



youthSpark

Summer/Fall 2015

Update

A Bigger and Brighter Future is on the Horizon

Fifteen years ago youthSpark was one of the first organizations in Atlanta to shine a light on the scourge of child sex trafficking, and the first in the Southeast to offer safe house services to its young victims. That vision and work provided the advocacy impetus for Georgia's statewide system of care, which today is a model for serving hundreds of child victims each year through cross-sector and interagency collaboration. We were also the first to offer early intervention services for at-risk girls through our *youthSpark Voices* program. Our experiences serving this vulnerable population have given us the framework and expertise to reach even more youth, including boys, on the wider continuum of exploitation and abuse. Now is the time for a new chapter—youthSpark's new *Youth Services Center*—to address profound gaps that still exist in Atlanta's capacity to connect abused, exploited, and at-risk youth with life-changing services. Not only will this Center help transform the lives of these youth, but it will also be a catalyst for systems change in Georgia through its data-driven approach to service provision and impact assessment.

The *Youth Services Center* is made possible through youthSpark's longstanding partnership with the Fulton County Juvenile Court, located in the heart of Atlanta and handling *over 5,000 cases per year for youth ages 12 and above*. Recent changes to state law allow an even greater percentage of these children to receive life-changing services instead of punishment, but currently it is up to the parents to seek out services and get the child help. When that young person has been affected by abuse or exploitation, this model obviously crumbles.

Yet, it is youth who experience abuse and exploitation, or who are at high risk, who most need life-changing services. These youth experience barriers to accessing community services that their peers do not, and it is crucial they have case-managing advocates who are committed to walking them through the transformations that await. The costs and consequences of failing to do so are well-known, substantial, and unacceptable; victimization by abuse or exploitation is no reason why a young person should be sentenced to a future of despair and punishment. Instead, we believe that by working with youth to connect them with the services they need at the time when the services are most needed, we can create brighter futures.

The *Youth Services Center* will offer:

- Screening for abuse and exploitation, unresolved prior exposure to abuse, and high risk status
- Case-managing advocates who mentor and oversee services for the Center's youth
- Service referrals to credentialed partners to address individual and family vulnerabilities
- Funding to cover gaps and shortfalls in connecting youth with needed services

youthSpark's new *Youth Services Center* will kick off at the beginning of 2016. Information is available now on our *Building Brighter Futures* Capital Campaign (including naming opportunities) being conducted this fall. Please reach out to us for more information.

Serve 500+ at-risk youth per year, beginning with those whose lives intersect with the Fulton County Juvenile Court and who experience abuse, exploitation, or who are at-risk; research the life outcomes of these youth and the root causes of their abuse; scale evidence-based models by training service providers and public agencies; and use community engagement alongside our research and service credibility to advocate for justice.

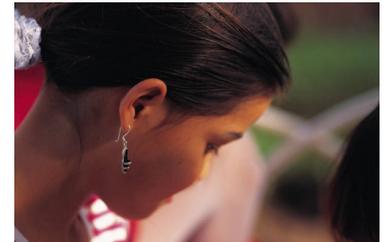


Our Enduring Commitment to End Child Sex Trafficking

youthSpark Voices

If programs only focus on rescuing children from exploitation and abuse, we will always have victims to rescue. We believe that early intervention is key to ending child sex trafficking. "youthSpark Voices" provides critical early intervention services for girls ages 12-17, deemed "high-risk" by the justice system, BEFORE they are exploited.

- Served 22 girls over the past six months.
- All of our girls successfully completed the current grade level and/or graduated at the end of the school year.
- One of our Voices girls graduated this school year and got accepted to five universities.
- Six of our girls' probation cases were successfully closed.
- During the last year, we have been able to increase the number of girls and families receiving individual and family therapy. Recognizing the importance of systemic change within the family, we now provide these services to seven of our current Voices girls through our partnership with JoyUs Beginnings Child & Family Wellness Center. Each of these families now receives therapy services aimed at reducing the effects of trauma.
- Two of our Alumnae Peer Leaders participated in youthSpark events as presenters on the Voices program.
- One of our Voices girls participated as a fashion model for *Traffik Atlanta*, an awareness event organized by one of our volunteer Community Ambassadors. The event brought together Atlanta's fashion industry in order to combat human trafficking, with youthSpark participating as a beneficiary.



What About the Boys and How They Are Victimized?

It's a question that many individuals and anti-trafficking organizations in metro Atlanta have been asking for years...*but how do we answer it?* We could look to data from Georgia Cares about services rendered through our statewide system of care for trafficking victims: a total of over 1,000 youth victims have been referred since the system's inception in 2009, but only 35 of these youth have been boys. Does this prove that boys are hardly ever victimized by sexual exploitation in Georgia, or does it indicate that we have yet to build the awareness, identification, and referral systems necessary to find male victims?

We set out to answer this question through an innovative scientific study that documents the number of young males, including adolescents under the age of 18, involved in metro Atlanta's online sex trade. The study identified 334 young males up to age 22 during a one-month period, of whom 16.8% were youth ages 17 or younger. That's over 50 boys victimized by sex trafficking each month in our region, which is more than have ever been referred to our state's system of care. The data are clear: we have a lot of work to do to organize victim identification and referral systems so that boys who are victimized can get access to life-changing services. Even more startling was that, in the same study, we conducted an experiment that demonstrated a large volume of buyers "shopping" online for sex with young males. After placing just one decoy ad that our research team created on a popular online sex marketplace, we documented 253 different prospective buyers (through computer IP addresses) who interacted with our ad.

We were also able to figure out where these prospective buyers were "shopping" from by geocoding their computer IP addresses. We once again confirmed what the Georgia Demand Study showed years ago: most metro Atlanta buyers were "shopping" from outside the perimeter (88%). We found more buyers outside of metro Atlanta, and even outside of Georgia, however. About 1 in 10 "shoppers" were in Georgia, but outside metro Atlanta. Even more surprisingly, 17% of all the "shoppers" of this Atlanta ad for a young male came from outside of Georgia altogether—even as far away as Hawaii. These findings confirm that the exploitation of our youth is not just a regional and statewide problem; it is a nationwide problem as well.



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It's Time to Get Serious About Demand Reduction in Georgia

We often view child sex trafficking as something fundamentally different from prostitution. In one sense it is: the victims are children ages 17 and younger. But child sex trafficking exists as *part of the prostitution industry*, which is why effective demand reduction in child sex trafficking means addressing the demand in the prostitution industry *that most directly threatens children*. There are very few exploiters of children who are not also actively "buying" in the prostitution industry more broadly.

Research tells us that not all buyers are created equal...at least when it comes to victim impact. The youthSpark research team, led by Executive Director Alex Trouteaud, Ph.D., has been assembling published data sources on buying behavior in order to understand what types of buying behavior drive the market for the exploitation of our youth (see graphs).

The data show that 5% of buyers account for roughly half of all transactions (48%), while another 20% of buyers account for an additional 39%. That's nearly 90% of transactions at the hands of 25% of buyers. We call this group "high frequency buyers," and members of this group who shop for young people (particularly online) represent the most persistent and immediate threat to youth caught in the illegal sex trade.

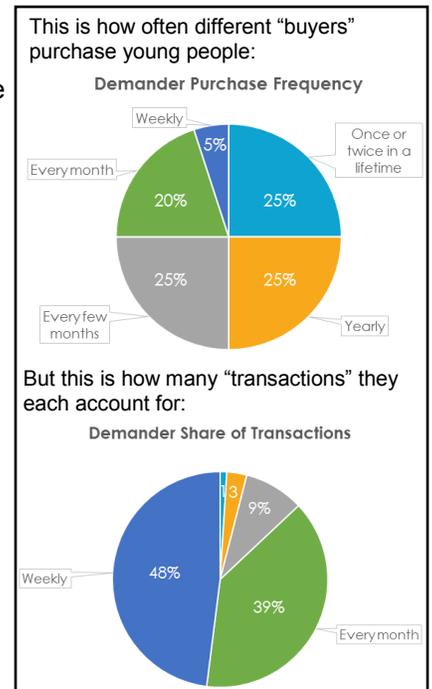
In the past, it would take law enforcement countless hours to build a case against a single perpetrator. Unfortunately, this meant that many more children were exploited during the time it took to collect evidence. All of this is changing as law enforcement use data like what youthSpark collects and analyzes in order to better understand how buyers operate and which types of buyers are most important to catch. In fact, Georgia is leading the way on data-driven law enforcement practices. Camila Wright, the Human Trafficking Prosecutor for the Georgia Attorney General's Office, drives home this point:

"We know more about the buyers' of children today than we ever have before, and our office supports law enforcement in their use of that knowledge to go after these serious offenders. Every [high frequency buyer] we put behind bars equates to dozens of children spared from abuse each year."

One arrest of a high frequency buyer; dozens of instances of abuse prevented. There are plenty of high-frequency buyers of young people in metro Atlanta, but Georgia's law enforcement agencies now have the data, tools, and tactics to hone in on these perpetrators and bring them to justice in swift fashion. That's demand reduction, and that's what youthSpark supports.

Our Mission

The mission of youthSpark today is *to advocate for youth who need legal and adult protection in abusive and exploitative situations.*



Thanks to our Funders!

What we do is not possible without the support of many individuals, organizations and foundations. We are thankful to everyone including some of our recent grant funders:

- Mary Allen Branan Foundation
- United Way of Metro Atlanta
- George Brown Trust
- Ellis Foundation
- A Hand Up Charitable Fund
- Central Presbyterian Church
- Scott Hudgens Family Foundation
- Ware Foundation

Many thanks, as well, to our supporters who make invaluable contributions, both financial and in-kind, to our organization. A special thanks goes out this Update to the employees of SunTrust who together collected boxes of hygiene and school supplies for our Voices girls and children who come through Fulton County Juvenile Court.



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