



STRATEGIC PLAN

Developing a Therapeutic Crisis Center for Alabama's Trafficked Youth

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Organizational Overview

For the past four years, Blanket Fort Hope, a Birmingham-based, Christ-centered nonprofit, has served the state of Alabama diligently through developing programs to assist child trafficking victims, creating and facilitating human trafficking prevention trainings, and partnering with federal, state, and local lawmakers and advocates to push for stronger laws and more effective policy. Blanket Fort Hope has grown to become a prominent voice in the state through educational trainings that have reached over 3,000 health care professionals, attorneys, educators, legislators, parents, and youth. The organization has a vocal role on the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force and most recently developed a groundbreaking **Foster Care Trafficking Training Program** which teaches social workers and foster parents the best practices regarding supporting the unique psychosocial, developmental, and trauma-induced needs of trafficked children. The organization's next step is to develop and build the first **Child Trafficking Support Crisis Center** in Alabama designed specifically for trafficked youth. Currently trafficked youth in Alabama are moved to residential group shelters where they do not receive the supportive services necessary to address the extreme trauma of being trafficked, and nationwide, 87% of trafficked youth return to the streets. Blanket Fort Hope's plan to develop the first Child Trafficking Support Crisis Center is the main focus of this strategic plan.

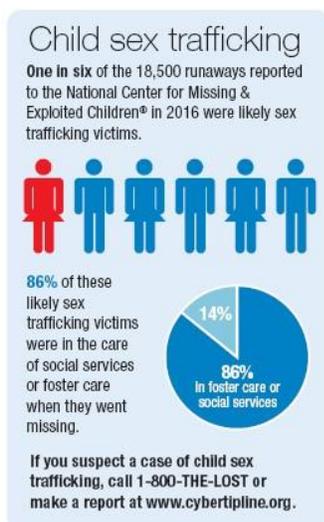
Alabama's Need: Data Speaks

Sadly, Birmingham is not immune to the pervasive and insidious nature of sex trafficking. Current data indicates that over 10,000 individuals are trafficked for sexual exploitation in Alabama each year, and of these, approximately 57% are children (University of Alabama School of Social Work). With minors, federal law states that all commercial sex *is* trafficking because a minor (anyone under 19 in Alabama, 18 in other states) cannot legally provide consent. **I-20, which cuts through Birmingham, is the most heavily trafficked stretch of interstate in the U.S., as confirmed by Homeland Security Investigations Resident Agent in Charge, Doug Gilmer.** The 140-mile stretch is known as the 'sex trafficking super highway.' Add these statistics to the \$110 million spent on commercial sex in the Greater Birmingham area alone, and a picture of great need for supportive services targeting trafficked youth in our state emerges (Department of Homeland Security). Throughout the US, human trafficking continues to be an explosive epidemic in the US, estimated to bring in global profits of about \$150 billion a year—\$99 billion from sexual exploitation, according to the International Labor Organization. Researchers agree that there is a growing number of sexually exploited and trafficked children in the United States (Boxill & Richardson, 2007; Estes & Weiner, 2002; Spangenberg, 2001), yet few programs emphasize the unique experiences and special needs of this population (Fong & Cardoso, 2009).



Alabama's Need: Lawmakers Speak

Alabama's lawmakers acknowledge the woeful lack of supportive crisis housing and associated therapeutic care for these vulnerable victims. Senator Cam Ward explains, "Children are the most common victims of human trafficking. Crisis centers are needed to provide hands-on, face to face help to those who are the most vulnerable in our state. This underserved group of victims desperately needs this help in Alabama." **Currently, there are no crisis centers devoted to the trafficked child in the state of Alabama.** In fact, in the US, there are only 600 total beds available for trafficked individuals of any age. This means that when a child is rescued from trafficking, they either go to a group home or in the foster care system—neither of which is able to adequately address the needs of trafficked youth.



Angela McClintock, former DHR Director for Alabama reiterates, "Many trafficking victims were also victims of abuse/neglect in their own homes—escaping one misery only to be caught up in another. Foster children are especially vulnerable as their attachments have been damaged along with trust of most adults in the helping professions. **Even after being 'rescued' from the trafficker, these girls tend run away from their safe place and back to the streets, not because of mistreatment, but because they have been 'brainwashed' into thinking that the trafficker is their only lifeline.** Trafficking victims do not need to be institutionalized, but they do need a secure short-term placement to heal emotionally and sometimes physically until they can be reunited with relatives or placed in a therapeutic foster home."

Brad Jordan, a detective for the Pelham Police Department, explains, "Once the handcuffs are applied, and the scene is secure, my top priority as an investigator of human trafficking crimes turns to find an appropriate placement for these troubled victims. I'm currently averaging 13% placement, which means 87% of the girls we take out ultimately return to the life. Each has their reasons, but **ultimately it comes down to a lack of services** and our inability to confront their addictions. Blanket Fort Hope strives to fill that need through counseling, housing, and a myriad of other support-based services. I fully support their efforts and the vital services they provide." Confounding the issue is the misconception that only at-risk, poor youth are vulnerable enough to fall prey to traffickers. In a recent *Bham Now* interview, Carrie Hill, Juvenile Probation Officer and Human Trafficking Liaison at Jefferson County Family Court, explained: "When we're talking about children, we're often talking about high risk kids. And this can affect anyone. I can't tell you what a victim looks like. It can be anyone from any community, ethnic group, or part of the country. From Mountain Brook to Ensley, this affects everybody."



Blanket Fort Hope's Collaborative Plan

Currently when trafficked youth in the Birmingham metro area are properly identified and rescued, they are either sent to a group home or into the foster care system. Neither of these is capable of sufficiently addressing the extreme medical and therapeutic needs of child trafficking victims. Some of these needs are dealing with STIs and HIV/AIDS, and helping the children cope with severe PTSD from starvation, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and being raped countless times, to name a few. Trafficked children require Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), which is an evidence-based, structured, short-term treatment model that effectively improves a range of trauma-related outcomes in 8-25 sessions with the child/adolescent and caregiver (www.tfcbt.org) & (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008). They also need intensive counseling, psychiatric care, cognitive assessments, tattoo removal, and a host of other therapeutic interventions.

DHR in Jefferson, Shelby, and St. Clair Counties all have partnered with BFH in the development of the Foster Care Trafficking Training program and to date over 60 foster care families and social workers have been trained in how to serve these vulnerable youth. The various DHR organizations also acknowledge the great need for a Child Trafficking Support Crisis Center which would provide a 90- to 120-day stabilization program for child victims of human trafficking and would then transition these victims into the next phase of recovery. BFH's plan is to lease-purchase land for a multi-transitional house, Long-term housing and future transitional housing in which each child will have his/her own room. Full-time house parents will nurture these youth along with 24/7 staff, and due to the trauma these children have undergone, they will be checked on every 15 minutes.



Architectural Rendering of Blanket Fort Hope's Child Trafficking Support Crisis

The overall estimated construction and development cost of this project is \$1.5 million.

Support services offered: Trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), Social workers, psychological trauma assessment, Mental health- next steps. Outsource with our partners and inhouse

Partner with Children's of Alabama and UAB for substance abuse. Once stabilized, these youth will be placed with highly trained therapeutic foster parents, enrolled in school, and continue therapeutic treatment where their trajectory will be one of success. Next steps for Blanket Fort Hope are an onsite therapeutic cottage.



Our Mission

Our mission is to love and care for child trafficking victims through housing, services, and long-term commitment, and to prevent children from becoming victims through education and advocacy.

Our Goals

- **Child Trafficking Support Crisis Center:** Develop and build Alabama's first and only Child Trafficking Support Crisis Center for child victims of human trafficking.
- **Further Expand on the Foster Care Trafficking Training Program:** Openly educate our community about the dangers and realities of the human sex trafficking epidemic—with a special focus on healthcare professionals, educators, parents, and youth.
- **Increase Advocacy:** Continue to advocate for stronger, more effective legislation affecting human trafficking in Alabama and throughout the nation.

Our Work

Our work is centered around our goals. Our primary task is to build the Crisis Center, so we are creating partnerships with churches, businesses, organizations, and private donors in order to achieve this goal. Another one of our goals is to educate as many individuals as possible, so we are continuously taking speaking engagements in a host of different venues. **To date, we have conducted over 300 trainings, resulting in over 3,000 new trained individuals.** From an advocacy standpoint, we have spoken at the Alabama Senate House on human trafficking bills which led to the passing of House Bill 260, which requires certain healthcare professionals to receive training on human trafficking, House Bill 261, which requires all CDL trainees to receive training on human trafficking, and House Bill 263, which requires that training on human trafficking is implemented into mandatory continuing education requirements for law enforcement officers. We have also trained lawyers, judges, schools, and other groups on human trafficking. We also assist on trafficking cases when law enforcement requests our help.



Resources and Collaborative Partners

Committed financial partners and other include:

- The Church at Brook Hills
- Big Oak Ranch
- Alabama's DHR
- Southeastern Construction
- King's Home
- Gods outreach center

The Church at Brook Hills and a Board member is making a large financial contribution and is slated to launch BFH's Capital Campaign, entitled "Investing in Hope" #RaiseTheFort, in February 2020. "Hold the Fort 5K" on September 19, 2020, is our 2nd annual largest fundraising event of the year. With new events being planned

Southeastern Construction has already provided us with office space, and they are offering to help build the Crisis Center. We are working the Kings Ranch in the interim for housing through their Therapeutic foster families once the Crisis Center is up and running,

DHR is in full support of BFH's plans, and they are helping us as we finalize the details of the Crisis Center. Once the Crisis Center is running, we will receive government contracts since we are housing children.



Situational Assessment (SWOT)

The following key strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats were considered to identify strategic priorities and optimal strategies.

Strengths:

- Alexa James, CEO of Blanket Fort Hope, has an impressive track record operating anti-trafficking nonprofits. She helped start The WellHouse and played an instrumental role in this impactful nonprofit's development and sustainability.
- BFH has established tremendous partnerships with passionate stakeholders, committed public figures, and influential organizations that are heavily invested in our cause.
- Christ – Centered
- BFH has educated and is continuing to educate pertinent professionals to properly identify and rescue victims.

Weaknesses:

- Short-staffed and need volunteers who can handle administrative tasks.
- Additional steady donors and funding partnerships.
- Facility Constraints until facility is built.
- Weak technology infrastructure

Opportunities:

- Countless professionals who work with trafficking victims acknowledge the incredible need for a Crisis Center in Birmingham.
- Data supports the need: over 1,000 Alabama children are trafficked each year, and currently they land in group foster homes with inadequate care.
- DHR supportive—BFH will be the first organization contacted by DHR when child trafficking victims are identified.
- Ministry opportunities abound as local churches learn of BFH's mission.

Threats:

- The disturbing and unsettling nature of child trafficking creates a barrier to information sharing and problem acknowledgement: parents, schools, administrators, and government leadership shy away from bringing the issue to light. This inhibits BFH's ability to fundraise and conduct training/outreach. Schools are reluctant to invite BFH to speak to parents and children because of the sensitive nature of the issues involved.
- Making sure Alabama prosecutors, judges, educators, doctors, and first responders are trained to identify child trafficking victims and understand referral options. (86% of trafficking victims will visit a medical facility, so there is a great need for healthcare professionals to be adequately trained on identifying signs of trafficking.)