



# **Sex Trafficking of Youth**

An introductory zine for advocates  
and service providers in Multnomah County



# Raphael House of Portland Prevention Education Program

Dedicated to advocating for safe and equitable relationships through workshops, trainings, and peer-led programming throughout the Portland Metro area.

## Why we're here

Raphael House is committed to prevention because:

- 1 in 3 adolescents will experience some form of relationship abuse
- Violent behavior typically begins between the ages of 12 and 18
- Only 33% of youth who were in a violent relationship ever told anyone about the abuse

(source: [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org))

## Topics we discuss:

- Equity
- Consent
- Boundaries
- How to identify abuse
- Exploitation
- Sex Trafficking
- Empathy and support
- Healthy relationships
- Available resources

## Contact us to learn more or get involved:

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[www.raphaelhouse.com](http://www.raphaelhouse.com)

## Sex Trafficking of Youth

An introductory zine for advocates and service providers in Multnomah County

This introduction explores contexts in which trafficking occurs, risk factors traffickers target and exploit, and some ways we can support survivors and disrupt trafficking.



**We believe that everyone  
deserves to live a life free  
from violence.**

## Why do we need to learn about trafficking in Multnomah County?

Since the nineteenth century, Portland has been a major trade and port town. Situated at the intersections of I-84 and I-5, it is highly susceptible to trafficking, as many survivors are transported over state lines.

In 2013, a report released in Multnomah County shared the sheer volume of individuals impacted by or involved in trafficking over a five-year period.

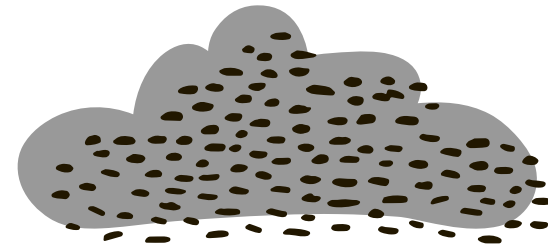
***There were 469 minors, 900 adult survivors, and 790 suspected or prosecuted traffickers identified.***

We know these numbers are undercounts. Shame, stigma, and experiencing violence and trauma are all barriers to identifying survivors of trafficking. In addition, these numbers do not reflect the amount of people arrested and prosecuted for prostitution where there was a third-party exploiter.

In the years since this report was released, Multnomah County has experienced a record housing and rental crisis, meaning numbers of survivors are only climbing.



Source: [justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao-or/legacy/2013/10/29/the\\_csec\\_report.pdf](https://justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao-or/legacy/2013/10/29/the_csec_report.pdf)



With falling economic prospects, diminished access to safe shelter, and the surveillance and policing of marginalized people, more youth are being made vulnerable to exploitation of all kinds.

***We have a responsibility to survivors of trafficking to create spaces of healing, safety, and support.***

The experience of being trafficked disrupts an individual's fundamental right to self-determination and direction. The tactics and strategies traffickers use are founded in violence, fraud, deceit, and coercion. Our responsibility to survivors of trafficking is to create spaces of healing, safety, and support, and to disrupt and address the social conditions under which trafficking exists.



## Street Economies

The formal economy looks like people going to work, collecting a paycheck, and filing a W-2. For those without adequate access to the formal economy, street economies are a way to generate income.

When people are pushed out or denied opportunities for economic growth and development, they will create their own opportunities. Some of the examples below may sound familiar to you and you may recognize their powerful and important role in strong communities taking care of each other, like babysitting and doing hair. While others, like sex trafficking or armed robbery, create incredible violence and disrupt communities and are sensationalized within mainstream media.

We know many youth identify their primary barriers to independence as economic. Youth often experience a lack of opportunities; inability to secure safe, sustainable, and well-paying jobs; and access to safe shelter. For many, engaging in the street economy allows them to meet their basic needs.

### Examples of the street economy:

- Boosting (reselling stolen goods)
- Doing hair and nails
- Babysitting (unofficial daycare)
- Shoplifting
- Performing (dancer, musician, etc)
- Bootlegging music/dvds
- Selling and distributing controlled substances
- Growing and trimming (weed)
- Unlicensed tattooing
- Working in the sex trade
- Graffiti/airbrushing
- Reselling items purchased at a deep discount
- Armed robbery
- Stealing/parting cars
- Identity theft (credit cards and checks)
- Trafficking others

## Sex Trade

The sex trade is the practice of trading sex or sexuality for some type of payment. Payment can be money, a place to sleep, physical goods, food, protection, and/or substances.

### The sex trade can take many forms such as:

- Street-based prostitution
- Escort work
- Dancing/stripping
- Cam modeling
- Performing in pornography
- Dominatrix or fantasy roleplaying

You may notice that for people over 18 some of these are illegal and some are not. Youth may see trading sex as their only or best means of survival, sometimes reporting they feel better trading sex than distributing substances or engaging in other survival crimes. For some youth, trading sex can be viewed as a way to leave abusive situations; add income to a family unit; receive emotional, physical, and gender-identity validation; or have other needs met. But for many youth, their involvement in trading sex can be experienced through force, fraud, or coercion.

### A youth's lived experience is theirs and theirs alone to define.

It is often complex and multi-layered. Youth will often develop their feelings and perspective about their experience over time. An advocate's role is to be there to support and create safe spaces for youth to explore their experience.

## Sex Trafficking

In 2000, the United States Congress authorized the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA). This followed nearly a hundred years of legislation meant to address commercial sexual exploitation beginning with the Mann Act of 1910.

The passing of TVPA and its subsequent re-authorizations enhanced pre-existing criminal penalties in other related laws, afforded new protections to trafficking survivors, and made available certain benefits and services to survivors of severe forms of trafficking, such as emergency T visas (which enable survivors who have assisted law enforcement to remain in the United States for up to four years). The legislation's primary focus has been on prosecution, protection, and prevention.

Under the TVPA trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age."

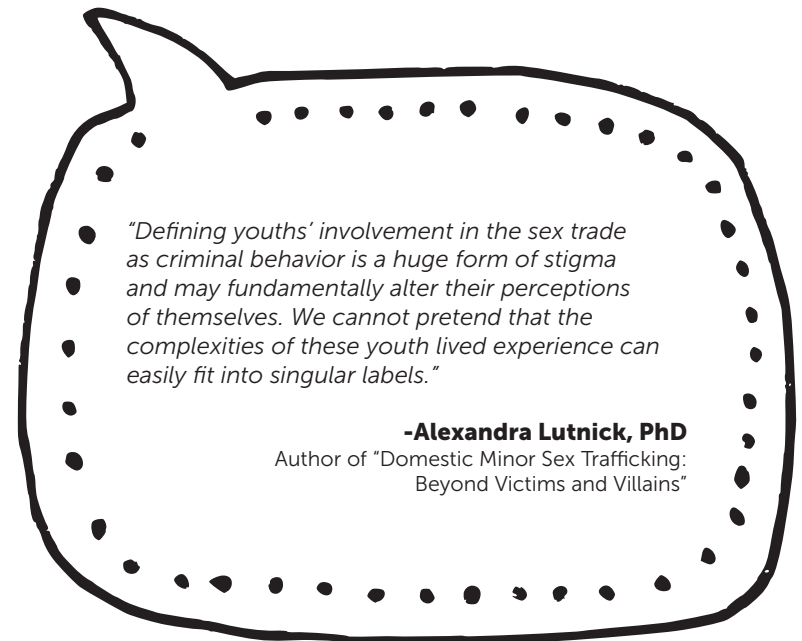
For youth under the age of 18, force, fraud, or coercion does not have to be present for them to be labeled as "victims of sex trafficking."



For advocates working within survivor-centered empowerment models, federal and state definitions of trafficking can feel overly simplified compared to the complexities and nuance of a survivor's lived experience. We see how approaches focused primarily on prosecution can compound youth's trauma and disempowerment, and even label them as co-conspirators within their own trafficking.

Due in part to a lack of nuance and complexity within mainstream conversations on trafficking, service provision can be incredibly difficult. Myths, inaccurate statistics, and punitive non-survivor-centered responses are still at the forefront in mainstream conversation.

Young people who are trading sex with or without a third-party exploiter will rarely view themselves as victims. They view themselves as constructing their own lives to the best of their abilities with the available options they have. By depicting them as one-dimensional victims, we rob them of their autonomy and may alienate them from services and resources that could be helpful if their independence and decisions were respected.



## Anyone can experience trafficking.

We know survivors of trafficking can be from any background. However, most dominant cultural narratives portray trafficked youth as young cisgender white girls. Many trafficking programs themselves do not even provide services to transgender girls.

These ideas create expectations for who a survivor can be and how they should act. This can lead to programs being completely unprepared to support vulnerable youth because their needs are not prioritized or recognized in program and service development.

Though there is no one image of a youth survivor of trafficking, there are certain risk factors which create vulnerabilities traffickers exploit.



### Youth experiences traffickers may exploit:

- Already trading sex
- Neglect/abuse at home
- Houseless/runaway
- LGBTQI (especially Trans youth)
- Tribal youth
- Youth of Color
- Criminal records and convictions
- Undocumented youth

In order to end trafficking and best support survivors, we also must address the social conditions that create the risk factors traffickers exploit. These social conditions are a result of oppression like racism, sexism, and classism, which make people vulnerable to many forms of violence.

Just as we know survivors of trafficking are not one homogenized group, neither are the people who traffick them. To provide services which are open and receptive to the complexities of youth's lived experiences, we have to move beyond our socially constructed image of pimps.

## Youth can experience third-party involvement or exploitation from:

- An intimate partner
- A caregiver, parent, or guardian
- A member of organized crime
- A friend or acquaintance (peer recruiters)
- A member of law enforcement



**Most youth who experience trafficking identify their trafficker as an intimate partner,** even if that person is also trafficking three to four other people.

## Common tactics of a person who trafficks by “selling the dream”

Youth entry into “the life” does not have a singular trajectory, and neither do the tactics and strategies that exploiters use. Every youth’s experience of being trafficked will be unique to the youth and the person who is exploiting them. Advocates can create opportunities for youth to explore the complexities of how they have or are experiencing abuse and harm.

Some of the common tactics youth have identified as part of their trafficking:

### Using violence

- Physical and sexual violence
- Confinement
- Forced relocation
- Withholding food, water, shelter, and sleep

### Fraud/deceit

- Elaborate promises of a better life, fast money, and luxuries
- Lying about working conditions (modeling, acting, etc.)
- Blackmail or extortion
- Creating false debt that a survivor has to repay

### Coercion

- Warmth, gifts, and compliments, coupled with emotional intimacy
- Emotional abuse
- Climate of fear
- Threats of serious harm or violence towards loved ones
- Stealing personal identification and documents

Though many people who traffick only use as much force as is necessary, some youth report experiencing extreme violence on their first encounter with a trafficker. Sexual assault by multiple people, beatings, confinement, and threats of murder can be part of entry into the life for some youth, and these traffickers will often be the most dangerous for a youth to leave.

Many of the youth that you meet will likely be experiencing a variety of abuse strategies from a trafficker. They will have experienced an intense period of grooming in the form of warmth, gifts, expressions of love, and promises of a better and beautiful life. Many youth report having complex relationships with the people who traffick them, and traffickers will work hard to develop those emotional connections.



### Common ways that youth identify their trafficker

- **As an important person in their life**
- **As a surrogate family, including others who are being trafficked (a common term is sister-wives)**
- **As someone they feel love and commitment towards, which is one of the biggest barriers to leaving**

**Most youth do not identify with terms like “trafficked” or “victim.”**



## Complex Relationships

Though this introduction is primarily about youth who are experiencing exploitive relationships marked by severe power imbalances, it's important to remember that youth can have third parties involved in their entry and involvement in trading sex without the elements of an abusive or exploitive relationship.

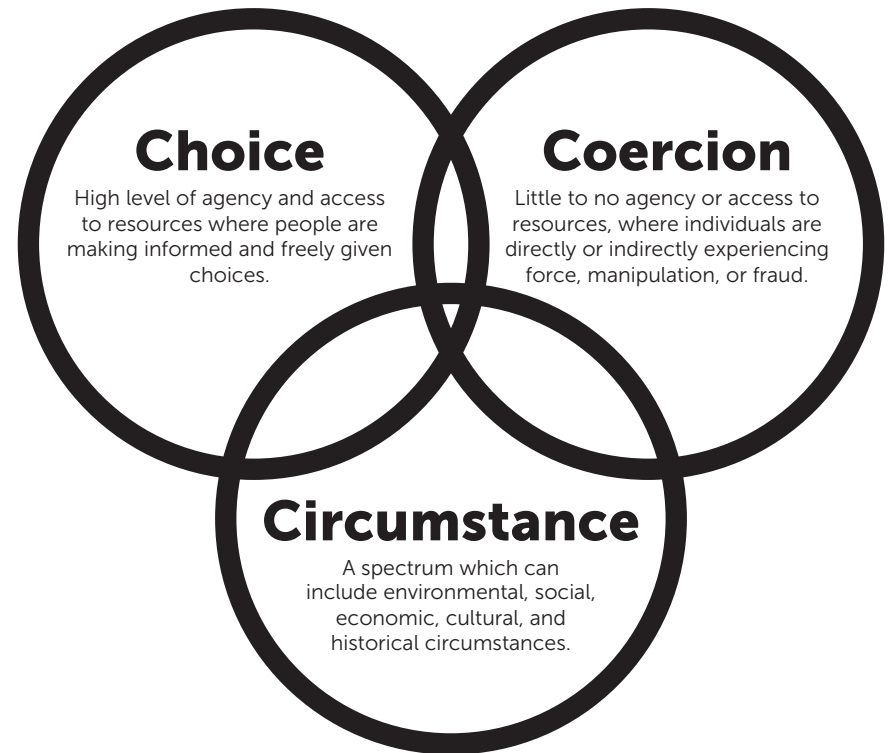
Street-based youth and those with other barriers to accessing needed resources are continuously forming cultures of care and survival-based relationships with each other. Youth will often connect each other with clients, share information on how to trade sex, and communicate on how to navigate systems-based involvement or interactions with law enforcement. Street families can form as important networks of support and safety through trading sex.

For a person to be charged with trafficking a youth under the age of 18, force, fraud, or coercion do not have to be present for arrest and prosecution. This has led to the prosecution of some youth's peers - who are often valuable social and safety supports - as traffickers, even when these peers have been engaged in trading sex themselves. Sometimes with people over the age of 18, roommates and partners who have little to no involvement in a person's sex trade have been threatened or even experienced prosecution for trafficking based on their proximity to a person trading sex. This is especially present within communities who disproportionately experience surveillance, policing, and incarceration.

A number of laws have been developed to protect youth from sexual, physical, and emotional violence from people who seek to exploit age or vulnerability, like statutory rape and sex-offender status. But these laws have sometimes not protected youth or adults who are trading sex. Instead, these laws end up treating people trading sex and the people in their lives as criminals who should have done or known better.

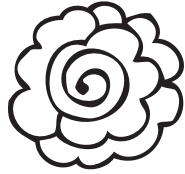
## Choice, Coercion, and Circumstance

For people who are engaged within the street economy and who are trading sex, that involvement is often occurring as a result of social and structural conditions in our society. People's involvement within trading sex is often a complex and shifting combination of choice, circumstance, and coercion.



Working to understand the complex ways youth identify their experiences trading sex (though this can change over time) can help us to better understand how to offer support and care. Framing conversations through looking at how choice, coercion, and circumstance influence their lives can be a powerful tool when working to support youth who have traded sex or experienced exploitation.





## JILL'S STORY

Jill is walking in her neighborhood. A man approaches her in a super nice car and offers her a ride. She takes it. His name is Jim and he's a little older and has a bunch of flashy and cool things.

During the ride he tells her how beautiful and amazing she is, how perfect, how special. The two have sex in the back of the car and start dating. Two weeks in, Jill is deeply in love and has been told that they are going to be together forever. He treats her like an adult and really, really listens to her.

Jim tells her they can be together if they could just get enough money, and he knows how they can make money. Just five months working on a track and the two are set. He'll be her manager and keep her safe. It'll be amazing, and she'll be so fancy just like a star.

She feels weird about it, and asks him why he's okay with sharing her. He tells her how dumb she is - this is how people do things and if she loved him she would.

### STORY EXERCISE

- Identify one tactic Jim used with Jill.
- Identify one social condition that may have contributed to Jill's exploitation.
- What is one thing you would say to Jill if she told you all this?



## SAM'S STORY

Sam runs away from an abusive home. They are 15, but look really young for their age. They call a crisis line and are told there's a youth shelter in town. When they show up at the shelter, staff misgender them and tell them a runaway/guardian check will happen. Sam doesn't know if their parents would have filed a report ... and doesn't want to wait to find out.

Sam goes to hang out over by Pioneer Square and an older man approaches them. The older man shows them a lot of compassion and care and also validates their gender identity.

Sam goes to the man's house and has sex with him for shelter. Later the man mentions to Sam that he will help Sam make money and figure out how to make their own way.

### STORY EXERCISE

- Identify one tactic the older man used with Sam.
- Identify one social condition that may have contributed to Sam's exploitation.
- What is one thing you would say to Sam if they shared this with you?

## In and out of “the life”

When it comes to trading sex, many youth see themselves as making choices to the best of their ability with the circumstances presented to them. Others may see themselves having had no choice at all. And for some, the question of choice is much more complicated than choice/no choice, even when there is a third-party exploiter.

A lot of youth report that leaving a person who is exploiting them does not necessarily mean they are leaving trading sex. Lack of opportunity for economic and social independence, coupled with the unique experiences of a person who trades sex, can create unique barriers to safety.

Youth engagement in trading sex is often fraught with continual exposure to violence. Youth report experiencing violence from people who purchase sex, from traffickers, from social stigma, from law enforcement, and from a decreased ability to access necessary resources. This can lead to the development of incredibly ingrained survival skills and trauma responses, which can create difficulties and barriers when integrating back into formal economies and mainstream social environments.

**When youth are leaving a person who trafficks, they may be leaving their community as well.** For many youth, everyone they include in their social sphere is also involved in trading sex, and it can be difficult to develop new relationships with those who do not have similar life experiences. The trauma-bonds that youth develop when experiencing trafficking are often incredibly intense.

We know for survivors of intimate partner violence, they often leave their abuser on average of seven times. Though no formal or official studies have been conducted with trafficking survivors, advocates feel this number easily doubles, and is often higher the younger the trafficking survivor is.

Advocates who work with this population often report a youth's number one need (outside of stable and safe housing) is access to mental health care, but youth often find the mental health supports which exist insufficient in meeting or understanding their unique experiences and needs.

## Barriers unique to leaving trafficking

- Lack of employment history
- Disruption of education
- Little to no experience in mainstream social environments
- Criminal history or charges
- Substance use or addictions
- Social isolation
- Mental health needs (developed or exacerbated due to severity of trauma)
- Lack of trauma-informed care unique to trafficking survivors and those who trade sex without third-party exploiters
- Intense trauma-bonds with traffickers and/or peers

Working with this population is difficult and complex. From a lack of resources and social opportunities, it can feel impossible to support youth in accessing safety, healing, and independence. Advocates' experiences of vicarious trauma can feel overwhelming and hopeless at times.

When working with youth experiencing trafficking, it can be important to modify our expectations for outcomes, and sometimes just celebrate that a youth was able to access our support or had three meals in one day.

We have to recognize that we may never know our impact on a youth's life as they may not be able to access safety and independence until many years after we have provided support. We must also recognize that the most powerful support we can provide is to always be there, believe them, and show non-judgmental and compassionate support.

## The most important support we can provide as advocates working with youth survivors:

- Honesty, patience, and truthfulness
- Consistency
- Modeling safe, healthy, and equitable relationships
- Support in identifying and practicing boundaries
- Survivor-centered empowerment models which recognize and celebrate youth strength and resilience

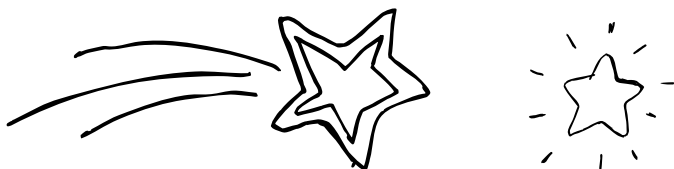
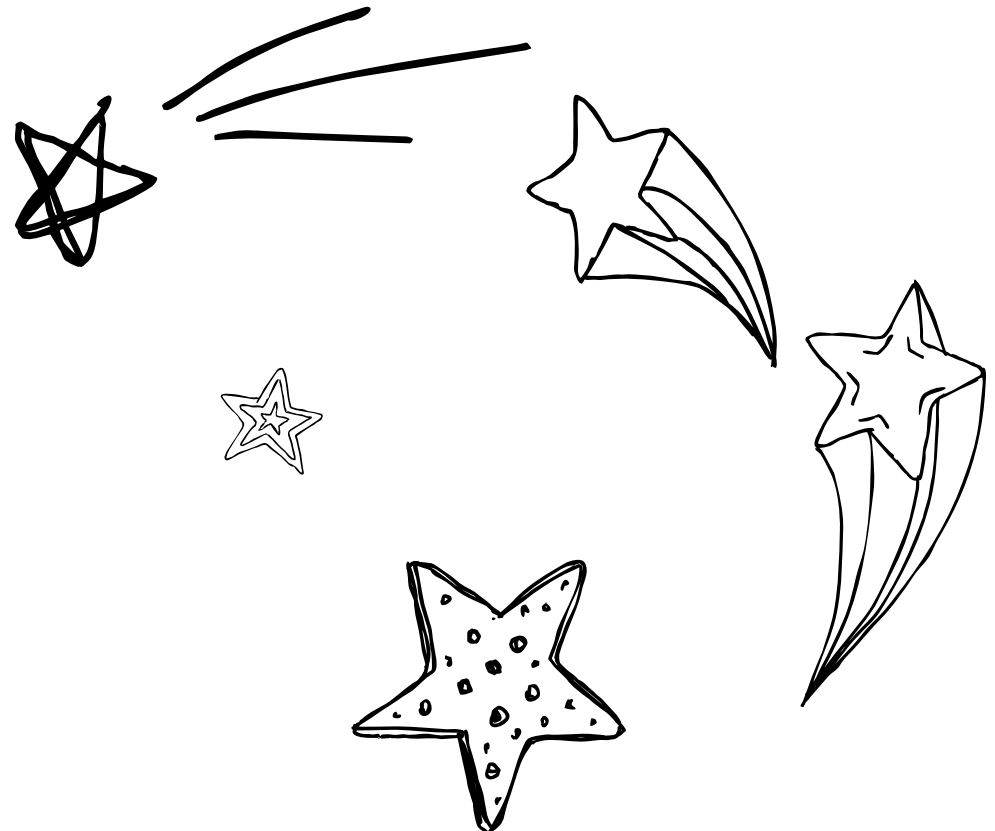
*Social justice for girls and young women in the sex trade means having the power to make all of the decisions about our own bodies and lives without policing, punishment, or violence. Our community is often represented as a "problem" that needs to be solved or we are portrayed as victims that need to be saved by someone else. We recognize that girls have knowledge and expertise in matters relating to our own lives that no one else will have. We are not the problem — we are the solution.*

**-Young Women's Empowerment Project**

## Opportunities for engagement and outreach

We can meet youth wherever they are at! These are just some of our opportunities to connect:

- CPS/DHS Involvement
- In schools
- Justice involvement
- 24/7 crisis lines
- Youth drop-in centers
- Youth health facilities
- Youth custodial facilities
- Peer support/leadership groups
- Inpatient youth behavioral health units
- Street outreach
- Pre-natal and reproductive health care
- Emergency rooms



## What are our responsibilities to youth as we work to address system change?

- Acknowledge the diversity of experiences in trading sex
- Examine and challenge structural factors and inequalities
- Explore the ways our construction of childhood and victimhood may contribute to the marginalization of youth when they access programs or become justice involved
- Fundamentally ensure that we are engaged in co-creating a system-wide culture of care in which access to basic needs is a right

*"In an effort to get people to care about this issue, we've been less than careful with the statistics and in an effort to get the media to cover this story we've often reduced it to its most basic elements. We've focused on quick fixes and good vs. evil responses that rarely address the true causes or empowering the young people we're serving."*

**-Rachel Lloyd,**

Survivor and Founder of Girls Education and Mentoring Service

## Further reading and viewing

### **GEMS (Girls Educational & Mentoring Services)**

Gems-girls.org

### **Young Women's Empowerment Project**

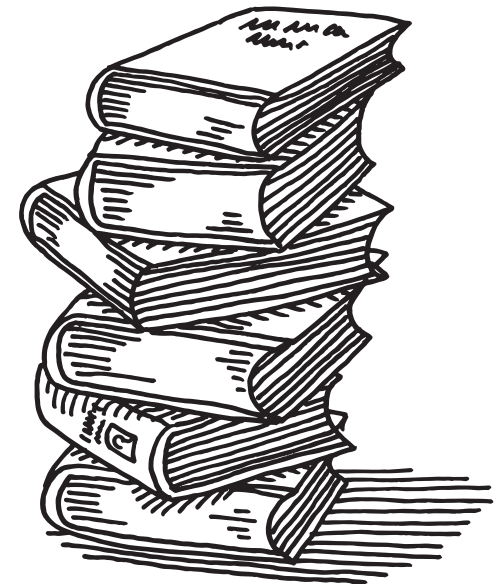
youarepriceless.org

### **"Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Beyond Victims and Villains"**

by Alexandra Lutnick

### **"Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights"**

by Juno Mac and Molly Smith





**For over 40 years, Raphael House of Portland has helped intimate partner violence survivors and their families find safety, hope, and independence.**

- We believe that domestic violence is preventable.
- We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence, oppression, and fear.
- We believe that the foundation of this work begins with creating a more equitable society for all people.
- We believe that violence-free lives are possible, and deserved, and that hope is the key to our future.

**[www.raphaelhouse.com](http://www.raphaelhouse.com)**