

May 2024

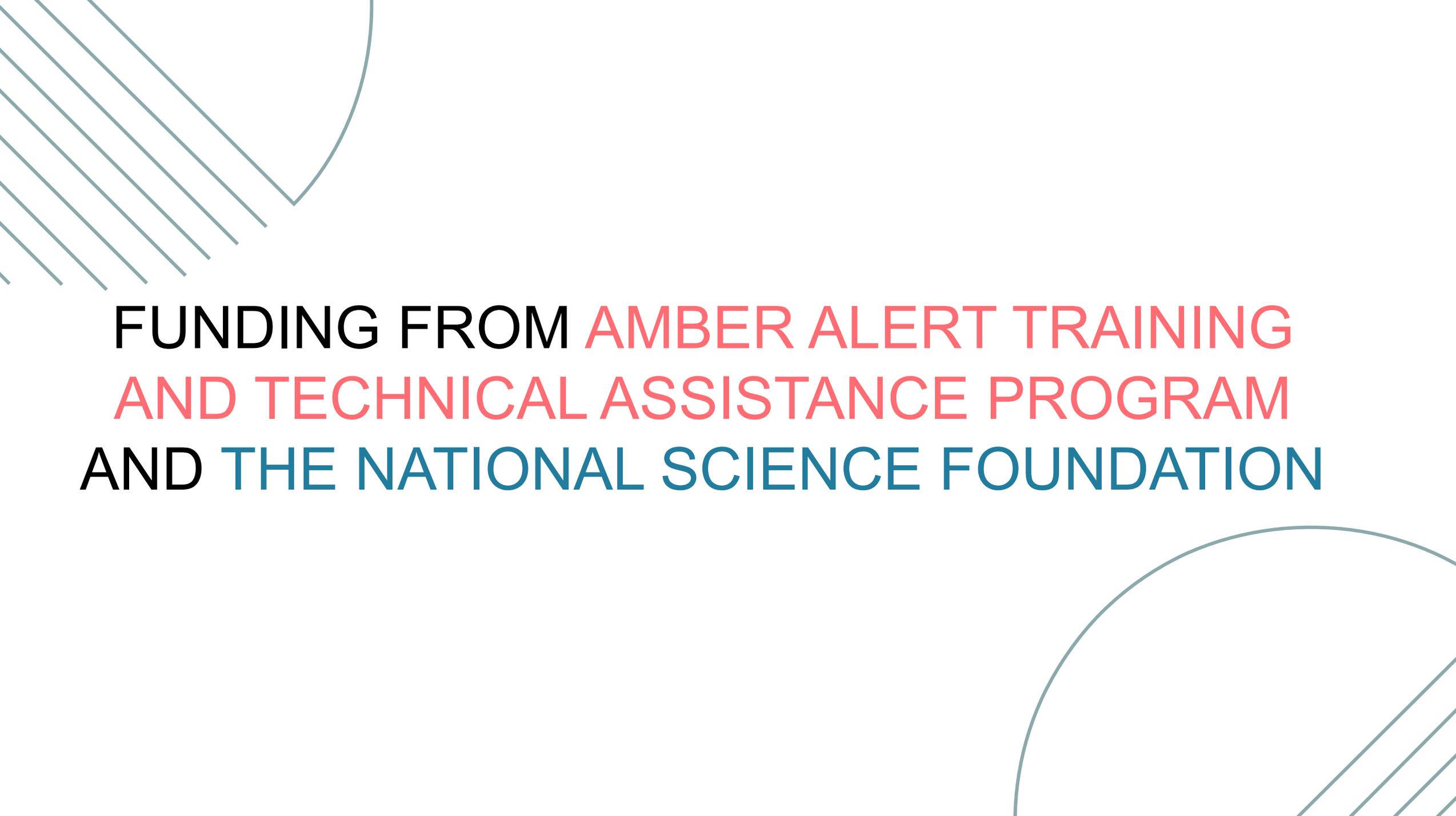
# CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING IN ARIZONA: 2021-MAY 2023

Presented by

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**FUNDING FROM AMBER ALERT TRAINING  
AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
AND THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION**



# THIS PROJECT

The data in this report was collected by a statewide medical and behavioral health insurance provider for youth in care of the State of Arizona for the purpose of better understanding the experiences of child sex trafficking survivors. The report describes the Arizona Statewide Collaborative Process to identify victims of child sex trafficking and the how victims were identified as well as characteristics of the victims identified. From January 2021 to May 2023, **309** suspected or confirmed victims of sex trafficking were identified.

# Arizona

## SIZE

Arizona is the sixth largest state in the U.S. We have 15 counties, 141 law enforcement agencies and 14,591 sworn police officers.

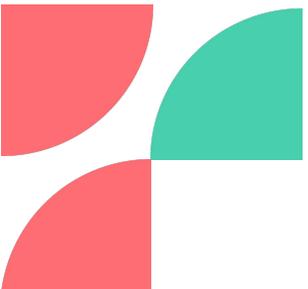
## CHALLENGES

Arizona has some of the richest and poorest zip codes in the country. Arizona has a robust network of gangs and criminal activities including drug trafficking and human smuggling that are adjacent to sex trafficking.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

Arizona has multiple environmental factors that drive sex trafficking activities-

- consistently sunny weather
- a large concentration of people- including those vulnerable to trafficking and those with the resources to purchase sex
- events that bring men and money to the major cities in Arizona regularly.



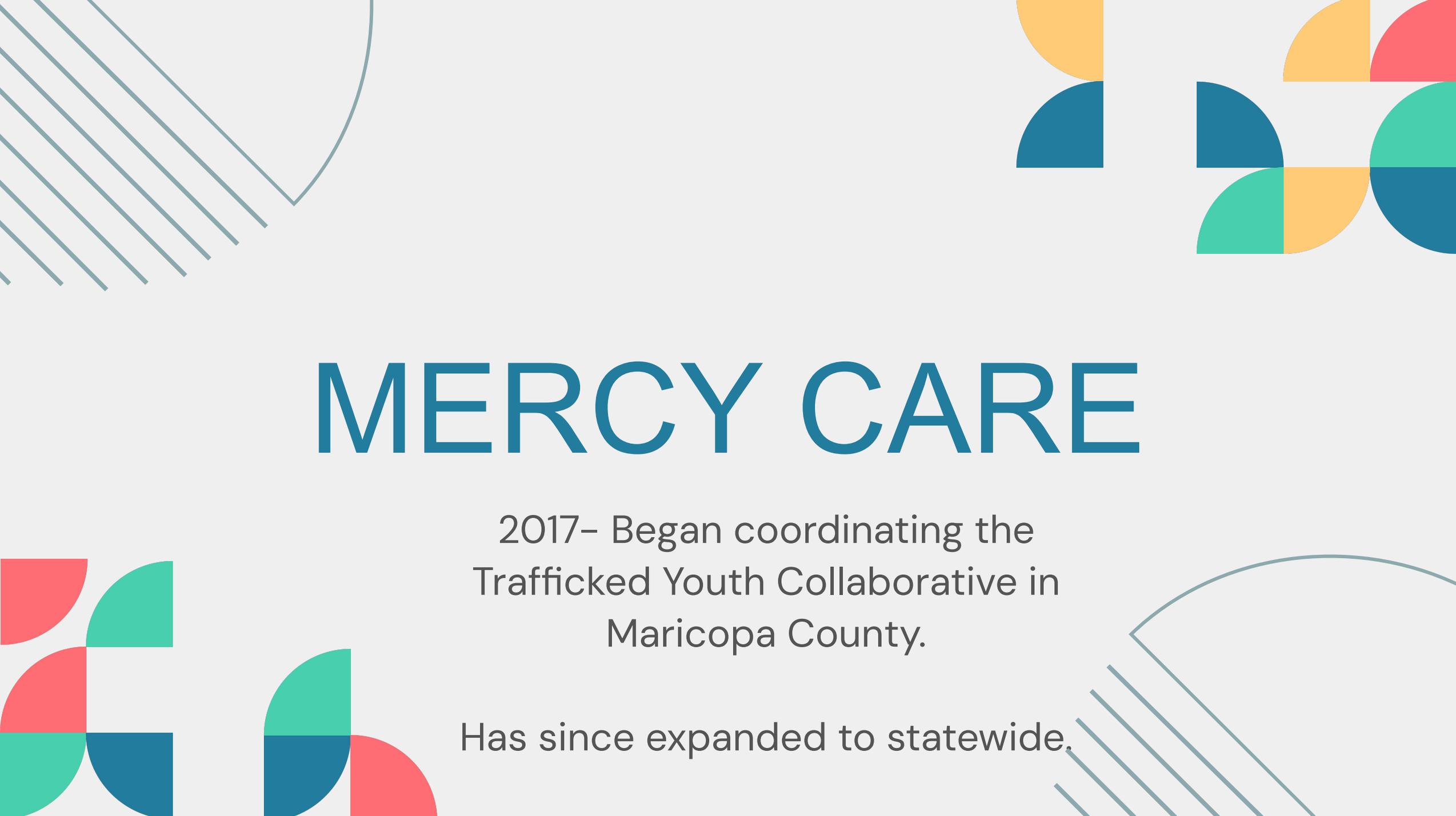
# Previous Research

## 2020 REPORT

- 3-year time frame
- all but 4 were from Arizona
- Average age a detection was 15.3 (decreased over time).
- African American youth made up over a third of the sex trafficking cases.
- Change over time from 90% of the CST victims in AZDCS guardianship in 2017 to 59% in 2020.
- A history of running away was a key element of many of the cases.

291 child sex trafficking cases





# MERCY CARE

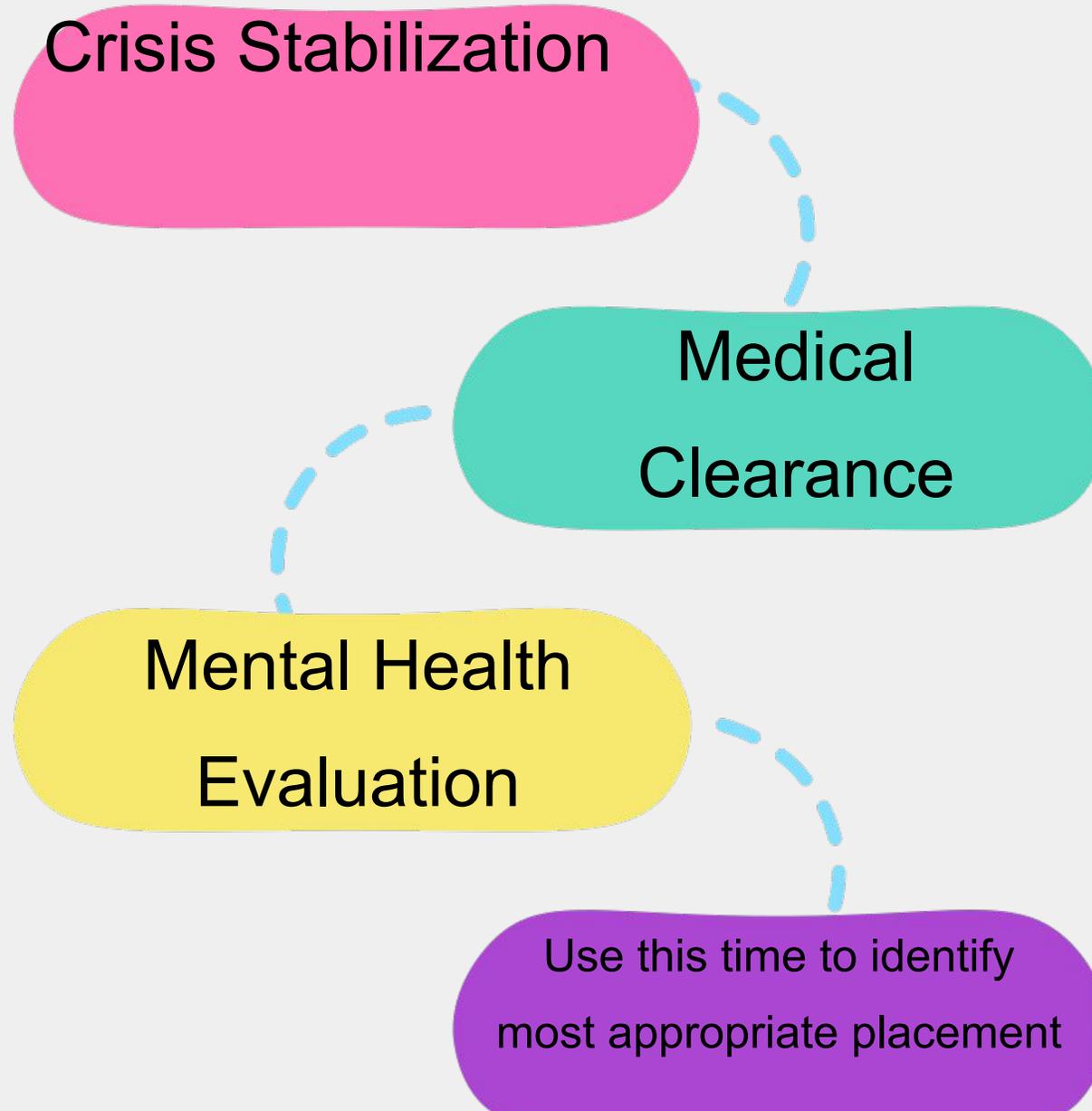
2017– Began coordinating the  
Trafficked Youth Collaborative in  
Maricopa County.

Has since expanded to statewide.



# PROCESS OF THE COLLABORATIVE

# Collaborative Process



# THIS STUDY

309 CHILDREN  
IDENTIFIED

196 (63.4%)  
SUSPECTED

113 (36.6%)  
CONFIRMED

2021 = 97

2022 = 173  
(78.3%)



-MAY 2023 = 39

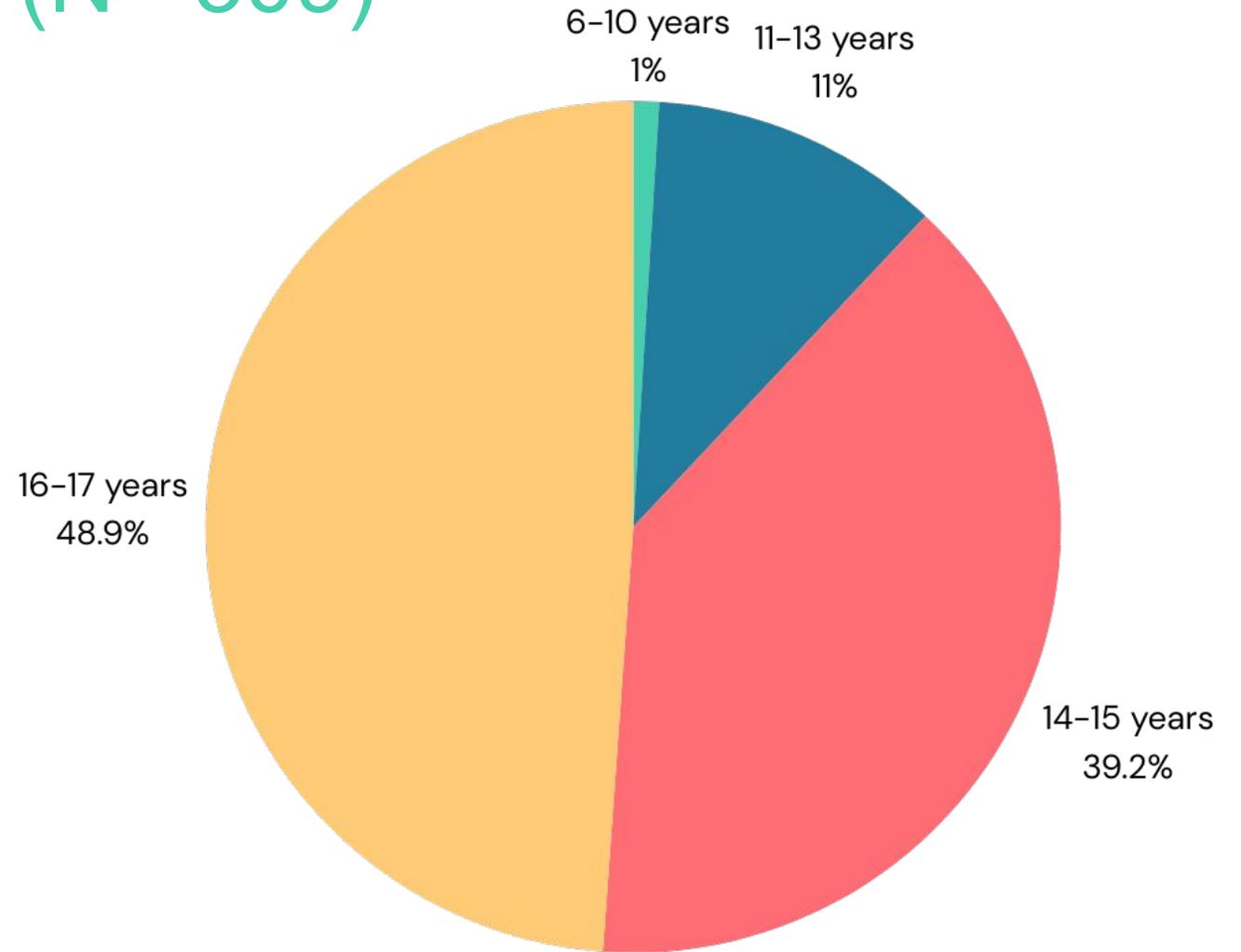
# AGE OF CST VICTIMS (N = 309)

## SMALL CHILDREN

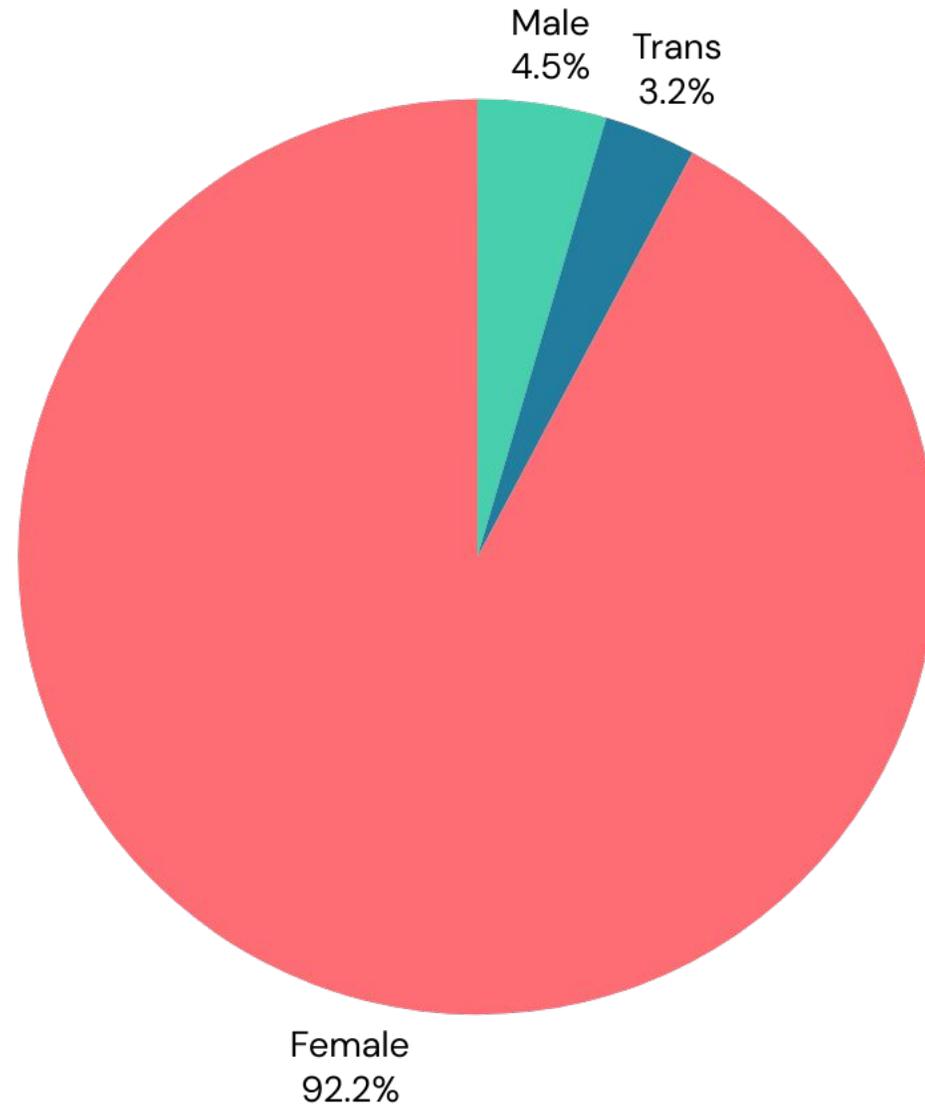
Three children were under age 10.

## AVERAGE AGE

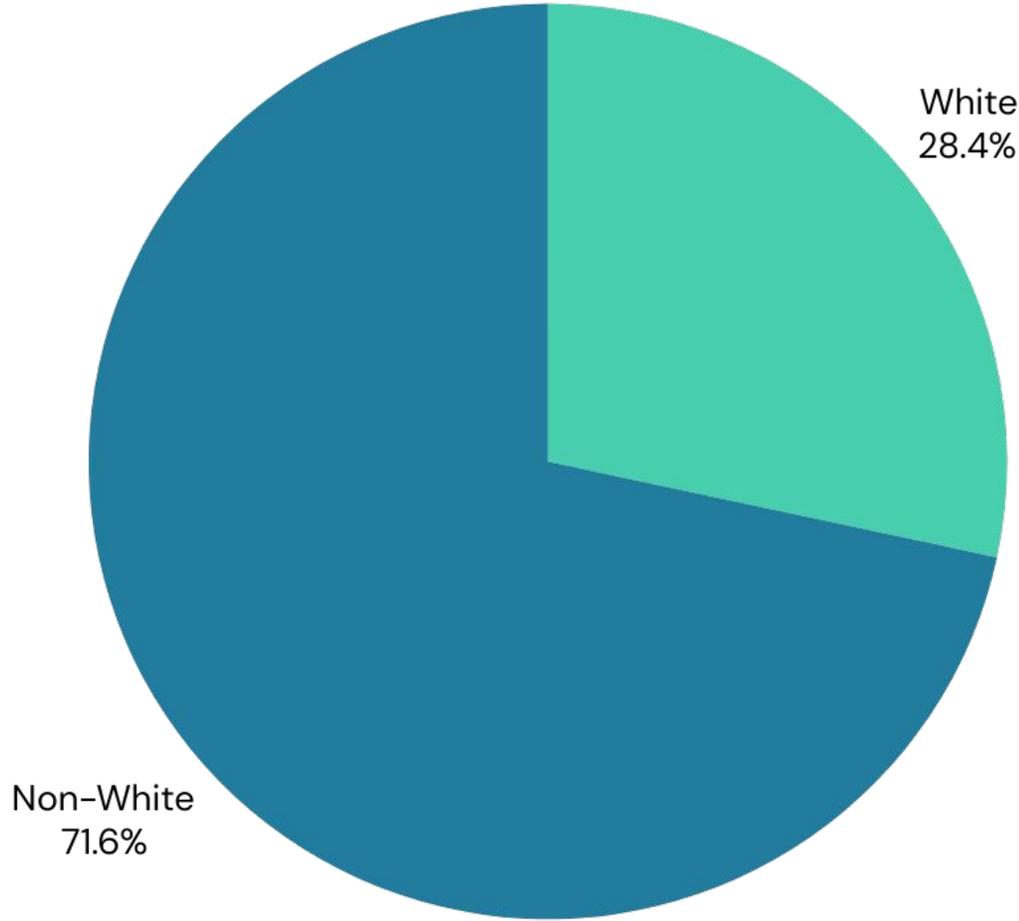
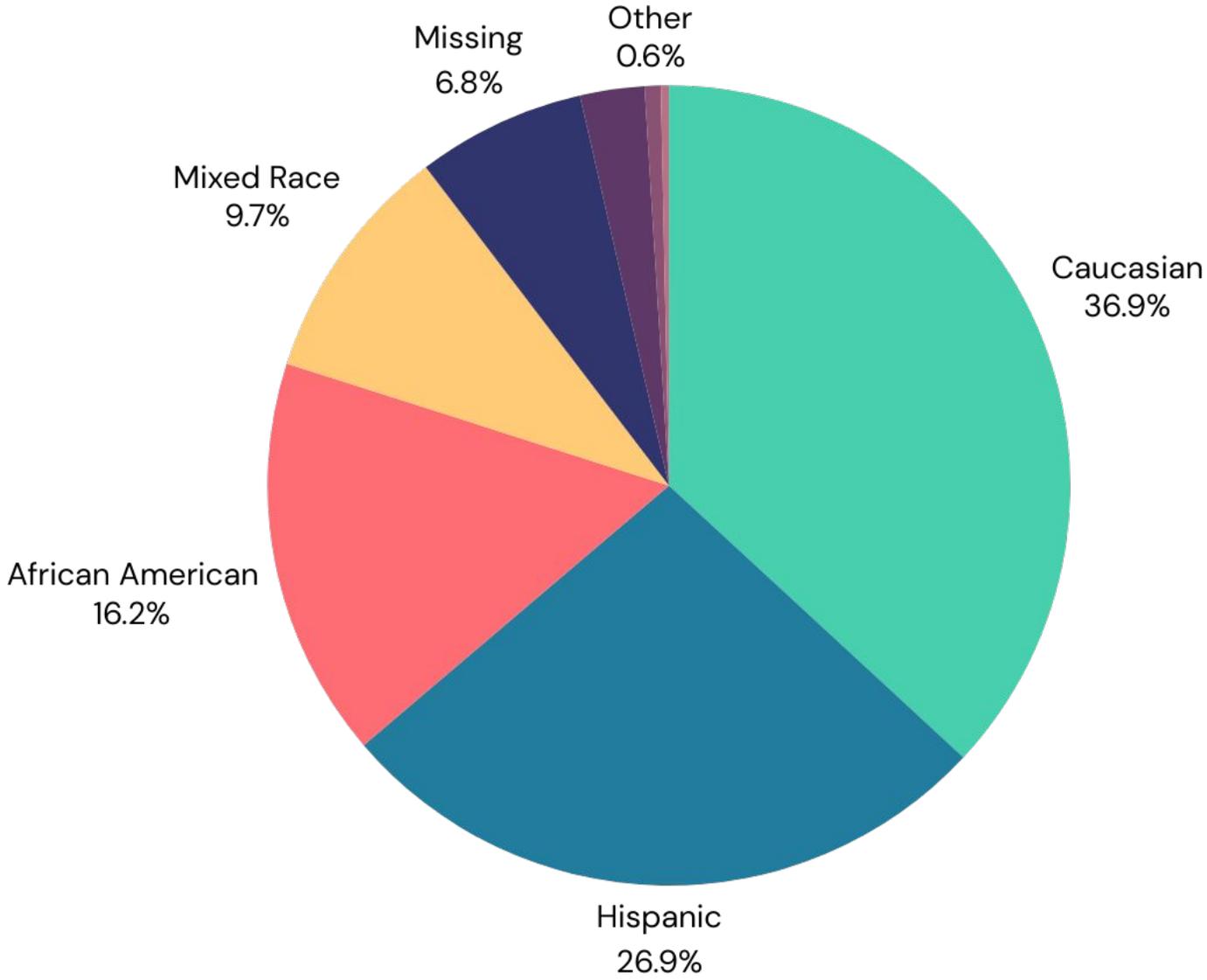
The average age of the children when identified was 15.1 years old.



# GENDER OF CST VICTIMS N = 309



# RACE OF CST VICTIMS N = 309



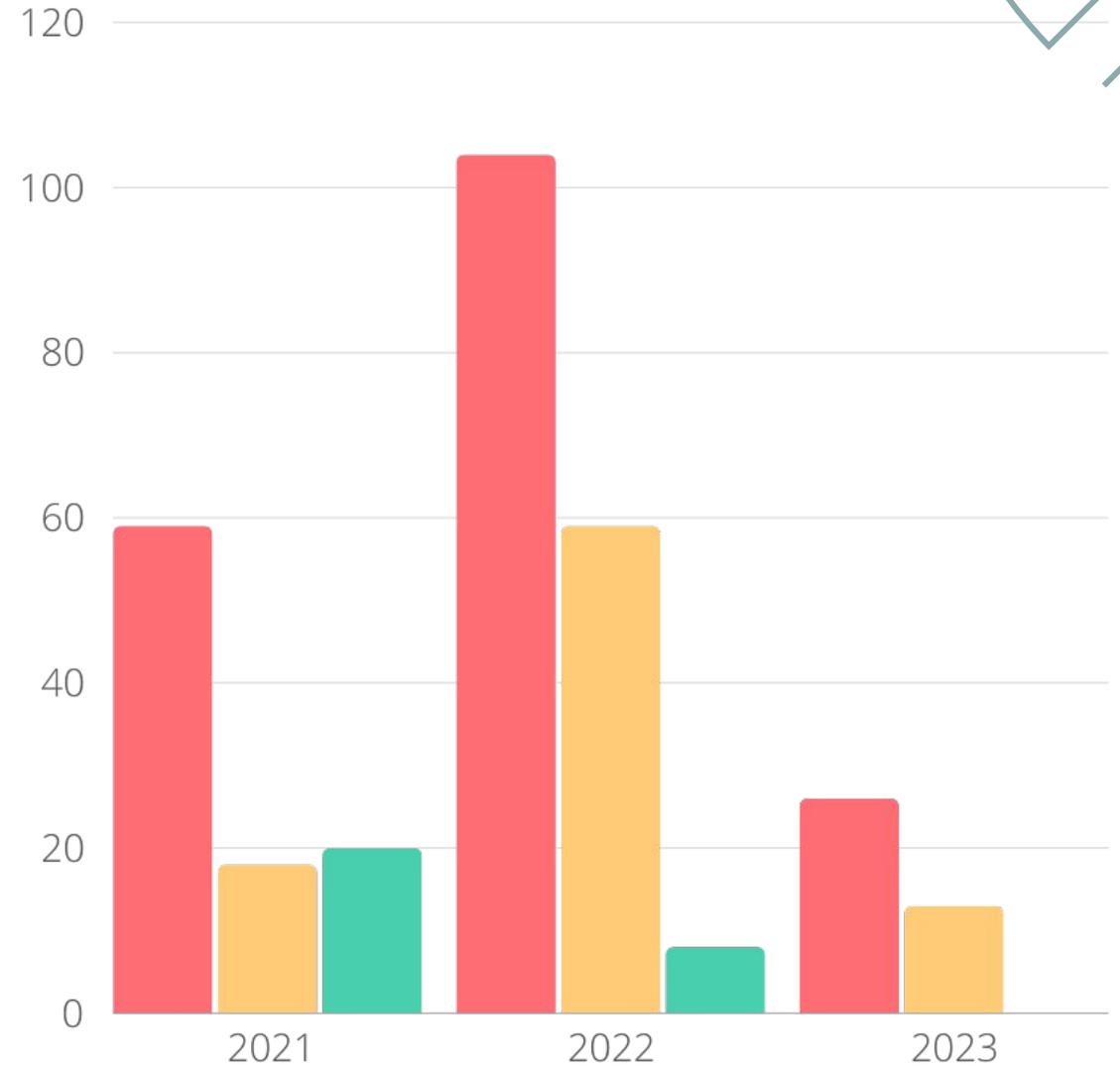
# GUARDIANSHIP

The most common guardianship found among the 309 CST victims was AZDCS (between 60 and 66%). There were only 2 cases of Indian Child Welfare Act Guardianship

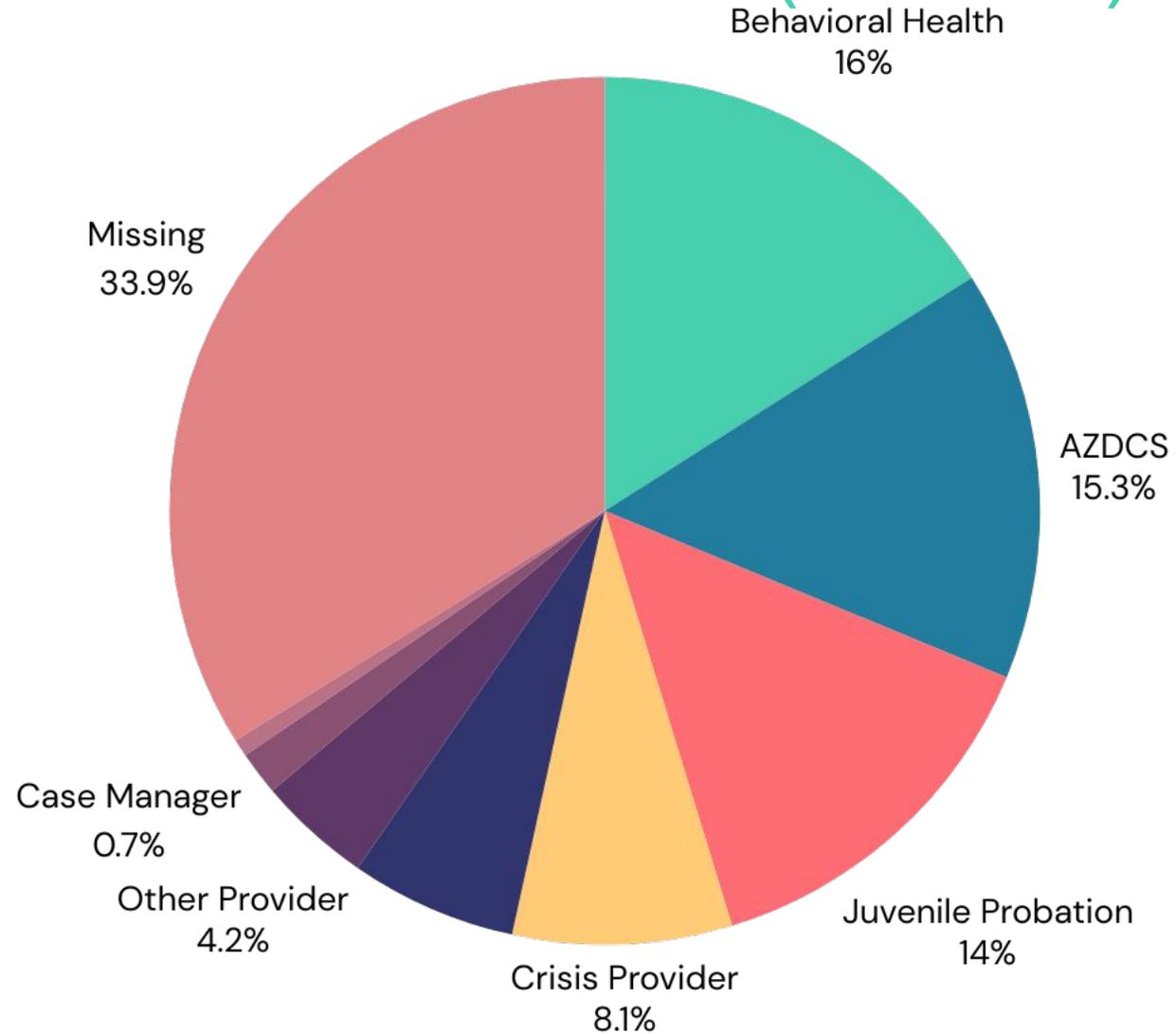
01 - AZDCS

02 - NON-DCS

03 - MISSING



# REFERRAL SOURCES (N = 309)



# WHERE ARE THE CST CASES

**2021**

## 5 COUNTIES

In 2021, five counties had reports of CST victims.

**2022**

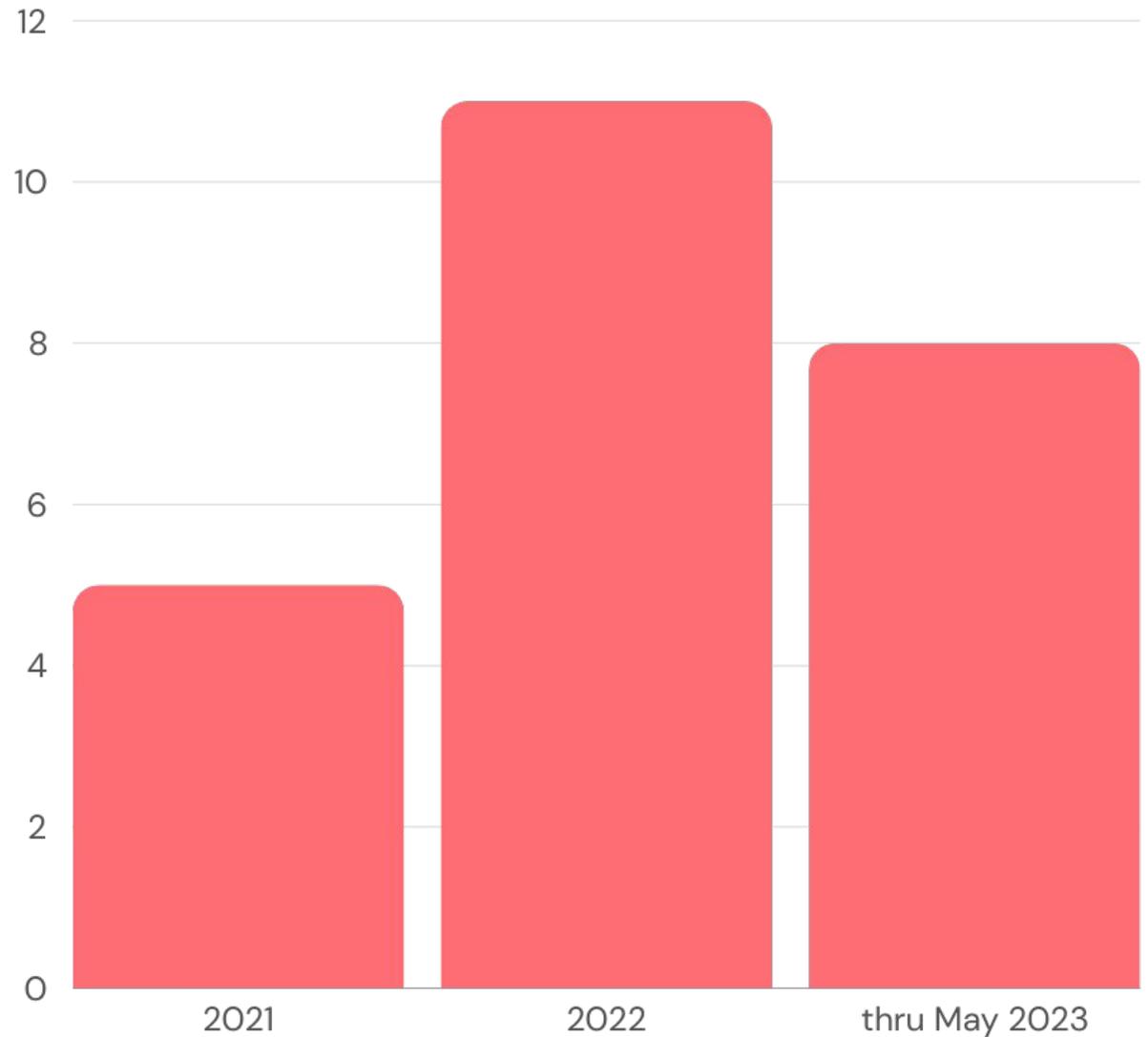
## 11 COUNTIES

In 2022, 11 counties had reports of CST victims.

**THRU MAY 2023**

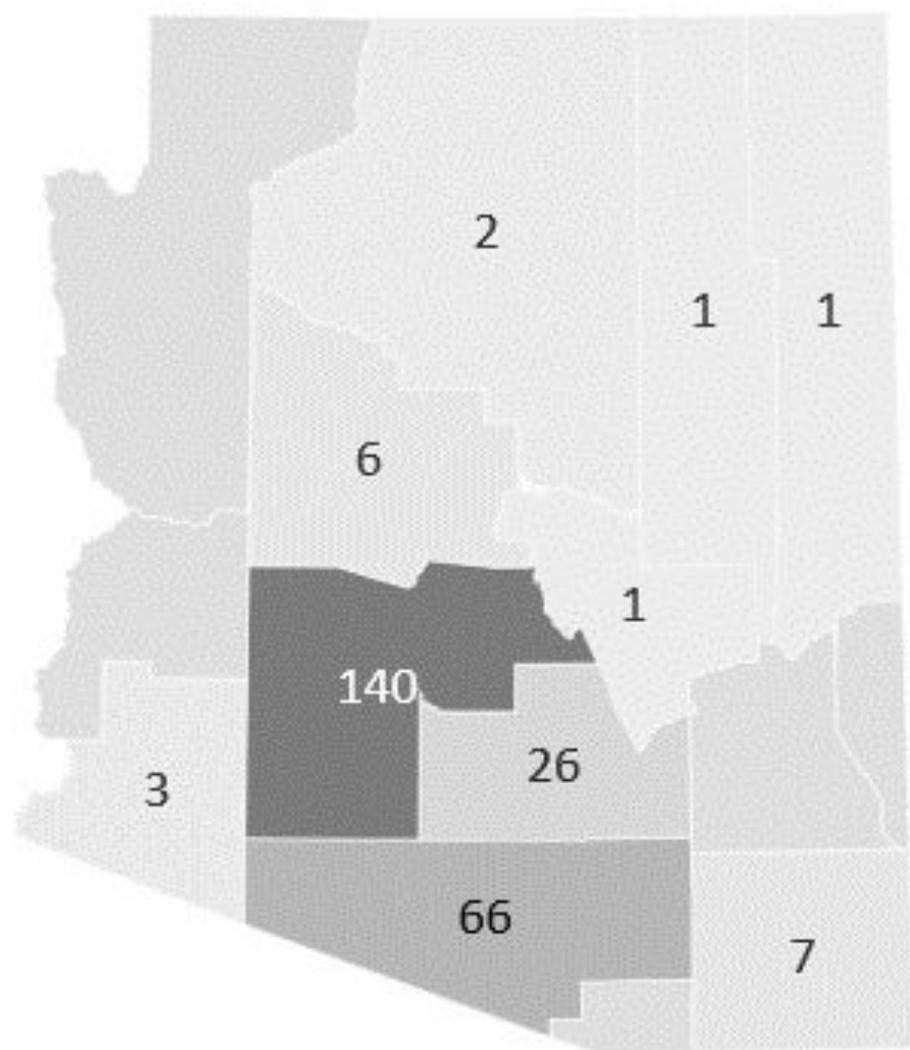
## • TO MAY 2023

Through May 2023, eight counties had reports of CST victims.



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# Arizona Child Sex Trafficking Victims 2021-May 2023



# CST VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS (N =309)

## Type of Substance Use



### RUNNING AWAY

There was a 40.1% increase from 2021 to 2022 in reports of CST victims having a history of running away.



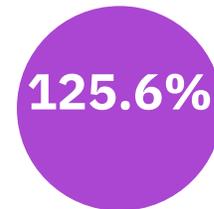
### ALCOHOL USE

During the study period, alcohol use increased by 153.6%.



### SEXUAL ABUSE

Nearly one out of five of the CST victims reported a history of sexual abuse.



### FENTANYL

During the study period, Fentanyl use increased by 125.5%.



### SUBSTANCE ABUSE

45% of the victims CST were reported to have used drugs and alcohol. Substance use by the victims of CST increased by 30% from 2021 to 2022.



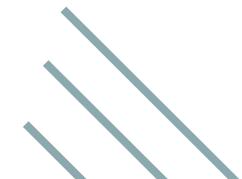
### COCAINE

During the study period, Cocaine use increased by 41.4%.

# DISCUSSION



- Overrepresentation of youth of color – exceeding 50% of the CST victims.
- 309 child victims of sex trafficking in Arizona!
- Overrepresentation of youth of color – exceeding 50% of the CST victims.
- This disproportionality, not uncommon in sex trafficking victimization research, points to limited opportunities for awareness and prevention in especially communities of color.
- This study found that 29 percent (n =90) of the identified victims of sex trafficking were living in non-Department of Child Safety situations, i.e. with their family.
- Female child sex trafficking victims represented 92.2 percent of the victims in this study.
- Nearly one out of every five (18.8%) of the child sex trafficking victims identified as having a history of childhood sexual abuse.
- This study found a large increase over the 2.5-year study period of drug use, with significant increases in victims of sex trafficking's use of alcohol and Fentanyl by 153 percent and 125 percent increases from 2021 to 2022 respectively.



# WHAT NOW:

- Cases from 11 of 15 Arizona Counties.
- Nine Human Trafficking Task Forces.
- Maricopa County STRENGTH Court.
- Pinal County Juvenile Court
- Statewide Collaborative approach.
- Continue to build awareness and prevention.
- Continue to build capacity for detection and intervention.
- Create services and supports for guardians of the 40% of the CST victims not in DCS care.
- Continue to build clinical capacity to treat CST victims.
- Screenings used in Juvenile Probation.
- New AZDCS training.
- No standardized screening in most settings.





# THANK YOU

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# Child Sex Trafficking in Arizona: 2021-May 2023

*May 2024*



Authors:  
Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, Ph.D.  
ASU STIR  
Sarah Way, M.S., & Karrie Steving  
Mercy Care

## **Child Sex Trafficking in Arizona: 2021-May 2023**

**May 2024**

**Authors:**

**Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, Ph.D.**

**ASU STIR**

**Sarah Way, M.S., & Karrie Steving**

**Mercy Care**

Funding for this study came from the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program and the National Science Foundation.

The crime of sex trafficking was defined in the United States through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000). A sex trafficking victim is any child under the age of 18 exchanging sex for something of value such as money, a place to stay, drugs, clothes, or protection. Additionally, an adult and over the age of 18 is considered a victim if they are being forced or coerced by a third party (a trafficker) to exchange sex for something of value. Sex trafficking is a horrific crime against vulnerable people and is often hidden from sight, making it difficult to track. This invisibility leads to a limited understanding of the extent of the problem of sex trafficking in any given region. Any action or lack of action by law enforcement to address sex trafficking in an area can give a false indication that sex trafficking is or is not occurring.

### **This study**

The data in this report was collected by a statewide medical and behavioral health insurance provider for youth in care of the State of Arizona for the purpose of better understanding the experiences of child sex trafficking survivors. The report describes the Arizona Statewide Collaborative Process to identify victims of child sex trafficking and the how victims were identified as well as characteristics of the victims identified. From January 2021 to May 2023, 309 suspected or confirmed victims of sex trafficking were identified.

In the United States, there is no valid accounting of the number of sex trafficking victims. This lack of concrete data continues to pose serious challenges for resource allocation and decision-making efforts. Developing accurate data on victims of sex trafficking is critically important for making data-driven decisions regarding community education, awareness, and the coordination of care for victims in each community by law enforcement, child welfare departments, medical and behavioral health providers, and social service agencies.

Child sex trafficking, which is specific to minors (under age 18) and does not require the involvement of a third party (trafficker), is defined as the recruitment, harboring, provision, transportation, obtaining, patronizing or soliciting a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). All children are vulnerable to being sex trafficking regardless of race, socio-economic status, or location. Due to the complex ways sex traffickers recruit, groom, and exploit their victims, addressing the crime of child sex trafficking and supporting victims requires a multifaceted approach from law enforcement, victim service providers, the child welfare system, and medical and behavioral health providers.

Identifying victims of sex trafficking in the community differs in some ways for children and adult victims. While the risk factors are similar, such as history of child welfare involvement (Greeson, Treglia, Wolfe, Wasch, & Gelles, 2019; McDonald, Fisher, & Connolly, 2023; O'Brien, White, & Rizo, 2017; Olender, 2018), sexual abuse (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Quas, Mukhopadhyay, & Lyon, 2023; Sprang & Cole, 2018; Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015), and a history of running away (Fedina, Williamson, & Perdue, 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Latzman, Gibbs, Feinberg, Kluckman, & Aboul-Hosn, 2018; Reid et al., 2019), children are often actively hiding. They are hiding from law enforcement, their caregivers, and school personnel, requiring proactive actions to locate them. Child sex trafficking victims have unique challenges that demand a comprehensive and coordinated response from various stakeholders.

### **Sex Trafficking in Arizona**

Arizona is the sixth largest state in the U.S. with 15 counties and 141 law enforcement agencies and 14,591 sworn officers (ACPA, 2023). Arizona has some of the wealthiest zip codes and some of the poorest communities in the country. While sex trafficking is a pervasive issue across every city in America daily, Arizona faces specific factors that contribute to the prevalence of sex trafficking as a significant and ongoing problem in the state. These factors include consistently sunny weather, a large concentration of people, including those vulnerable to trafficking and those with the resources to purchase sex, along with events that bring men and money to the major cities in Arizona regularly. Some communities in the U.S. have chosen to ignore this issue but Arizona has not. The community fighting against human trafficking has collectively trained tens of thousands of community members in the past five years. The anti-trafficking community in Arizona has worked to build capacity for support services, ranging from churches to state prosecutors. The information from this study will help align the capacity-building efforts to best serve victims of child sex trafficking across the state.

### **Previous Research in Arizona**

In 2020, a report was released on 291 child sex trafficking cases in Maricopa County, Arizona (Roe-Sepowitz et al, 2020). Those cases were identified over a three-year period. Lessons from that report included:

- a. Nearly all of the child sex trafficking cases involved children from Arizona.
- b. The age of the victims has steadily decreased with the average age changing from 16.6 years old in 2017 to 15.3 years old in 2020.
- c. From the 2020 study, children of African American race made up over a third of the cases for child sex trafficking each year and was consistently the highest race represented.
- d. Initially, more than 90% of the guardians of the victims were the Arizona Department of Child Safety. By year three, guardianship by the Arizona Department of Child Safety decreased to 59% while parent guardianship increased to 38%.
- e. Referral sources of child sex trafficking victims have diversified over the three years
- f. The majority of the referred child sex trafficking victims were identified as having a runaway history.

### **This Report**

The data in this report was collected by a statewide medical and behavioral health insurance provider for youth in care of the State of Arizona. The purpose was to gain a better understanding the experiences of child sex trafficking survivors. This information is intended to assist the systems responsible for the care of victims of child sex trafficking in being more targeted and focused on the actual needs for services.

This report highlights a number of the challenges faced by child victims of sex trafficking as well as changes over time about how victims are identified. The information in this report is a critical part of the active and responsive anti-sex trafficking work being done by dozens of agencies in Arizona.

This report includes all cases of children in Arizona reported to a system of care designed for victims of child sex trafficking to coordinate services. Extensive training in all regions of Arizona has resulted in increased reports and children being identified as suspected or confirmed victims of sex trafficking.

### **Statewide Human Trafficking Collaborative**

Mercy Care has coordinated the Trafficked Youth Collaborative since 2017. The Collaborative created a centralized coordination of care model for child trafficking victims in Maricopa County including providing identification, assessment, and streamlined services. Since 2017, Mercy Care has expanded this work beyond Maricopa County and now coordinates the Statewide Trafficked Youth Collaborative.

A List of specific agencies who have referred to the collaborative is at the end of this report.

### *Utilization of Crisis Stabilization Short Term Placement*

At the outset of the Collaborative in 2017, Mercy Care had contracted beds at St. Luke's Hospital OSCA Unit for crisis stabilization of child sex trafficking victims. This decision to utilize a 23-hour crisis assessment was made because child victims were being brought straight to group homes or treatment centers and would, in numerous cases, immediately run away again. The crisis stabilization allows for the provision of medical and mental health evaluations in a safe and supervised location. Mercy Care has since taken over as the health plan contractor for all children in the custody of DCS under a health plan called the DCS Comprehensive Health Plan (DCS-CHP).

St. Luke’s Hospital OSCA Unit closed in December of 2021. A new crisis provider, MIND24-7 joined the Collaborative and has created a Human Trafficking protocol. Law enforcement agencies, DCS, and other stakeholders have been trained to bring a suspected or confirmed trafficked youth to MIND 24-7.

Upon arrival, MIND24-7 staff enact a Human Trafficking protocol which includes coordinating consents to treat and, when applicable, arranging for the youth to be transferred to Phoenix Children’s Hospital for a medical clearance. The medical clearance includes a basic physical exam, basic labs, STI testing, UDS, UA and an EKG. If law enforcement deems that a forensic medical exam is recommended, MIND24-7 staff will coordinate the youth’s transport to the local family advocacy center if the exam had not already been completed. Law enforcement will then transport the youth back to MIND24-7.

If the youth is a confirmed pregnant patient, the youth will instead be transferred to St. Joseph’s Hospital throughout a partnership with Common Spirit. MIND24-7’s nurse contacts Common Spirit/St. Joseph’s Attending On Call physician to determine if the patient needs to be seen in OB Triage or In-Office. Common Spirit/St. Joseph’s then coordinates transportation back to MIND 24-7.

Both St. Luke’s OSCA Unit and MIND24-7 provided a critical service in offering crisis stabilization and for allowing the Collaborative team to work together to find the safest and most clinically appropriate place for the child to go where they would receive ongoing services upon discharge.

**This Study**

The data for this project was collected from case files from a statewide integrated health plan provider from January 2021 to May 2023, with 309 children identified as suspected (n =196, 63.4%) and confirmed (113, 36.6%) victims of child sex trafficking. This report will combine the two groups (suspected and confirmed) in this study.

Youth were deemed confirmed according to the Collaborative if they had made a disclosure to a professional (MIND24-7, law enforcement, JPO, therapist, DCS or a survivor mentor). A youth could also be confirmed if they were recovered during an undercover law enforcement operation. The federal definition of child sex trafficking is used by the Collaborative, which includes any known exchange of sexual activity for something of value.

The “Suspected” status is used by the Collaborative to describe youths with a high likelihood of having experienced commercial sexual exploitation. Multiple professionals staff suspected youths to determine, based on their experience and the juvenile’s clinical, familial and criminal history, that the youth had likely experienced trafficking victimization.

**Child Sex Trafficking Cases by Year**

The number of child sex trafficking cases identified by the Collaborative increased 78.3% from 2021 to 2022.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>2021</b>	97	31.4%
<b>2022</b>	173	56%
<b>January – May 2023</b>	39	12.6%
<b>Total</b>	309	

**Child Sex Trafficking Victim Age**

Over the 2.5 years, the 309 victims of child sex trafficking ranged in age from six to 17 years old with an average of 15.1 years (*SD* = 1.6). There were three child victims of sex trafficking who were under age 10.

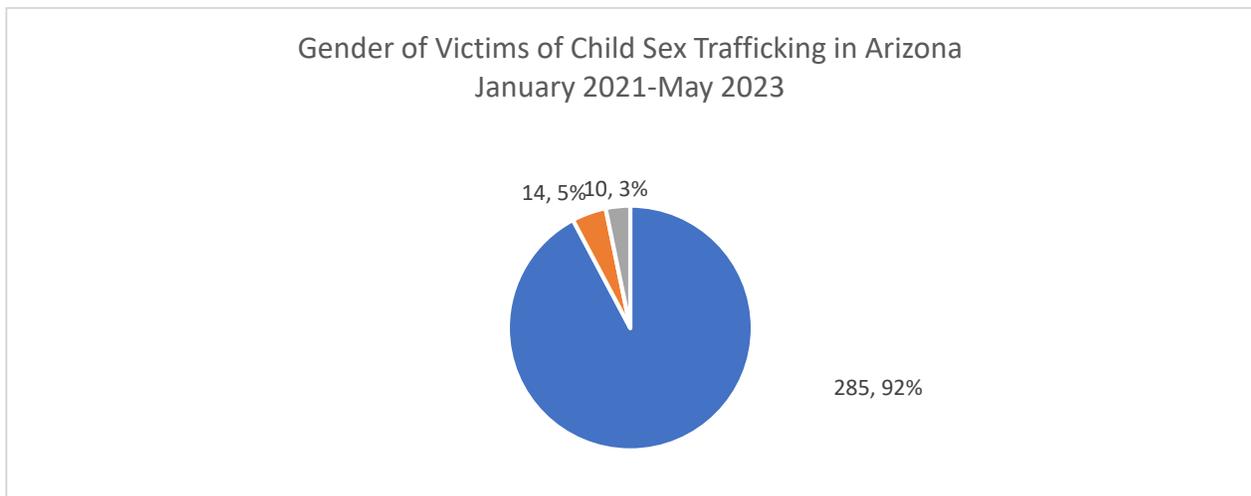
Age	#	%
6 -10	3	0.9%
11-13	34	11%
14-15	121	39.1%
16-17	151	49%
	309	100%

Over the first two years of the study, the average age of the victims of child sex trafficking dropped by 3.2 percent from 15.4 to 14.9.

Age	Average	Standard Deviation
<b>2021</b>	15.4	1.38
<b>2022</b>	14.9	1.7
<b>January – May 2023</b>	15.1	1.42

**Gender**

The victims of child sex trafficking were 92.2 percent (n =285) female, 4.5 percent (n = 14) male, and 3.2 percent (n = 10) transgender.



**Race**

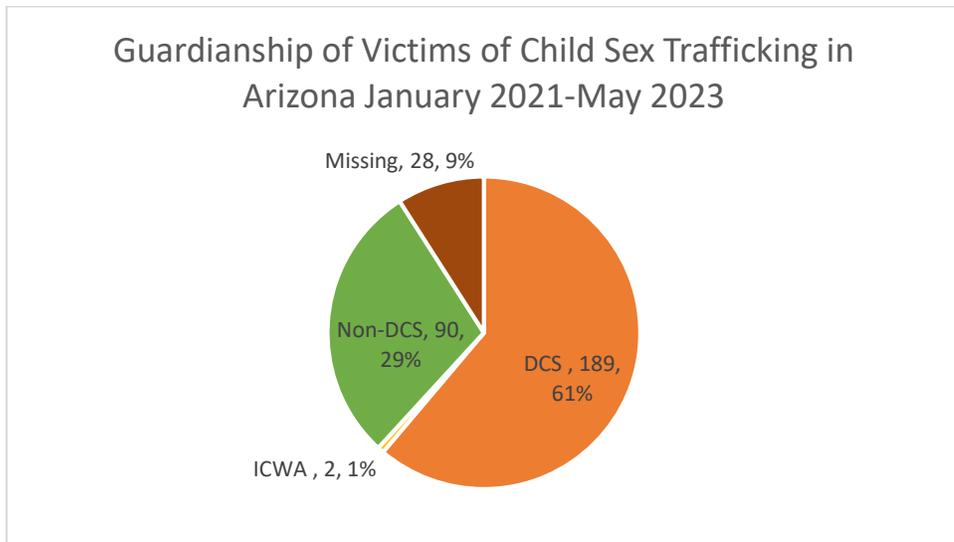
More than a third of the child sex trafficking victims were classified as Caucasian (n =114, 36.9%), and more than a quarter (n = 83, 26.9%) were identified as Hispanic. When combining mixed race, Native American, African American, and Hispanic- into a person of color category, more than half (n = 171,

55.4%) of the victims of child sex trafficking were identified as persons of color.

Race	#	%
Caucasian	114	36.9%
Hispanic	83	26.9%
African American	50	16.2%
Mixed race	30	9.7%
Missing	21	6.8%
Native American	8	2.6%
Other	2	0.6%
Asian	1	0.3%

**Child Guardian**

While the majority of the children were under the guardianship of the Arizona Department of Public Safety (n =189, 60.2%), nearly 30 percent (n= 90) were in their family’s custody.



Over the 2.5 years of the study, guardianship of the victims of sex trafficking continued to be between 60 and 66 percent with the Arizona Department of Child Safety.

Guardian	2021	2022	Jan 2023 - May 2023
Arizona Department of Child Safety	59 (60.8%)	104 (60.1%)	26 (66.7%)
Indian Child Welfare	0	2 (1.2%)	0
Non-DCS	18 (18.6%)	59 (34.1%)	13 (33.3%)
Missing	20 (20.6%)	8 (4.6%)	0
Total	97	173	39

## Referral Sources

The referral sources for victims of child sex trafficking data was only available from 2022 through May of 2023. There were multiple sources of how the information about the victim of child sex trafficking was given to the Collaborative. The most common referral source was behavioral health providers (n =49, 15.9%), while law enforcement referred 19 victims of child sex trafficking from January 2022 to May 2023. Notably, law enforcement increasingly referred victims to MIND24-7 (a behavioral health provider) who would then contact the Collaborative.

Referral Source	#	%
Behavioral Health Provider	49	15.9%
Arizona Department of Child Safety	47	15.2%
Juvenile Probation Officer	43	13.9%
Crisis Provider	25	8.1%
Law Enforcement	19	6.1%
Other provider	13	4.2%
Physical Health Provider	5	1.6%
Case Management	2	0.6%
Missing	104 (97 from 2021)	33.7%
<b>Total</b>		100%

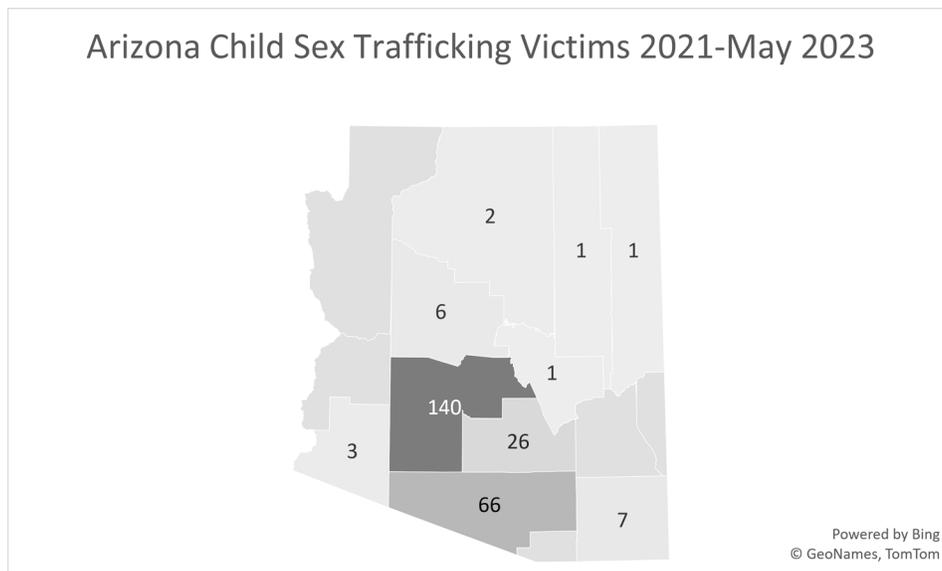
Over the 2.5 years, referral sources shifted with no referrals from law enforcement in the first five months of 2023.

Referral Source	2022	January – May 2023
Behavioral Health Provider	36 (20.8%)	13 (33.3%)
Arizona Department of Child Safety	36 (20.8%)	11 (28.2%)
Juvenile Probation Officer	36 (20.8%)	7 (17.9%)
Crisis Provider	22 (12.7%)	3 (7.7%)
Law Enforcement	19 (11%)	0
Other provider	13 (7.5%)	0
Physical Health Provider	3 (1.7%)	2 (5.1%)
Case Management	0	2 (5.1%)
Missing	7 (4%)	0
<b>Total</b>	173	39

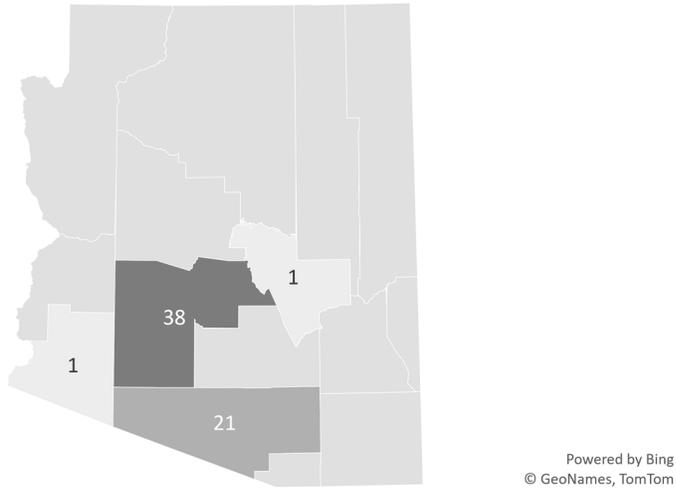
### Arizona Counties

During the 2.5 years of the study, victims of child sex trafficking were identified across the state of Arizona, from the most rural communities to urban communities. The victims of child sex trafficking were identified in 11 of the 15 counties in Arizona. Nearly half of the cases (45.3%) were from Maricopa County (the largest county in Arizona).

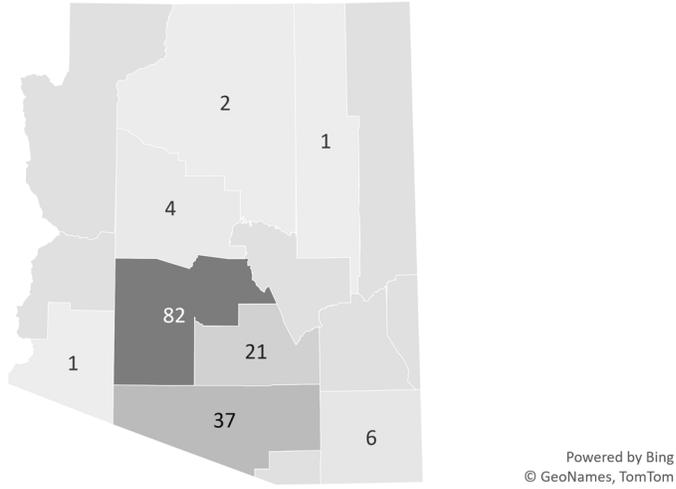
<i>County</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Apache</b>	1	0.3%
<b>Cochise</b>	7	2.3%
<b>Coconino</b>	2	0.6
<b>Gila</b>	1	0.3
<b>Graham</b>	0	0
<b>Greenlee</b>	0	0
<b>La Paz</b>	0	0
<b>Maricopa</b>	140	45.3%
<b>Mohave</b>	4	1.3%
<b>Navajo</b>	1	0.3%
<b>Pima</b>	66	21.4%
<b>Pinal</b>	26	8.4%
<b>Santa Cruz</b>	0	0
<b>Yavapai</b>	6	1.9%
<b>Yuma</b>	3	1%
<b>Missing</b>	42	13.6%



### Arizona Child Sex Trafficking Victims 2021 by County



### Arizona Child Sex Trafficking Victims by County 2022



County	2021	2022	January – May 2023
Apache			1 (2.6%)
Cochise		6 (3.5%)	1 (2.6%)
Coconino		2 (1.2%)	
Gila	1 (1%)		
Graham			
Greenlee			
La Paz			
Maricopa	38 (39.2%)	82 (47.4%)	20 (51.3%)
Mohave		3 (1.7%)	1 (2.6%)
Navajo		1 (0.6%)	
Pima	21 (21.6%)	37 (21.4%)	8 (20.5%)
Pinal		21 (12.1%)	5 (12.8%)
Santa Cruz			
Yavapai		4 (2.4%)	2 (5.1%)
Yuma	1 (1%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (2.6%)
Out of State		10 (5.8%)	
Missing	36 (37.1%)	6 (3.5%)	

### Victim Characteristics

The 309 victims of child sex trafficking were frequently reported as having run away from their home. There was a 40.1 percent increase in victims being reported as runaways from 2021 to 2022 (from 43.3% to 60.7%).

### Runaway History by Year

One of the most predictive behavior by youth who are sex trafficked is running away. In this study, 59.1 percent (n =183) of the victims of child sex trafficking were known to have runaway in the lifetime.

	2021	2022	January-May 2023
Yes	42 (43.3%)	105 (60.7%)	36 (92.3%)
Total	97	173	39

### Child Sexual Abuse History

A highly correlative issue to sex trafficking, child sexual abuse was reported by nearly one in five (18.8 %) of the victims of child sex trafficking.

Childhood Sexual Abuse	#	%
Yes	58	18.8%
Total	309	100%

### Substance Abuse History

Forty-five percent (n =139) of the victims of child sex trafficking were reported to have used drugs or alcohol. Reported use of substance abuse by the victims of child sex trafficking significantly increased by nearly 30 percent from 2021(36.1%) to 2022 (46.8%) and in in the first five months of 2023 (59%).

Substance Abuse	2021	2022	Difference (2021-2022)	January-May 2023
Yes	35 (36.1%)	81 (46.8%)	+29.6%	23 (59%)
Total	97	173		39

### Drug Type

Over the period of the study, the drugs used by the victims of child sex trafficking in Arizona changed significantly. Regarding Fentanyl, there was an increase of 125.6 percent from 2021 to 2022. Reported alcohol use also increased significantly (153.6%) from 2021 to 2022. Ecstasy use increased significantly (130%) from 2021 to 2022 but only included 5 participants. There was an interesting significant decrease (-27.8%) in use of opiates from 2021 to 2022, perhaps due to the increased availability of fentanyl. Also, a significant drop (-61.3%) in cigarette smoking and vaping (-71.4%) was noted between 2021 and 2022.

Drug Type	2021	2022	Difference (2021-2022)	January-May 2023	Totals
Alcohol	4 (4.1%)	18 (10.4%)	+153.6%	4 (10.3%)	26
Fentanyl	8 (8.2%)	32 (18.5%)	+125.6%	9 (23.1%)	49
Marijuana	21 (21.6%)	39 (22.5%)	+4.2%	4 (10.3%)	64
Methamphetamines	16 (16.5%)	27 (15.6%)	-5.4%	3 (7.7%)	45
Opiates	7 (7.2%)	9 (5.2%)	-27.8%	2 (5.1%)	18
Cocaine	4 (4.1%)	10 (5.8%)	+41.4%	2 (5.1%)	16
Nicotine	3 (3.1%)	2 (1.2%)	-61.3%	2 (2.6%)	6
Ecstasy	1 (1%)	4 (2.3%)	+130%	0	5
Percocet	1(1%)	2 (1.2%)	+20%	1 (2.6%)	4
Vape	2 (2.1%)	1 (0.6%)	-71.4%	1 (0.6%)	4
Xanax	1 (1%)	1 (0.6%)	-40%	2 (5.1%)	4
Pills	1(1%)	2 (1.2%)	+20%	1 (2.6%)	4

### Discussion

While this data is limited in scope, with a focus only on youth in managed care by one specific program in Arizona, there are numerous findings that may assist in planning for prevention, identification and intervention for child victims of sex trafficking. First, this is a large number of Arizona children impacted by sex trafficking. That 309 children were found to be sex trafficked in Arizona should send a message to our communities that prevention of this victimization should be a priority in schools, churches, medical practices and social services.

The overrepresentation of youth of color among the victims of child sex trafficking, exceeding 50 percent, raises concerns about the broader dynamics within child welfare systems. This disproportionality, not

uncommon in sex trafficking victimization research, points to limited opportunities for awareness and prevention in especially communities of color. The inadequacy is attributed to the scarcity of state and federal funds available for the direct prevention of sex trafficking activities and the systemic issues that contribute to the overrepresentation of youth of color in child welfare systems.

This study found that 29 percent (n =90) of the identified victims of sex trafficking were living in non-Department of Child Safety situations, i.e. with their family. Currently, there are no services for family members of child sex trafficking victims offered anywhere in Arizona. Services for families of child sex trafficking victims should include specifically trained family support specialists, mentors, educational liaisons, and family counselors.

Female child sex trafficking victims represented 92.2 percent of the victims in this study. It is prudent to regard this majority representation as neglectful of identifying male victims due to a lack of awareness of male victimization in much of the community responsible for identifying victims. Screenings used in settings of juvenile corrections are administered to all gendered youth but the screening may not be as effective in detection if male victims present with different risk factors and vulnerabilities.

Nearly one out of every five (18.8%) of the child sex trafficking victims identified as having a history of childhood sexual abuse. This link between sexual abuse and sex trafficking has been substantially discussed in the research literature, but few targeted prevention and awareness interventions exist to implement to prevent further victimization for victims of childhood sexual abuse.

This study found a large increase over the 2.5-year study period of drug use, with significant increases in victims of sex trafficking's use of alcohol and Fentanyl by 153 percent and 125 percent increases from 2021 to 2022 respectively. The use of drugs and alcohol is considered a risk factor that sex traffickers use to lure victims into sex trafficking situations.

## **Conclusions**

The number of child sex trafficking victims identified in Arizona during a 2.5-year period from 2021 to 2023 is heartbreaking. Victims were identified and referred for services from 11 of the 15 counties in Arizona, emphasizing the widespread nature of this issue in both rural and urban settings. Currently, Arizona does not mandate any sex trafficking awareness training for any professionals including school personnel, medical providers, or law enforcement. The Arizona Department of Child Safety provides an introductory course during onboarding of all new child welfare staff.

There are nine Human Trafficking Task Forces around Arizona working to bring awareness to human trafficking and to create teams to support child and adult victims. The Maricopa County Juvenile Court continues to support STRENGTH Court, focusing on victims of child sex trafficking in delinquency or dependency court to provide additional supports to the youth. The Arizona Office of the Court has been consistently working over the past three years to train and develop experts on child sex trafficking within each county's juvenile probation divisions. Trainings have been provided to juvenile court judges in multiple municipalities and judges' conferences. and juvenile detention staff in Pima, Pinal, Mohave and Maricopa Counties. Additionally, the Arizona Department of Child Safety has hosted a speaker series on identifying and supporting victims of child sex trafficking in 2023. Sex trafficking summits in Maricopa County, Pima County, and Coconino County in 2023 have educated over 600 professionals, including law enforcement, school personnel, juvenile court staff, and service providers, on awareness, detection

In conclusion, the identification of 309 victims during this period serves as a stark reminder that our collective efforts, though commendable, require continual growth and refinement. Arizona's children deserve not just reactive support but a proactive and robust preventive framework. Sustaining momentum in awareness, training, and support systems will be pivotal in ensuring a more resilient and responsive approach to the multifaceted challenges of child sex trafficking.

**List of specific agencies who have referred to the collaborative:**

Arizona Department of Child Safety  
Administrative Office of the Courts and Statewide Juvenile Probation  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Phoenix Police Department Human Exploitation and Trafficking Unit and Crimes Against Children Units  
Mesa Police Department Human Exploitation & Trafficking Squad  
Glendale Police Department Arizona  
Department of Public Safety  
Homeland Security  
Tucson Police Department  
Chandler Police Department  
Tempe Police Department  
Scottsdale Police Department

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