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Grant to Provide Trauma-Informed Services to Human Trafficking Victims

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) has received a three-year federal grant to provide safe housing assistance and mental health support for young victims of human sex trafficking.

The \$600,000 grant will initiate the RISE Above Project (RAP), which will provide physical and psychological safety through supportive transitional housing and short-term housing assistance, and linkage to an array of wrap-around support services.

The project's lead partner is Restoring Identities after Sexual Exploitation (RISE), a private non-profit providing long-term residence where girls receive comprehensive, individualized services and mentoring to permanently escape the world of the sex trade and become strong independent, responsible adults.

RISE is the only provider of housing services to exclusively focus on young victims of human trafficking in Oklahoma. Other partners are the Oklahoma Coalition Against Human Trafficking, The Red Cord, Oklahoma Attorney General's Office, Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and ODMHSAS' network of community mental health centers, which have an extensive history of providing trauma-informed services.

Partners will serve on an advisory council and as referring agencies. Many are experts in educating on human trafficking and have offered training support.

Carrie Slatton-Hodges, ODMHSAS commissioner, said the project aims to assist victims in improving their social and emotional well-being by connecting them to safe, stable housing and a wide variety of support services. Other goals are to help young sex trafficking victims find or strengthen existing connections and supports to lead healthy, successful lives in the community; increase self-sufficiency through assistance with employment skills; and increase collaboration and provide training for all partners and stakeholders to identify and work with victims through a trauma-informed approach and coordinated referral system.

“This RISE Above Project will address some of the gaps in housing and support services that exist for these vulnerable young Oklahomans,” said Slatton-Hodges. “Safe, stable housing is a crucial component of their recovery, as is addressing the impact of trauma on mental health.”

The project will offer access to transitional housing and short-term rental assistance in 75 of Oklahoma’s 77 counties. At least 75 individuals will be served over the three-year lifespan of the grant, “but we anticipate serving more,” she said.

For more information about ODMHSAS services, visit www.odmhsas.org.

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