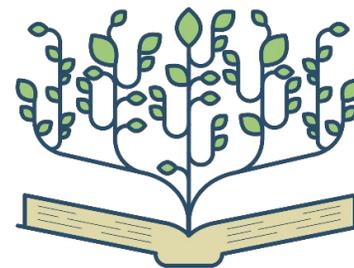


# NDTAC Program Spotlight Series



## Leading the Charge:

### *Innovative Programs Supporting Survivors of Sexual Trafficking and Exploitation*

An emerging area of treatment in the United States focuses on supporting survivors of sexual trafficking and exploitation. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports there were 27,800 reports of child sex trafficking with 89% of those youth having been involved with the child welfare system. Given the high percentage of students Title I, Part D serves who are in the child welfare system, this emerging field of treatment is relevant to the neglected and delinquent community. Unfortunately, only a limited number of residential programs nationwide are dedicated to addressing the unique needs of these victims. This spotlight highlights two innovative programs in Oregon and Kentucky that are at the forefront of providing specialized care for this population. The programs highlighted in this Spotlight are eligible for Title I, Part D funding or Title I, Part A funding through the neglected set-aside. The primary purpose of this spotlight is to highlight an emerging field for stakeholders working with neglected and delinquent youth. It is important for Title I, Part D administrators and stakeholders in the field to be aware of the ever-changing landscape of care for neglected and delinquent students in the country so they can best prepare to serve students in the future.

## Discovering and Rising Together Program and Support, Achievement, Growth, and Empowerment Program

### *Transforming Lives with Compassion and Education: A Safe Haven for Healing and Learning*

The Discovering and Rising Together ([DART](#)) program is a vital educational support network for students enrolled in residential treatment centers across the Portland, Oregon metro area. Serving between 200-300 students a year, DART provides support to students in grades K-12 who come from a variety of backgrounds, including those dealing with medical or adjudicated issues through the court for criminal offenses. Students are placed in specialized care facilities, where they receive tailored educational services designed to meet their unique needs. Through partnerships with over 50 school districts, DART plays a pivotal role in ensuring these students can successfully transition back into their home schools when the time is right.

#### **Why These Programs are Needed**

In 2024 the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) Reported:

- 27,800 reports of possible child sex trafficking
- 1 in 7 of the more than 29,000 cases of children reported missing to NCMEC were likely victims of child sex trafficking
- 15 was the average age of child sex trafficking victims reported
- Of the children reported missing to NCMEC who had run from the care of child welfare, 18% were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

[Child Sex Trafficking](#)

One of the residential programs the DART program provides educational services for is Hope Academy,<sup>1</sup> a residential program which focuses on providing a safe, nurturing environment for female youth who have been sexually trafficked or are at risk of being trafficked. The program services youth ages 11-17 and can house up to 16 youth at a time. The program is the only one of its kind on the west coast, offering a fully locked facility where students can begin the long journey of healing and recovery. The staff are dedicated not only to addressing the emotional and psychological challenges these young women face but also to providing a rigorous education that empowers them to believe in their potential.

Hope Academy is supported and primarily funded by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). The department has established a grant called the [Long Term Care and Treatment](#) (LTCT) education program. This program works to ensure services and funding for students placed in residential treatment programs.

### *Tailored Support for Each Student*

Hope Academy serves female youth who are placed at the facility due to being victims of sex trafficking. Many of them have had traumatic experiences at home, including family trauma and addiction. These youth are often placed in the facility under a court order, which is crucial to ensuring their protection from potential traffickers. The goal of the Hope Academy program is not only to provide trauma-informed care but also to help them rediscover their voices through education, emotional support, and life skills development. Additionally, the education program offered provides a comprehensive support system that includes case managers, counselors, and specialized therapists who are dedicated to each student's well-being. Teachers are trained in trauma-informed care, which allows them to provide a safe space for youth to heal while also addressing academic gaps. This support includes everything from remedial education to specialized classes, such as culinary arts and PE credits through yoga, giving them a well-rounded education that focuses on their personal growth and well-being. Through initiatives like the internal job experience program, youth can gain practical skills in areas such as cooking, office administration, and food handling, helping them build confidence and a sense of independence. Many youth arrive at Hope Academy with significant educational gaps, and DART provides additional support through summer school, specialized workshops, and advanced courses like college prep and SAT/PSAT testing. Additionally, DART utilizes Title I, Part D, Subpart 1 funding to support transitions for students by providing trained transition specialists. These specialists assist students as they get ready to and eventually leave the program and return to their home community. Helping them to enroll in school and ensuring they have the proper wraparound services (e.g. case management, outpatient therapy, tutoring, court appointment advocate) are just some of the ways the specialists support students through the process.

### *Building Trust, One Relationship at a Time*

At the heart of the DART program is a commitment to building strong, trusting relationships. Jamie Makara, the Assistant Principal of DART, explains, “the biggest skill you have to have is the ability to build strong relationships. You must be authentically you.” These youth have experienced betrayal and harm, and the process of rebuilding trust can be challenging. The educators and staff members

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<sup>1</sup> Hope Academy is a pseudonym. The name of the program has been changed to protect the confidentiality and safety of students attending the school.

at DART are committed to walking alongside them every step of the way. Through consistent support and authenticity, the youth learn to trust again, to open up about their pasts, and to see a brighter future ahead. The program utilizes the Sanctuary Model to help youth. The Sanctuary Model's Four Pillars focus on creating a trauma-informed, supportive environment in residential treatment programs for youth. Here's a summary of each pillar:

1. **Trauma Theory:** highlights the universal impact of trauma, adversity, and chronic stress on individuals and organizations. It stresses that understanding trauma's effects on health and behavior is crucial, and the Sanctuary Model helps mitigate these impacts.
2. **The S.E.L.F. Framework:** S.E.L.F. organizes treatment and care by focusing on four key elements, safety, emotional management, loss, and future. It provides a shared language for both individuals and organizations, aiding in treatment and problem-solving.
3. **The Seven Commitments:** these core values guide the Sanctuary Model, emphasizing non-violence, emotional intelligence, social learning, democracy, open communication, social responsibility, and growth. These principles shape both individual behaviors and organizational practices.
4. **The Sanctuary Tools:** practical interventions designed to reinforce the model's language and philosophy, including:
  - **Community Meetings:** regular meetings that help connect individuals and foster emotional sharing.
  - **S.E.L.F. Framework:** tool for treatment planning and community conversations focused on trauma healing.
  - **Safety Plans:** techniques and skills for managing strong emotions and preventing inappropriate behaviors.
  - **Self-Care and Workplace Wellness:** practices to reduce stress, prevent burnout, and promote emotional health for both individuals and teams.
  - **Red Flag Reviews:** reflective process for addressing critical incidents to foster learning and solutions.
  - **Core Team:** dedicated group that leads the implementation of the Sanctuary Model and ensures its principles align with organizational goals and outcomes.

These pillars work together to promote healing, safety, and growth for individuals in treatment.

The program's success stories are abundant, from the youth finding their voices through poetry to those discovering their talents in art, music, and drama. One student, in particular, wrote a deeply moving poem comparing her experience to that of the Little Mermaid, describing how, once placed at Hope Academy, she realized that her voice had been stolen—but with the help of the program, she found it once again. This is just one example of how Hope Academy and DART foster an environment where female youth can express themselves, build confidence, and begin to heal.

### *Transitioning to a New Beginning*

As youth begin to heal, they are gradually prepared for their transition back into mainstream schools. The DART team works closely with the student's new school, connecting them with the right support network to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible. These supports are provided in a variety of ways. From the treatment perspective, a case manager is assigned to each student at discharge who provides ongoing follow up check-ins visiting the student in their home community. This therapeutic support lasts up to a year after discharge to ensure the students have the support they need to

transition successfully into their community. On the academic side, the team conducts a transition meeting with the school to which the student will be enrolling. If the student is served under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan, they hold a meeting to ensure the plan reflects the level of support the student needs. The school counselors in the program work to ensure the receiving school has all appropriate records and transcripts to aide in a smooth transition. By ensuring that they are emotionally and academically prepared for the next step, DART helps to eliminate the stigma often associated with being a part of the program.

### *Looking Ahead*

The DART program focuses on coordinated support of educators, therapists, and others to build a strong community to meet the individual youth's needs. "We want them to be able to look at their three strengths and challenges with a growth mindset," says Jamie. "We are helping them rewrite their narrative and realize that they are worthy of success, love, and respect."

## Holly Hill Child and Family Solutions: Leading the Way in Kentucky

[Holly Hill Child and Family Solutions](#) operates a qualified residential treatment program for youth in foster care, ages 11-17.<sup>2</sup> Founded over 140 years ago as an orphanage, the organization has evolved to meet the growing and changing needs of the female youth it serves. A distinguishing feature of this program is its status as the only residential treatment program in Kentucky that specializes in serving female youth who have been, or are at risk of being, victims of sex trafficking. In 2023 reporting period, there were 376 reports of alleged sex trafficking in Kentucky, a 20% increase from the previous reporting period (reporting periods run from October 1 to September 30 each year) in alleged child victims.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Holly Hill launched this specialized program in 2024 at a time when the field of treatment for sex trafficking victims was still emerging. For additional information on the data presented in the Kentucky data reporting figure above, see [Human Trafficking Report to LRC 2023](#).



Holly Hill also qualifies as a neglected facility which makes the LEA eligible to receive Title I, Part A Neglected funds. The LEA, Campbell County, uses those funds to provide tutoring services to the students as many of the students have significant deficits in the core academic areas. These additional services provide the students with supplemental learning and help to close achievement gaps between them and their peers.

James Sherry, the Chief Executive Officer of Holly Hill, emphasized that this program exists within an emerging field where stakeholders' understanding of the issue is still in its early stages. He remarked, "the statistics around this issue do not reflect the extent of the problem; they reveal how much we

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<sup>2</sup> [2024 Kentucky Statewide Human Trafficking Data Report, A Comprehensive Report of Existing Multi-Disciplinary Data, The Kentucky Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force Data and Research Working Group \(2024\).](#)

still need to learn.” Given this knowledge gap, Holly Hill has worked diligently to create a program for these vulnerable youth based on the limited data available. Their goal is to establish themselves as a model that other agencies can follow to support this population.

The program offers a wide range of services designed to support the holistic needs of these youth. Students attend local public schools. While on campus at Holly Hill, they receive individual, family, and group therapy; behavioral support; social skills development; psychiatric care; case management; and numerous other services. Central to the program’s approach is the [My Life, My Choice](#) curriculum, which is specifically designed to support victims of sex trafficking. This group, led by survivors of sex trafficking, focuses on empowering youth to regain control of their lives. As described on their website, “our holistic, battle-tested approach is grounded in the experiences of youth who have survived the harsh realities of commercial sexual exploitation. Our mentors, who are survivors themselves, provide stability, community, and hope to exploited children.”

Success within the program is individualized for each student. For some, success is defined by maintaining stability at a lower level of care, especially for those who have experienced repeated psychiatric hospitalizations. For others, success is marked by a successful transition to adulthood and independent living outside of residential care. One recent graduate exemplified this success by establishing her own advocacy agency to support other victims, demonstrating the program’s lasting impact.

### **The Numbers**

13: the average age when a child is first exploited.

89% have been involved with the child welfare system.

52% have histories of sexual abuse prior to their exploitation.

Source: [The Issue — My Life My Choice](#)