations for Greater Minnesota, including a preview of certification trainings that will be available for multi-disciplinary professionals in 2019.

StreetWorks has partnered with MDH, DHS, the Safe Harbor Regional Navigator, and other providers in each region to host the trainings, develop content, and identify local training experts that are relevant to the region (see Appendix 3).

### **Training dates and locations are as follows:**

- Rochester (SE Region), April 25, 2019 at the DoubleTree Hotel
- Alexandria (West Central Region), May 8, 2019, at Arrowwood Conference Center
- Mankato (SW Region), May 16, 2019, at the Marriott Courtyard
- Agendas available upon request.

## CONCLUSION

Conducting focus groups with youth and professionals in Willmar, Duluth, Mankato, Brainerd, and Rochester affirmed that the StreetWorks Certification Training Curriculum would be a useful tool for youth workers and youth serving professionals in Greater Minnesota. Focus group results indicate there are key differences between the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota in the way this work should be approached and the challenges youth experiencing homelessness and/or exploitation face. The curriculum should be adapted to account for differences in shelter and housing, safe places for youth, transportation, and confidentiality.

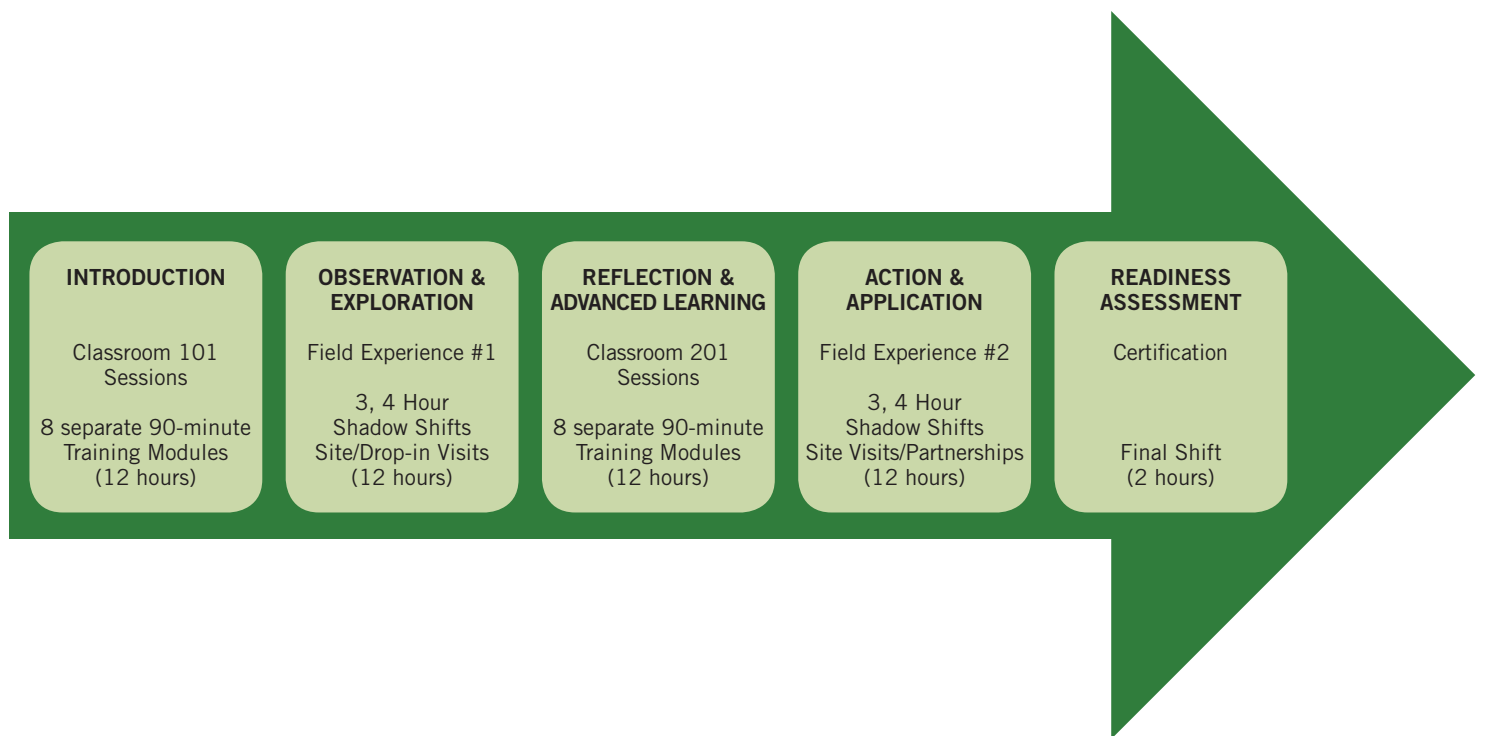
Similarly, the way in which training is delivered will need to be adapted to meet the needs of agencies and organizations that do not have capacity for a train-the-trainer model or frequent travel to in-person training sessions in the Twin Cities metro. StreetWorks is engaging in a strategic planning process to identify increased capacity needs to develop a training team and implement this new certification curriculum statewide.



# Appendix

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*Appendix 1*  
*StreetWorks Certification Pathway*



StreetWorks Certification Training Curriculum Delivery Model

Metro Model – Classroom/In-person -- CURRENT	Traveling Certification — SH Regions-- 2019/20	Hybrid Online -- FUTURE	Train the Trainer --FUTURE
<p><u>Summary:</u> Participants in the Metro area attend classroom session and are assigned field experience homework to complete the traditional SWC pathway to certification.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> Community cohorts in greater MN Safe Harbor regions (collaborate with Reg. Nav’s and LSS). Traveling version of SWC certification with classroom sessions and online coaching delivered by SWC. Modified field experience.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> An on-line version of the certification process that includes a mix of self-paced learning modules, field experience assignments, and live online discussion facilitated by SWC.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> A train-the-trainer version, that helps key partners become certified to deliver the SWC training in their agencies and regions.</p>
<p><u>Time commitment:</u> 6 classroom sessions and 2 field work assignments totaling approx. 40-50 hours.</p>	<p><u>Time commitment:</u> Two 3-day in-person trainings with 2 online follow-up discussions. Approx. 20 hours classroom 6 hours field, 2 hours Zoom follow-up in between 101 and 201 and at graduation (Sup. and participant. + SWC web resources (videos etc.).</p>	<p><u>Time commitment:</u> Self-paced, but cohort’s set-up throughout the year with timelines and online video conferencing support.</p>	<p><u>Time commitment:</u> Delivered through a 3-day in-person SWC Training Institute?</p>
<p><u>Target Audience (s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SWC member agencies</li> <li>• Other youth serving agencies/workers</li> <li>• Systems professionals</li> </ul>	<p><u>Target Audience (s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Harbor Grantees</li> <li>• Other youth serving agencies/workers</li> <li>• Systems professionals</li> </ul>	<p><u>Target Audience (s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Harbor Grantees</li> <li>• Other youth serving agencies/workers</li> <li>• Systems Professionals</li> </ul>	<p><u>Target Audience (s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Harbor Grantees</li> <li>• Other youth serving agencies/workers</li> <li>• Systems professionals</li> </ul>
<p><u>Needs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update existing Fac. Guide, Workbook, PPT’s, Sup. Guide, Resources/Activities. Design Regional Appendix/Supplemental information</li> </ul>	<p><u>Needs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design 3-day agenda and process, set calendar, design remote field experience and online platform (Zoom), engage cohorts, hire more staff</li> </ul>	<p><u>Needs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review OVC SOAR, NSVRC, Hollywood Youth, YIPA, Futures Without Violence webinar archive (adult learners), Shared Hope, create online platform</li> </ul>	<p><u>Needs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key host partners, process/training designed for trainers, LSS Guidelines/Criteria, Evaluation/report back</li> </ul>



# SAVE THE DATE

## Beyond the 101: A Regional Multidisciplinary Safe Harbor Conference

### ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Co-hosted by Lutheran Social Service of MN, StreetWorks, the MN Department of Human Services O.E.O, and the MN Department of Health Safe Harbor Program, the **Beyond the 101: A Regional Multidisciplinary Safe Harbor Conference** is designed for advocates (youth and adult), youth-workers, systems professionals, and other professionals who encounter youth in their work.

The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity for multidisciplinary professionals to participate in skills-based learning through a full day of engaging plenary sessions, workshops, and panel discussions focused on best practices in serving youth who are at-risk of and/or have experienced sexual exploitation and/or homelessness.

The trainings will also provide an introduction to the new StreetWorks Certification Curriculum and its adaptations for Greater Minnesota, including a preview of certification trainings that will be available for multidisciplinary professionals in 2019.

StreetWorks has partnered with MDH, DHS, the Safe Harbor Regional Navigator, and other providers in each region to host the trainings, develop content, and identify local training experts that are relevant to the region.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND THE CONFERENCE?

We welcome broad participation from multidisciplinary partners such as advocates (youth and adult), youth-workers, systems professionals and other professionals who encounter youth in their work.

### DATES & LOCATIONS

SE Region  
Rochester  
April 25, 2019

West Central Region  
Alexandria  
May 8, 2019

SW Region  
Mankato  
May 16, 2019

### TIME

8:30 registration  
9:00-4:30 conference

### PRICE

\$35 (includes snacks, lunch and materials)

### REGISTRATION

Coming soon!



[www.streetworksmn.org](http://www.streetworksmn.org)

*ABOUT STREETWORKS: A Program of Lutheran Social Service, StreetWorks is an Outreach Collaborative serving youth at-risk of, or experiencing homelessness and/or sexual exploitation.*



