

Comparative Overview of Three Sex Buyer Accountability Programs

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I. INTRODUCTION

Community Solutions contracted in 2017 with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), a nonprofit social justice research organization, to conduct a literature review of existing information and research about sex buyer accountability programs. The goal of the literature review was to help inform local planning in Santa Clara County, California, on strategies to reduce demand for commercial sex. A sex buyer accountability program is an education or treatment program for individuals arrested for soliciting commercial sex, with the goal of decreasing demand for sex buying by affecting buyers' behavior.¹

Several key findings emerged from the literature review.

- **Prevalence.** Sex buyer accountability programs have been deployed as a demand-reduction tactic for approximately 30 years in the United States, often in combination with other strategies. One recent estimate indicates that more than 60 distinct programs in the country provide services to more than 100 cities and counties (Demand Abolition, 2016). Some programs serve a single city or community, while others provide services to several neighboring locations.
- **Curriculum/Format.** Programs do not share a uniform model, format, curriculum, or duration. However, one approach used or adapted by many jurisdictions across the country is based on the First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP). The FOPP began in San Francisco in 1995 as partnership of the San Francisco District Attorney's office; San Francisco Police Department; and Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), a community-based organization providing survivor-led services. The FOPP is typically a day-long lecture-style class, often with guest speakers including representatives from program partners, survivors, and other agencies such as the local public health department.
- **Research Status.** Jurisdictions may look to program evaluations and other research to determine whether sex buyer accountability programs are a useful tool in reducing demand for commercial sex and are an appropriate consequence for buyers. However, evaluations and current research are limited. Several reports and evaluations comprise the primary knowledge base on this subject in the

¹ While this demand-reduction approach is often called a "john school," that wording normalizes sex-buying behavior. This paper uses the term "sex buyer accountability program" to emphasize the buyer's responsibility.

United States; these documents are supplemented by news articles, websites, and other materials.

Following the development and dissemination of the literature review, NCCD worked with Community Solutions during 2017 and 2018 to explore and compile information about three sex buyer accountability programs that surfaced during the literature review, again with the purpose of providing information for local planning and decision making. This exploration examined a range of programs, including emerging approaches and formats that appear promising. This overview covers the following programs.

- **First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP):** Santa Clara County, California
Program provider: YWCA Silicon Valley
- **Men Accountable for Sexual Exploitation Program (MASE):** Stearns County, Minnesota
Program provider: Central MN Sexual Assault Center (CMSAC)
- **Stopping Sexual Exploitation: A Program for Men (SSE):** King County, Washington
Program provider: Organization for Prostitution Survivors (OPS)

This report shares what was learned from this exploration, including a discussion of program similarities and differences where relevant. It is important to note this work is not an evaluation of any program. Rather, it reflects a preliminary look at the programs' curricula; their staffing; their data collection/evaluation practices; and other potentially useful areas to consider regarding the development, implementation, and evaluation of sex buyer accountability programs. The sources for this overview include conversations with at least one staff person from each program (usually the person who developed and/or facilitates the program) and

secondary materials including the website of the agency that runs the program, program materials, and news articles.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS/INFORMATION

This section provides an overview of each of the three programs, in alphabetical order.

A. Men Accountable for Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Program (Stearns County, Minnesota)

1. Program Introduction

Launched in 2016, the Men Accountable for Sexual Exploitation (MASE) program is a one-day conditions-of-sentence program. CMSAC—a nonprofit crisis intervention agency that provides direct services to people affected by sexual violence—developed, facilitates, and operates the program. Rebecca Kotz, trafficking services coordinator with CMSAC, is the program developer and facilitator. Other program partners include the nonprofit Gender Violence Institute, based in Clearwater, Minnesota; the organization’s co-founder Chuck Derry provided consultation during development of MASE. In addition, program partners as referral sources include law enforcement, the county attorney, and county probation officers.

The program’s mission is “to reduce all forms of commercial sexual exploitation through an accountability-focused program for men who have solicited commercial sex” (Central MN Sexual Assault Center, no date). It focuses on sex buyers’ accountability from a sociological and feminist perspective. Through examining male socialization and cultural norms, the program aims to reframe the discussion about buyers away from avoiding, denying, or minimizing buyers’ behaviors and onto the harm buyers have done to others.

2. Program Eligibility

The program is designed for men; and to date, only men have participated. Most MASE participants are first-time offenders convicted of solicitation. However, some participants have attended another sex buyer accountability program or have been charged with other offenses like sex crimes or domestic violence. For example, probation officers who supervise sex offenders may refer their probationers to the program. In addition, the program works with individuals who have solicited children.

3. Curriculum Content and Delivery

MASE is held at a local police department in Waite Park, Minnesota. CSMAC selected this location to avoid participants being onsite at its center where victims are served. CSMAC also wanted a law enforcement setting for safety reasons and to help communicate a message that solicitation is a serious crime. The class size generally ranges from about six to 10 men. The one-day curriculum, co-facilitated by Kotz and Derry, covers the following main topics.

- Male culture/socialization, men's violence against women, the functionality of violence, and men's responsibility.
- Rape culture, women's experiences, impact of pornography, sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy.
- Myths versus reality of the sex trade, grooming, exploitation, and the illusion of choice/consent.
- Violence in the sex trade.
- Identifying defense mechanisms, justification/rationalizations for exploitative behavior, and making change.

Instructional formats include discussion, guest speakers, video testimony, writing exercises designed to confront men's attitudes and beliefs on sexual exploitation, and "Dear John" letters written by survivors that facilitators read aloud. Kotz notes that the letters are often the most powerful part of the day because they provide survivors a way to convey raw, unfiltered truth.

4. Data Collection and Measuring Impact

MASE uses several tools to collect data about participants and to gauge program impact. Written materials include an intake form an anonymous end-of-day survey with demographic items and questions about behaviors and attitudes related to sex education, use of pornography and strip clubs, distance travelled to purchase sex, etc.; and a reflection form where men describe what they have gained from the class. As the class ends, the group talks about what they have learned and their commitments to change. In addition, the facilitator receives updates from the men's probation officers about how the men respond to the program. Although the program does not currently follow up with the participants, Kotz is interested in doing so given appropriate resources; she is also interested in measuring impact beyond whether or not a participant is rearrested for solicitation.

5. Challenges

The program's challenges tend to relate to resources. The class is currently offered twice a year; starting in the fall of 2018, it will be provided quarterly. Due to the limited number of times it is offered, potential participants may choose to attend another program instead.

Kotz would like to provide a longer-term program; for example, 10 weekly sessions for 90 minutes at a time. This approach would provide more weight to the program.

B. First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP) (Santa Clara County, California)

1. Program Introduction

Begun in 2014, the FOPP is a one-day diversion program run by the YWCA Silicon Valley in the San Jose area. It is housed in the YWCA's clinical services department. The FOPP is a psychoeducation program designed to teach participants about human trafficking, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and the realities of prostitution; and common myths of commercial sex. In covering these topics, the program focuses on creating and promoting awareness, accountability, and change in buyers using a trauma-informed approach. Denise Henderson, the YWCA's director of clinical services, oversees the program. In addition to the YWCA, the other key program partner is the Santa Clara County District Attorney's office.

2. Program Eligibility

The FOPP is a diversion program for men charged with a first-time solicitation offense. Failure to complete the program generally results in a conviction.

3. Curriculum Content and Delivery

The class is held onsite at the YWCA. The current facilitator is a male counseling intern earning a graduate Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) degree; previously, two MFT interns (one male, one female) co-facilitated the program. The current facilitator has a background in

law enforcement in addition to MFT training and teaches a curriculum for individuals with sex offenses at another organization.

The class usually uses an interactive-discussion, small-group format (usually about three to 10 men) and includes some videos on topics such as trauma. The program is offered in English and Spanish, with one session in each language per month, depending on need. Main topics covered include the following.

- Understanding Prostitution and Sex Trafficking
- Power and Control Wheel/Equality Wheel
- Statistics
- STDs
- Myths
- Methodology and Recruitment
- Trauma
- The Brain and Addiction
- Values
- Choices
- Media Influence
- Consequences

4. Data Collection and Measuring Impact

Currently, the program has two primary ways of examining program impact. Participants fill out pre- and post-surveys (available in English and Spanish) that include items about the impact of their actions, steps to change their behavior, and feedback for the facilitator. Staff review pre/post surveys to understand how the program is working and determine areas that could be changed (e.g., topics that could be added). The district attorney's office tracks recidivism data on solicitation offenses and other criminal offenses. Henderson is also interested

in conducting follow-up with participants—for example, six months after the program—to learn if the class made a difference to them.

C. Stopping Sexual Exploitation: A Program for Men (King County, Washington)

1. Program Introduction

Stopping Sexual Exploitation (SSE): A Program for Men, started in 2015, is a 10-week program for men convicted of sex buying. OPS, a nonprofit direct-service survivor-led organization, runs the SSE program. It is one of various demand-reduction programs and strategies implemented in the King County/Seattle area through the Ending Exploitation Collaborative.

SSE is grounded in principles of social justice and personal transformation. It frames prostitution as a practice of gender-based violence and is designed to challenge and change participants' beliefs and attitudes about social constructions of masculinity and, in doing so, "promote their own decisions to not buy sex" (Organization for Prostitution Survivors, no date). Peter Qualliotine, OPS co-founder and director of men's accountability, developed and leads a team in facilitating the program. Qualliotine previously worked in prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault; he also started the Sexual Exploitation Education Program, a three-day intensive sex buyer accountability program that operated in Portland, Oregon from 1995 to 1997. In addition to OPS, program partners include the King County prosecuting attorney office; courts, judges, and city attorneys in the municipalities that refer program participants; and the community.

2. Program Eligibility

SSE is a conditions-of-sentence program for men who have been arrested for buying sex. Most (an estimated 80%) are court mandated to attend. Participants may have misdemeanor or felony charges; in the latter case, men with a felony charge of commercial sexual abuse of minor or similar charge can be ordered to attend. Some are self-referred. No potential participants are refused admission to the class.

3. Curriculum Content and Delivery

Rather than occurring at a courthouse or municipal building, the SSE program is held at a community nonprofit that does not provide survivor services. Qualliotine feels it is beneficial to provide some separation between participants' experience in the criminal justice system and their experience in the SSE program.

The program consists of a series of individual and group modules that run weekly for 10 weeks, with about 10 men per cohort. The program starts with two one-on-one, hour-long sessions that focus on intake (by phone) and orientation (in person), led by a program facilitator using motivational interviewing techniques. These components allow the facilitator and participant to begin developing a relationship before the group sessions begin; they also provide a space to address logistics, such as signing group agreements. Next, eight group sessions of two to three hours each are held. The program also offers a voluntary follow-up weekly support group. The program is available in English and Spanish.

The curriculum helps participants examine and challenge male privilege, male socialization, and toxic masculinity. Two co-facilitators guide participants through eight group

sessions that explore the men's motivations for and the impact of sex buying, using group conversations and self-reflection exercises. Group sessions cover the following key topics.

- Sexuality and Gender Socialization
- Harm to Victims/Survivors
- Sexual Violence Continuum
- Pimping, Trafficking, and Domestic Violence
- Power and Violence
- Vulnerability
- Mutuality in Relationships
- The Will to Change

As the program concludes, men are provided with resources including information about counseling, therapy, and stress reduction. The program currently has a group of five trained co-facilitators (all male) in addition to Qualliotine. All co-facilitators attend the program as a participant two times before beginning the co-facilitation process (in some cases, initially as a court-mandated participant).

4. Data Collection and Measuring Impact

Data collected from participants include intake information, a self-report survey, and demographics. At the close of the 10 sessions, participants complete a 24-question self-assessment survey that focuses on their attitudes, before and after the program, about women in prostitution and sex buying. Demographics and program-satisfaction data are also collected. The program does not use a pre/post survey design; this is to limit the paperwork needed at the outset of the class when relationship development between the participants and facilitators is the focus. The SSE program is now working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct a program evaluation. Qualliotine is also finalizing a curriculum that

can be licensed and used by other sites, which could lead to development of a learning community and program evaluation across multiple sites.

5. Challenges

Challenges include gaining community buy-in for the program. According to Qualliotine, the early and consistent support of the prosecuting attorney and law enforcement means this has been less of an issue in King County than it may be in other jurisdictions. The length of the program is also a potential challenge. Jurisdictions considering a similar format may be concerned that participants may not finish; however, of more than 300 men court-mandated to attend SSE, only two did not complete the program. In addition, high-frequency sex buyers who are resistant to change and refuse to see the harm in sexual exploitation do not respond well to this program; it is not designed for this population. Finally, the co-facilitators may experience challenges because the work is difficult and demanding. To address this, in addition to paying facilitators, Qualliotine has helped to foster community among the men doing this work; the program has experienced minimal facilitator turnover.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Discussion

This overview describes various components of three sex buyer accountability programs, with the goal of providing information for local planning and decision making about demand-reduction strategies in Santa Clara County, California.

1. Similarities Across Programs

From this preliminary exploration, some similarities emerged among the three programs. Each has a program philosophy that emphasizes buyer responsibility. Other commonalities include the current or previous use of a co-facilitation approach, with two instructors leading the program and a relatively small class size of about 10 or fewer men per class to allow for discussion. In addition, all programs collect participant data; and all program representatives expressed the need for more extensive data collection and evaluation, including determining what is meaningful to measure to understand the program's impact on sex buyers' behavior. SSE is currently engaged in a detailed evaluation process.

Each program's curriculum explores some common topics, including sex trafficking, sexual violence, and creating personal behavior change. Two programs emphasize gender socialization and gender-based violence in their curricula.

2. Differences Among Programs

Differences among the programs include the criminal-justice approach used. In general, programs function as either diversion programs or as terms of a sentence for individuals arrested for soliciting commercial sex. For programs using a diversion approach, individuals' charges are typically dismissed upon program completion. When program attendance is a condition of a sentence, charges are not dismissed upon completion. A recent national estimate (Shively, Kliorys, Wheeler, & Hunt, 2012) found that about half of programs in the United States are diversion programs, one third are part of sentencing conditions, and about one fifth allow for both options. Of the three programs in this overview, two are used as part of sentencing

terms, and one is a diversion program. The decision about a program's criminal justice approach is typically made by the local district attorney's office.

Instructional formats and facilitator background differ by program. Instructional techniques used by one or more programs include the use of videos, guest speakers, reading aloud "Dear John" letters, and verbal and written reflection exercises. Both the FOPP and SSE offer classes in English and Spanish; a need for providing class in a language other than English has not emerged for MASE. Facilitators' backgrounds vary and include training and experience in domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, counseling and therapy, and law enforcement. For SSE, each co-facilitator attends the program as a participant twice prior to starting the co-facilitation process.

Some logistical differences exist across programs. The program duration varies, ranging from one day to 10 weeks, as does the day of the week (weekday or weekend) it is offered. The location also differs by program. The FOPP meets at the YWCA, MASE takes place at a local police department, and SSE occurs at a community nonprofit that does not provide survivor services.

It is also important to note that while this overview focuses on three sex buyer accountability programs, a variety of formats are used by other programs. For example, in contrast to an in-person, interactive discussion approach during a day or multiple sessions, some current and previous programs are shorter and offered online or by video. In addition, some programs include other curriculum elements such as screening and counseling for STDs (Demandforum.net, no date; Shively et al 2012).

B. Recommendations

Because existing research on sex buyer accountability programs is limited, efforts to gather additional, detailed data would continue to build and strengthen the knowledge base about the impact of this demand-reduction strategy on individual and community outcomes.

Additional research-related work could include the following.

- Convene a workgroup of diverse stakeholders (including survivors, advocates, community members, law enforcement, researchers, etc.) to discuss program measurement and evaluation approaches. This activity could include conversations about what is meaningful to measure and formats for collecting this information.
- Evaluate one or more programs based on the workgroup's recommendations. Include an examination of individual and community impacts and learning more about promising approaches and best practices. For example, what program philosophies, approaches, and curricula are working?

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