



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

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### WHO WE ARE

Community Against Sexual Harm serves women who have been commercially sexually exploited through survivor-led peer support and harm reduction services, while providing education about the harm inflicted on women and the community. We are located in Oak Park and serve women from throughout Sacramento County. Contact us at 916-856-2900.

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### WHAT'S INSIDE?

This toolkit was created in partnership with The Sierra Health Foundation and offers tips and resources to engage women who have been commercially sexually exploited and have trauma related symptoms.

Education, housing, and employment opportunities have been shown to be the factors that reduce the risk of continued exploitation. This guide is intended to help connect people with these opportunities.

# WHAT IS COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) occurs when a vulnerable person exchanges sexual acts for money, or to fulfill basic needs, including food, shelter, medicine, or safety; this may involve a third party who profits financially from the exploitation. A 'vulnerable person' is one who has few options for survival outside of CSE due to trauma, substance abuse, homelessness, threat of violence, or coercion by a trusted or more powerful party.

Despite their status as victims of crime, the stigmatized nature of trading sex for money often prevents exploited people from seeking services due to shame and fear of judgment from service providers.

## THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- **Human Trafficking**  
The practice of a third party using force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. Though violence is often used as a means of controlling the individual, emotional and psychological abuse and manipulation are a crucial element of trafficking.
- **Prostitution**  
The exchange of sexual activity for money or other valuable consideration, such as drugs. Prostitution often appears to be consensual, but it is often engaged in by vulnerable people with few other options for survival.
- **Survival Sex**  
Prostitution driven by extreme need, and occurs when sexual activity is exchanged for shelter, food, or clothing. People engaging in survival sex are generally disadvantaged by society in some way, and include members of the LGBTQ community, people suffering from addiction or untreated mental health disorders, and the homeless.

## TYPES OF STIGMA

**Anticipated Stigma** refers to the fear of rejection a person may feel when interacting with someone outside of their stigmatized group.

**Internalized Stigma** occurs when a person comes to believe the negative connotations related to the stigmatizing behaviors in which they engage are integral to their identity.

**Enacted Stigma** is the consequences of prejudice perpetrated by someone perceived to be outside of the stigmatized group.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

Stigma is negative stereotypes or **beliefs** attributed to behaviors that fall outside established social norms, while discrimination is the **action** that stems from stigma.

Discrimination may manifest as unequal treatment or refusal to provide services, housing, or employment to a member of a stigmatized group such as victims of CSE, substance users, or formerly incarcerated people.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

The following information is from Community Against Sexual Harm participants who volunteered to participate in a focus group to discuss their experience with education, housing, and employment opportunities.

*“I can’t pay an application and credit fee if I won’t qualify.”*

Focus group participants were either first time renters or applicants with poor credit. All found the application fee and credit check requirements onerous, given their personal expectation that they would not likely qualify. Few understood when the fees would be assessed, what would be required to be placed on a wait-list, and how to consider their personal situation before applying. Many are missing out on an opportunity because they don’t ask important questions about the process.

*“I need a place but the environment matters.”*

Most of our participants have limited experience with affordable housing complexes, outside of a handful of properties. They are much less familiar with complexes that have onsite services, family programs, and quality management. Because many of our participants have lived in unsafe neighborhoods, they worry that affordable means unsafe or inconvenient.

*“No doubt I qualify.”*

While most of our participants indicated they would fill out an application if they thought they qualified, our experience tells a different story. We have found that considerable assistance is needed in order to help our participants actually link to services like affordable housing. This may be due to feeling uncomfortable in unfamiliar settings. Stigmatization has been shown to produce difficulty engaging in normal social interactions. However, focus group participants indicated that they were much more likely to follow through with an application process if they were specifically referred by a trusted person.

*“Everybody judges.”*

One of the most consistent feelings described by focus group participants was that they are always judged. Feeling judged shows up when someone anticipates stigma and can be debilitating when the stigma has been internalized. Both self-esteem and confidence in the future suffer when people feel they are less valued. The fear of rejection by others leads many people to limit their life opportunities, including the obtainment of safe and affordable housing.

# 5 THINGS YOU CAN DO

We can all play a part in helping a person take meaningful steps toward obtaining the affordable housing they need to fully move ahead in their life. Our suggestions are simple, but the impact can be great.

1

Encourage the participation of mentors, advocates, and caseworkers in completing applications for public housing programs, viewing available units, and attending required orientations, interviews, or workshops.

2

Understand that poverty, trauma, and past experiences with discrimination affect how people navigate their lives, and are all part of commercial sexual exploitation. The participant may appear distrustful or anxious for unknown reasons. Taking care to use non-judgmental language, avoid asking unnecessary questions, and patiently guide the participant throughout the application process can make the process smoother.

3

Review eligibility guidelines before the participant completes an application, particularly if there is an application fee. If the participant does not meet these guidelines, offering a few quick tips on how they might do so in the future can be invaluable.

4

Use peers to help educate or guide participants through the housing process. If possible, select people who have experienced challenges such as chronic poverty, homelessness, literacy or reading comprehension issues, trauma, or commercial sexual exploitation. People who have overcome hardship are easy to find, and they are often eager to help. Tap into this valuable resource by forming networks with current participants, community colleges, and local non-profits. In our experience, there is no substitute for receiving help from someone who has walked in your shoes.

5

Normalize the assistance provided by affordable housing programs, special programs, and mentors. The idea that help is available, accessible, and used by many people helps nervous participants feel more comfortable and competent.



**In case of an emergency, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733)**

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Stable housing not only improves a person’s future, it is one of the factors that reduce the risk for commercial sexual exploitation. However, the stress of poverty and trauma, and the stigmatizing nature of sex work create additional challenges to receiving assistance. The following resources offer additional assistance to help people succeed.



Community Against Sexual Harm  
Mentoring, Wrap-Around Services, Drop-In Support Center  
916-856-2900 · [www.cashsac.org](http://www.cashsac.org)



TLCS Respite Center  
Respite center for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis  
916-RESPITE · [www.tlcssac.org](http://www.tlcssac.org)



Chicks in Crisis  
Prenatal care, parenting assistance, clothes, emergency food, baby supplies, and legal guidance  
916-441-1243 · [www.chicksincrisis.org](http://www.chicksincrisis.org)



Sacramento Food Bank  
Food access, clothing, GED, adult, parent, and youth education, immigration legal services  
916-456-1980 · [www.sacramentofoodbank.org](http://www.sacramentofoodbank.org)



One Community Health  
Primary health and specialty provider and covered CA Enrollment  
916-443-3299 · [www.onecommunityhealth.com](http://www.onecommunityhealth.com)



211  
Referrals to more than 1,600 community services in the Sacramento area  
Dial 2-1-1 or 916-498-1000 · [www.211sacramento.org/211](http://www.211sacramento.org/211)



Sources  
Corrigan & Watson: Understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness, Benoit, Jansson, Smith & Flagg: Prostitution Stigma and Its Effect on the Working Conditions, Personal Lives, and Health of Sex Workers & [www.mobilitypartnership.org](http://www.mobilitypartnership.org)