

Ending Child Sexual Exploitation in Texas: Progress and Hope

Governor Abbott’s Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT) was created by the 84th Legislature (2015) to coordinate a holistic response to child sex trafficking in Texas. CSTT is a division within the Public Safety Office and its mission is to build sustainable capacity, enhance expertise, promote policies, and leverage collaborations to:

- **Protect** children and youth by building their awareness of and resilience to all types of exploitation and by curbing demand for commercial sex;
- **Recognize** exploitation by raising public awareness and implementing screening tools to identify potential victims;
- **Recover** victims with protective and empowering collaborative multi-disciplinary responses and specialized advocates/case managers;
- **Support healing** of survivors through a variety of trauma-informed and responsive services and supports; and
- **Bring justice** for survivors by supporting investigations and prosecutions of exploiters and also by empowering survivors to achieve freedom from harms caused by exploitation.



CSTT Guiding Principles:

- We treat individuals who have experienced exploitation as victims and survivors, not perpetrators.
- We are collaborative.
- We are survivor informed.
- Our systems and programs prioritize the needs of children and transition-age youth who have experienced exploitation and strive to give equal access to services regardless of system involvement.
- We seek to prevent exploitation by educating the public, supporting protective factors for all children and transition-age youth, and by building resiliency among the most vulnerable.
- Our approaches, systems and services are trauma-informed, responsive, and include trust-based relationships.
- We develop and support community-based, sustainable resources and services.
- We are committed to long-term individualized services, including planning for, and re-engaging with, children and transition-age youth after relapse.
- We research the causes of and effective responses to exploitation and we evaluate and continuously improve our activities.
- We work to prevent and reduce demand for exploitation and to hold all exploiters, including facilitators and those who benefit from exploitation, accountable.

PROTECT Child sex trafficking is not limited to any race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or zip code. Traffickers prey upon vulnerability, and children and youth are inherently vulnerable. Sadly, exploiters can often be the very people our children trust – friends, romantic partners, family members, teachers, and others. CSTT partners with programs to increase the availability of prevention education across the state. CSTT is implementing the following key prevention strategies: providing age appropriate, research-based prevention education to high-risk youth; partnering with the Texas Education Agency to implement required school-based prevention education for educators and children; funding programs that provide healthy connections and other protective factors for vulnerable youth, like Court Appointed Special Advocates, and reducing demand for exploitation by increasing efforts to deter and prosecute buyers, as well as by educating youth and young men about the harms of commercial sex so that they do not become consumers.

RECOGNIZE Victims of sex trafficking are often hiding in plain sight due to fear or shame and many do not even realize they are being victimized for a variety of reasons.

CSTT works to educate the public about the indicators of trafficking and continues to promote and implement the [Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool \(CSE-IT\)](#), a research-based screening tool that improves early identification of commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY) up to age 25. The CSE-IT is used by hundreds of child-serving professionals to identify likely victims. Between 2016 and 2022, over 95,900 screenings were conducted with 11.8% scoring as “Clear Concern”, the highest probability for having experienced commercial sexual exploitation. Youth who score Clear Concern are presumed victims and eligible for a wide array of grant funded services. CSE-IT data reflects the *number* of screenings conducted, *not* the number of individuals screened. We are confident these numbers reflect youth who are screened multiple times.

First Lady Cecilia Abbott, CSTT, the Department of Family & Protective Services, and a variety of faith leaders across the state collaborate to raise awareness and inspire action to end human trafficking. To learn more about the GRACE initiative, please visit <https://gov.texas.gov/grace>



GRACE
Governor’s Response
Against Child Exploitation



RECOVER CSTT has worked to build collaborative and coordinated responses for exploited youth. Key elements include Care Coordination and specially trained [Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth \(CSEY\) Advocates](#). CSTT partnered with the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to develop multi-disciplinary Care Coordination teams to staff cases of survivors and ensure effective victim-centered care while supporting the investigation and prosecution of exploiters. CSEY Advocates respond to calls from first responders and others to provide crisis intervention, ongoing case management, and a healthy, supportive long-term relationship for survivors. These advocates work under a set of minimum standards and best practices developed by CSTT and Praesidium.

CSEY Advocacy Agencies Providing Crisis Response, Long-Term Supportive Relationships & Case Management in 116 Counties

NORTH

- **Traffic911** (Dallas & 5 nearby counties)
- **Unbound North Texas** (Tarrant & 5 nearby counties)

SOUTH

- **BCFS Common Thread** (Cameron & 12 nearby counties)

EAST

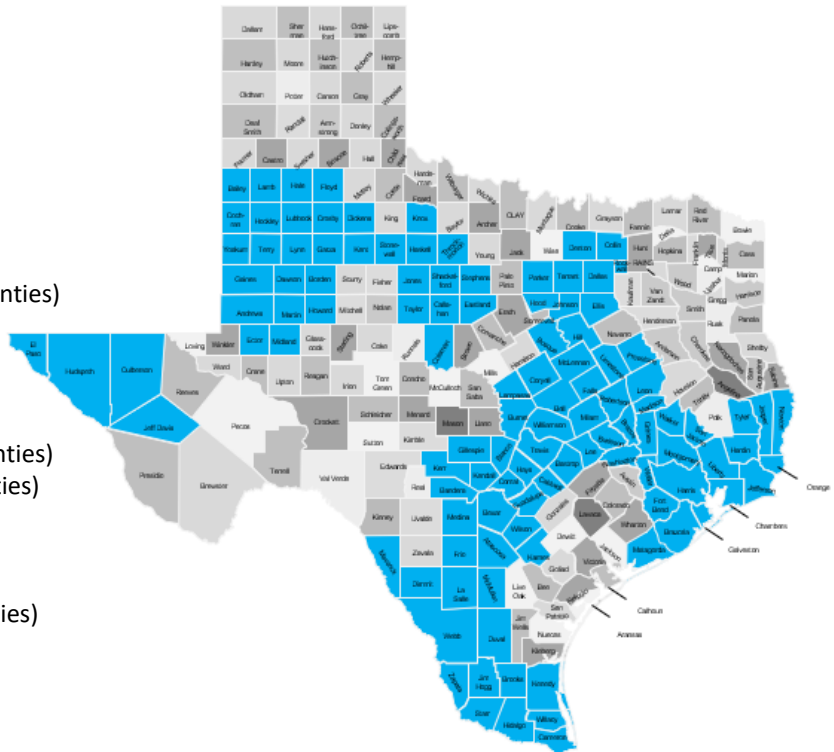
- **BCFS Common Thread** (Harris & 10 nearby counties)
- **Harvest House** (Jefferson & 5 nearby counties)
- **The Landing** (Harris & 7 nearby counties)
- **Unbound Bryan College Station** (Brazos & 8 nearby counties)
- **Unbound Houston** (Brazoria & 4 nearby counties)
- **YMCA International** (Harris & 7 nearby counties)

WEST

- **Paso del Norte Center of Hope** (El Paso & 3 nearby counties)
- **Regional Victim Crisis Center** (Taylor & 10 nearby counties)
- **Voice of Hope** (Lubbock & 21 nearby counties)

CENTRAL

- **Alamo Area Rape Crisis Center** (Bexar & 3 nearby counties)
- **AWARE Central Texas** (Bell & 4 nearby counties)
- **BCFS Common Thread** (Bexar & 18 nearby counties)
- **SAFE** (Travis & 5 nearby counties)
- **Unbound Global** (McLennan & 7 nearby counties)



RECOVER CSTT and the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas partner to develop Care Coordination processes for multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) to develop recommendations for, and facilitate access to, services for child victims. As of February 2022, child victims were provided Care Coordination in 16 counties: Bexar, Brazos, Collin, Comal, Dallas, Denton/Wise, Ellis, Harris*, Jefferson, Johnson, Kerr, Lubbock, Montgomery, Tarrant, Taylor & Travis counties. By end of 2022, Care Coordination will be available in 8 additional counties. (*Although the Children’s Assessment Center is part of the MDT, Harris County Resources for Children and Adults serves as the Care Coordinator in Harris County.)



Drop-In Centers

- **Austin:** SAFE
- **Dallas:** New Friends New Life
- **El Paso:** El Paso Center for Children
- **Fort Worth:** The Underground
- **Houston:** The Landing, Family Ties
- **Killeen:** CTYS’ Project Hope



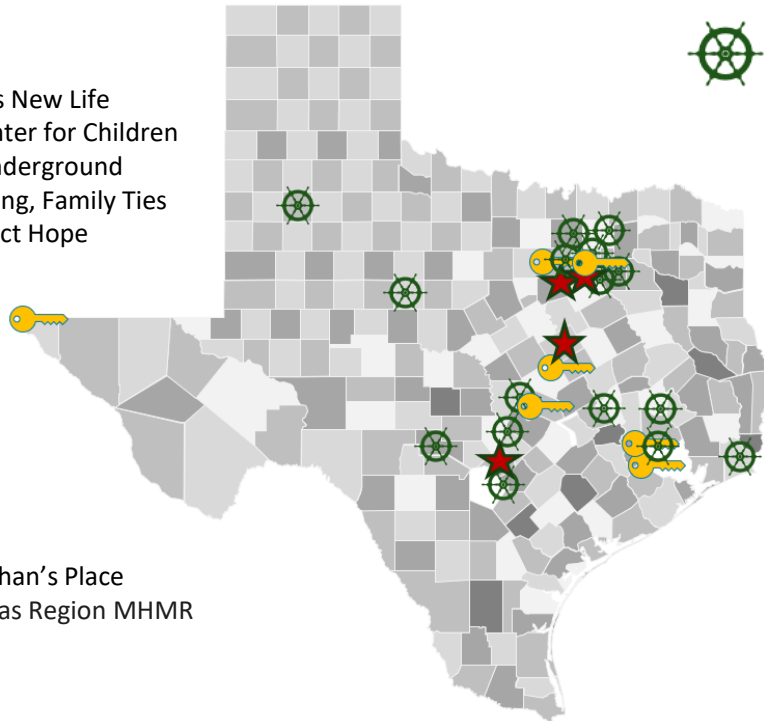
Care Coordination

- Bexar County
- Brazos County
- Collin County
- Comal County
- Dallas County
- Denton County
- Ellis County
- Harris County
- Jefferson County
- Johnson County
- Kerr County
- Lubbock County
- Montgomery County
- Tarrant County
- Taylor County
- Travis County



Emergency Shelters

- **Bulverde:** SJRC
- **Dallas:** ASAP, Jonathan’s Place
- **Waco:** Heart of Texas Region MHMR



SUPPORT HEALING CSTT is partnering with public and private organizations to develop an array of victim-centered, trauma-informed services to meet the immediate and long-term needs of survivors.



Case Management and Counseling Programs for Adults

- **Bryan:** Brazos County Rape Crisis Center
- **Dallas:** New Friends New Life’s Youth Resource Center
- **Fort Worth:** Rescue Her
- **Houston:** Rescue Houston, City of Houston Direct Services for HT Victims, YMCA International Counseling, HAWC
- **Lubbock:** Family Counseling Services of Lubbock



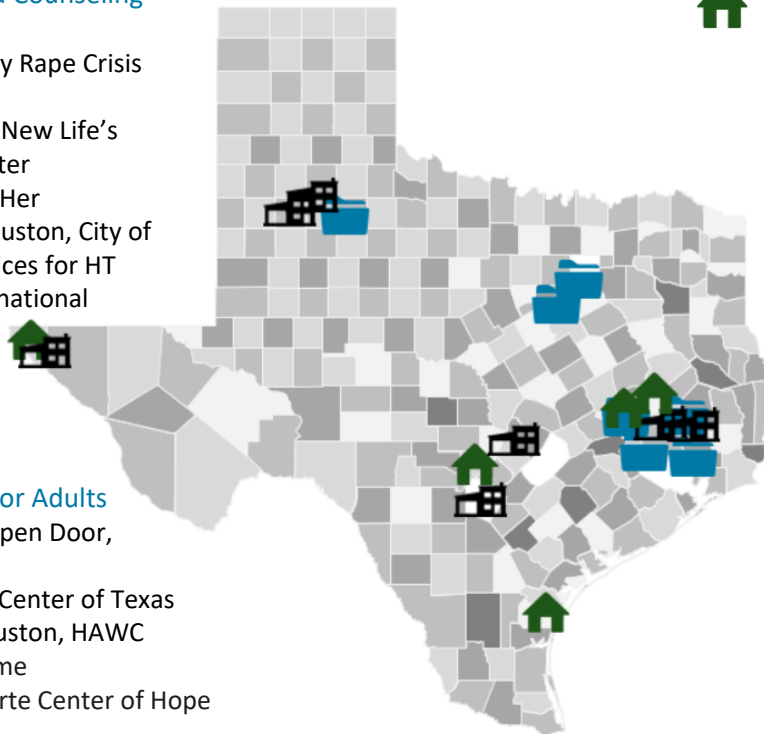
Residential Programs for Youth and Young Adults

- **Bulverde:** SJRC
- **Corpus Christi:** New Life Refuge Ministries (foster homes)
- **El Paso:** El Paso Center for Children (foster homes)
- **Houston:** Harris County GIFT, Home of Hope



Residential Programs for Adults

- **Lubbock:** Lubbock Open Door, One Voice Home
- **San Antonio:** Youth Center of Texas
- **Houston:** City of Houston, HAWC
- **Austin:** Red Oak Home
- **El Paso:** Paso del Norte Center of Hope



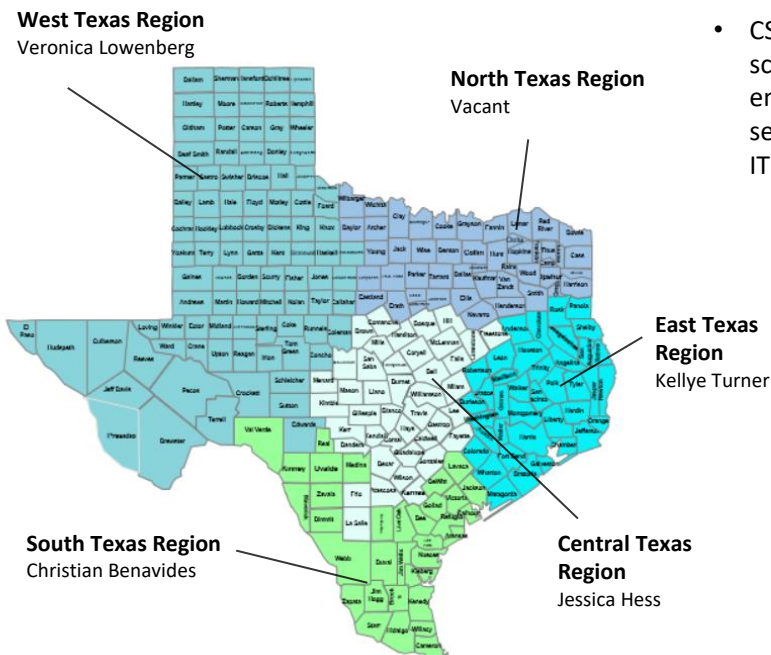
BRING JUSTICE Law enforcement and prosecutors need the appropriate training and tools to effectively investigate and prosecute child exploitation and human trafficking cases. While justice is pursued, it is critical to maintain a victim-centered and trauma-informed response to also ensure the survivor’s needs are met. CSTT works to bring justice for victims by providing funding and training to criminal justice partners. This work includes funding specialized investigators, prosecutors, and support positions in Dallas County, Fort Bend County, Harris County, McLennan County, Nueces County, and the Office of the Attorney General.

CSTT also recognizes that, for survivors, justice can mean many things, including autonomy and empowerment. CSTT worked with the Board of Pardons and Paroles to develop and implement a clemency process for survivors forced to commit crimes by their abusers. CSTT also supports and relies on the expertise of the Human Trafficking Survivor Leadership Council in making policy and programmatic decisions. Lastly, CSTT partners with various agencies, including the Texas Workforce Commission, to ensure survivors are economically empowered to move beyond surviving to thriving.

REGIONAL SUPPORT

CSTT’s 5 Regional Advisors work with public and private partners to help communities build their continuum of care for survivors and support their prevention, awareness, and justice activities. They provide training on human trafficking, training on the CSE-IT screening tool, strategy sessions with local stakeholders to identify and fill gaps in the continuum of care, and facilitation of Care Coordination development in conjunction with Children’s Advocacy Centers.

Office of the Governor Child Sex Trafficking Team Regions



BUILDING EXPERTISE

CSTT offers information resources to enhance expertise and promote research-based programs and practices that prevent child sexual exploitation, help survivors heal and thrive, and bring exploiters to justice:

- A webinar series addressing trends, lessons learned, and promising practices. Visit our [recorded webinars archive](#) and sign up for upcoming webinars.
- [Curated articles and relevant research](#) from peer-reviewed journals supporting CSTT’s five overarching goals: protect, recognize, recover, support healing, and bring justice.
- CSTT also funds research on child sex trafficking and evaluations of innovative anti-trafficking programs.
- CSTT funds Allies Against Slavery to integrate the CSE-IT screening tool within [Lighthouse](#), a software tool that enables users to complete screenings easily and securely online. Users can access and analyze their CSE-IT data at any time.



Contact us at CSTT@gov.texas.gov to get on newsletter/webinar list, or for more info.