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END CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**THE IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TRAINING FOR  
EDUCATORS ON REPORTING AND VICTIM OUTCOMES:  
THE *TEXAS EDUCATOR INITIATIVE***

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# THE IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS ON REPORTING AND VICTIM OUTCOMES: THE *TEXAS EDUCATOR INITIATIVE*

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## ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse recognition and intervention training requirements for educators are rapidly being adopted by states and school districts throughout the nation. There are a plethora of home-grown programs being used to meet these requirements, none of which have data to demonstrate an impact on child-protective behaviors or child sexual abuse reports, substantiations, or interventions.

*Darkness to Light* offers the *Stewards of Children* program, an evidence-informed child sexual abuse prevention, recognition, and intervention educator training available nationally. More than one million people, including 250,000 educators, have completed the *Stewards of Children* program. The training has been shown to change child-protective behaviors but, until now, *Darkness to Light* has not had the data necessary to demonstrate an impact on child sexual abuse reports, substantiations, or interventions in cases of abuse.

In October 2015, *Darkness to Light* conducted a one-year follow-up survey of 79,544 Texas educators who had taken the *Stewards of Children* training, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, during the fall of 2014. The purpose of this survey was to determine if educators increased their reports of previously unrecognized child sexual abuse to authorities in the year after training.

In the year following training, educators increased their reports of child sexual abuse to authorities by 283% as compared with career averaged reports in the year prior to training. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) data was obtained to corroborate the results. An analysis of 2011 – 2015 data from DFPS allow for the possibility that there was increased reporting of cases of previously unrecognized abuse by educators from 2014 to 2015. More children were also substantiated as sexually abused during this time period.

The effectiveness of a training program such as *Stewards of Children* can be evaluated by whether more children receive intervention services as a result of that program. Intervention services have been shown to mitigate many of the negative effects of child sexual abuse.<sup>36</sup> The data allow for the possibility that more children received intervention services in 2014 and 2015 as a result of the *Texas Educator Initiative*. This implies that the *Stewards of Children* program, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, may be effective in creating positive outcomes for children.

# THE IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS ON REPORTING AND VICTIM OUTCOMES

## THE *TEXAS EDUCATOR INITIATIVE*

### BACKGROUND

#### ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is one of the most prevalent health problems with the most serious array of consequences that children face.

#### Prevalence

- About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>1</sup>

#### Disclosure

- Only about 34% of children disclose that they have been abused during childhood.<sup>38</sup> Even when children do disclose, it is often to a friend or family member who might not report it.<sup>39</sup>

#### Consequences

- The medical and social impacts of child sexual abuse on victims are enormous. Studies have found that 51% to 79% of sexually abused children exhibit psychological symptoms.<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup> Children who are sexually abused are at significantly greater risk for post-traumatic stress and other anxiety symptoms,<sup>35</sup> depression,<sup>17</sup> and suicide attempts.<sup>20</sup> Behavioral problems, including physical aggression, occur frequently among sexually abused children and adolescents.<sup>21</sup> Sexually abused children perform lower on psychometric tests measuring cognitive ability, academic achievement, and memory.<sup>22,23,24,25</sup> Girls who are sexually abused are 2.2 times as likely as non-abused peers to become teen mothers.<sup>26</sup>
- The damage does not stop when victims grow up. Adult survivors of child sexual abuse are nearly three times as likely to report substance abuse problems.<sup>27</sup> Adult women who were sexually abused as a child are more than twice as likely to suffer from depression.<sup>28</sup> Adult child sexual abuse survivors are almost twice as likely to be arrested for a violent offense.<sup>29</sup>
- Child sexual abuse impacts health. As adults, survivors of child sexual abuse are twice as likely to smoke, be physically inactive, and be severely obese.<sup>7</sup> They are 30% more likely to develop serious conditions like cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke and

heart problems.<sup>8</sup> Adult victims of child sexual abuse have higher rates of health-care utilization and report significantly more health complaints than their non-abused peers.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

- Child sexual abuse affects society as a whole. It is estimated that a single incident of child abuse costs \$210,000 over a victim's lifetime.<sup>34</sup>

## **A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: TRAIN EDUCATORS TO RECOGNIZE AND INTERVENE**

This report summarizes a project that suggests that child sexual abuse training for educators leads to significantly increased reports of abuse. Increases in reports, in turn, could lead to improved outcomes for sexually abused children.

Some people have suggested that the large upsurge in reports of child sexual abuse reports arising from this project mean that rates of abuse are increasing. This is not likely. In fact, rates of child sexual abuse reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies throughout the nation decreased by 4% from 2012 – 2013 (the most recent data available).<sup>42</sup> Currently, the majority of abuse cases are never identified and are never reported to the authorities.<sup>14,31,32</sup> Large, sudden increases in reports of abuse probably signify that a larger percentage of abused children are being recognized as victims.

There is other evidence that suggests educating adults about child sexual abuse may result in increased reporting of previously unrecognized abuse to the authorities. Letourneau, et al. (2015) found that there were significantly more reports of child sexual abuse to social service agencies in a region where a large segment of the adult population had received *Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children* child sexual abuse training, when compared to a demographically-similar community that had not received training.<sup>40</sup> A survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance found that having attended child abuse training had the single greatest effect on reporting. Those who attended training were more likely to have seen and reported abuse.<sup>41</sup>

Accordingly, one possible solution to the problem of child sexual abuse is to increase reports of abuse to the authorities so that more victims can receive intervention services. Many children who are recognized as victims of sexual abuse can and do receive intervention services that mitigate many of its negative effects.<sup>16</sup>

Training educators to recognize and intervene in cases of child sexual abuse has enormous potential for improving child well-being. Educators and youth-serving professionals are all mandated reporters. They are uniquely positioned to recognize and intervene in child sexual abuse. In fact, school personnel already identify more child abuse than any other profession or organizational type including hospitals and the police.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, up to 66% of educators do

not have specific training in child sexual abuse.<sup>13</sup> As of 2006, 24% of teachers had never received training in the mandated reporting requirements of their state.<sup>14</sup>

There is an emerging national movement among state legislatures to address child sexual abuse by training educators to prevent, recognize, and report it. Some states are mandating educator training (Texas, California, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Ohio, Connecticut, Oklahoma, Utah) and others are requiring that their State Departments of Education develop or adopt training programs to be made available to districts (Indiana, New York, North Carolina). Legislation requiring training is being considered in many other states.

While both the potential and opportunity for widespread educator training in child sexual abuse is enormous, up until now there has not been any direct evidence that training either prevents abuse or increases recognition and intervention.

Given the rapid proliferation of training programs and training opportunities, determining the effectiveness of child sexual abuse training for educators must be a priority.

### **STEWARDS OF CHILDREN TRAINING**

*Darkness to Light* protects children by providing parents, teachers, and caregivers with the training and tools they need to prevent, recognize, and intervene in child sexual abuse. *Darkness to Light's* signature *Stewards of Children* training program is a two-hour docu-training. The training is available in both a facilitator-led and online format, and is available in Spanish. To date, more than one million adults have completed the program.

*Stewards of Children* is widely used by educators. More than 250,000 educators throughout the nation have completed the training.

The *Stewards of Children* program has been shown to increase knowledge and change child protective behaviors.<sup>15</sup> While behavior changes are an acceptable proxy measure for assessing the effectiveness of a child sexual abuse program, there has been little data collected that demonstrates the direct benefits and outcomes of the *Stewards of Children* training, such as increased reporting and intervention.

### **ESTABLISHING EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

In an attempt to establish evidence of effectiveness, *Darkness to Light* recently conducted a large survey of educators one year after taking the *Stewards of Children* training, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training. The purpose of the survey was to determine if educators reported child sexual abuse to the authorities more often after training than before the training. This would likely signify that teachers are recognizing and intervening in more previously unrecognized cases of abuse.

## THE SURVEY

### THE SURVEY: DESIGN

During the 2014 – 2015 school year, *Darkness to Light* provided online *Stewards of Children* training to 87,841 Texas educators. This training was available as a stand-alone program, or could be combined with Texas DFPS Mandated Reporter Training. This project was named the *Texas Educator Initiative*. Most of those taking the training were teachers, but some school counselors, administrative staff, and other school personnel were included.

79,644 of these educators completed the *Stewards of Children* online child sexual abuse training from late August through mid-December 2014. Because the training was conducted online, *Darkness to Light* has access to e-mail addresses for these trainees.

From October 20, 2015 until November 5, 2015, *Darkness to Light* conducted a one-year e-mail follow-up survey with the 79,644 educators that took the training from August 2014 through December 2014.

The trainees received an e-mail asking them to take a survey and enabling them to register for \$1,000 in gift certificates from Amazon.com. The e-mail provided a link to a SurveyMonkey three-question survey.

How many years **before** you took the *Stewards of Children* training did you interact directly with children in your job?

How many times **before** you took the *Stewards of Children* training did you report a suspicion of child sexual abuse to the police, a social service agency, or a school administrator?

How many times **since** you took the *Stewards of Children* training have you reported a suspicion of child sexual abuse to the police, a social service agency, or a school administrator?

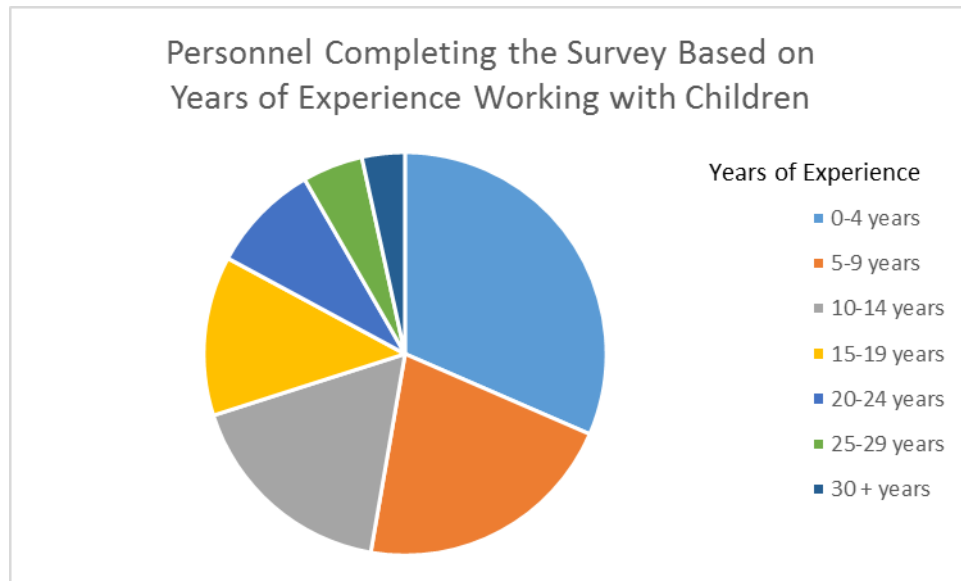
3,800 individuals completed the survey. 263 provided incomplete information and were removed from the dataset, leaving 3,537 valid responses. This is a 4.4% response rate.

In determining the estimated number of reports of child sexual abuse in the year prior to taking training, an average of the number of reports made over the career of the educator was used. This was done in order to moderate one-year data spikes that might skew results.

After administering this survey, it was determined that this method of calculating prior-year pre-training reporting rates was possibly flawed. This is because there have probably been changes in educator reporting standards over the years. It can be assumed that educators with

many years of experience had a lower abuse reporting rate early in their careers. Since estimated reporting in the year prior to training was an average of reports over an entire career, this suggests that the estimated number of pre-training reports from educators with many years of experience may have been underestimated.

This effect is partially mitigated by the fact that 59% of educators completing the survey have ten years' experience or less in working directly with children. 37% have five years' experience or less.



## THE SURVEY: RESULTS

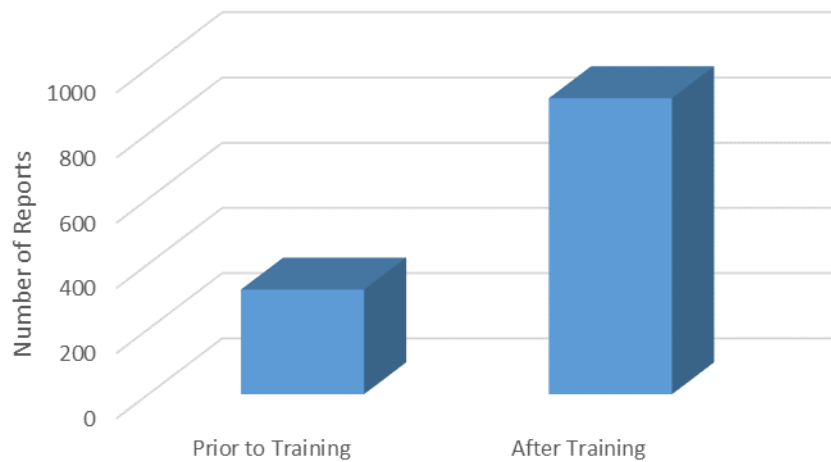
The 3,537 participants completing the survey reported that they:

- Made a career-averaged 321 reports of child sexual abuse to the authorities in the year prior to the training
- Made 908 reports in the year following the training

This is a 283% increase in reports of child sexual abuse to authorities in the year after training.



Child Sexual Abuse Reports to the Authorities



While there are several factors in the design of the survey that might cause this statistic to be adjusted downward if the project is replicated with a different methodology of determining pre-reporting rates, there is no doubt that there was a significant self-reported increase in the reporting of child sexual abuse to the authorities by Texas educators in the wake of training.

#### THE SURVEY: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

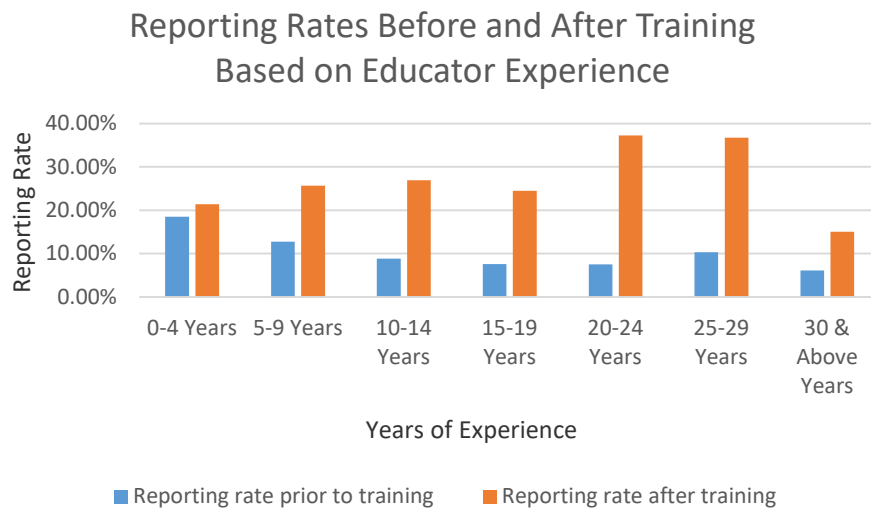
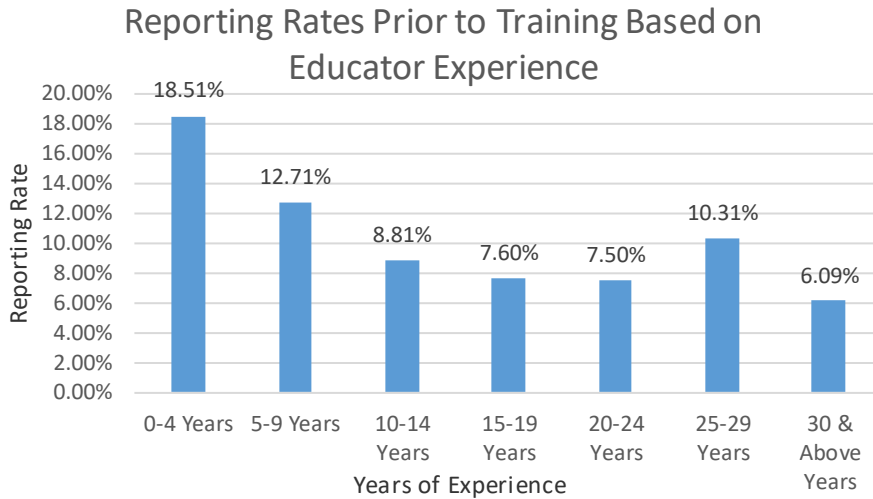
It is remarkable that educators self-reported making nearly three times as many reports of child sexual abuse in the year after the *Stewards of Children* training, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, when compared to an estimate of reports made in the year prior to training. This suggests a deficit in knowledge and/or motivation among educators prior to training. The results suggest that training increases the willingness of educators to report cases.

An analysis of reporting levels and trends prior to and after training was also conducted. This analysis implies that newly-prepared educators (0-4 years of experience) are significantly more knowledgeable about child sexual abuse and/or motivated to report prior to training than teachers with more experience.

However, the number of years of experience had an opposite effect on rates of reporting after educators took training. Educators with five to twenty-nine years of experience reported rates of child sexual abuse significantly above the rates of educators with less experience. However, educators of all experience levels reported increases in reporting rates after training.

The 283% increase in reports of child sexual abuse to authorities in the year after training may be somewhat diminished if the effect of possibly lower pre-training reporting rates from educators with many years of experience is removed. For instance, if you remove educators with more than 10 years of experience from the dataset, there would be a 114% increase in reports of child sexual abuse to authorities in the year after training. Moreover, if every

educator participating in the survey had a pre-training reporting rate equal to educators with only 0 – 4 years of experience (18.5%), there would have been a 30% increase in the reporting of child sexual abuse to the authorities after training.



## **CORROBORATION**

### **CORROBORATING THE RESULTS**

By extrapolating survey results, the 79,544 educators taking the training should have made at least 7,219 reports of child sexual abuse per year to authorities prior to training. They could have made up to 20,446 reports in the year following training.

A significant number of these reports would have been made to law enforcement agencies. However, law enforcement data is not being used to verify the survey results because each law enforcement agency maintains its data separately, making it difficult to access.

Some of these reports would have been made to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Even though DFPS would handle only a portion of reports made by educators participating in the project, an increase of the magnitude revealed by the survey should be detectable.

Accordingly, DFPS data was obtained in order to verify the results of the survey.

### **DFPS DATA**

DFPS maintains data in two categories that could have been impacted by the *Texas Educator Initiative*. These are the number of reports (allegations) of child sexual abuse and the number of substantiated (confirmed) cases of child sexual abuse.

It should be noted that the Texas DFPS data year spans September 1 – August 31. The most recent data available from DFPS measured cases of abuse through August 31, 2015. The *Texas Educator Initiative* data collection year ended October 20, 2015. Therefore, some of the information reported through the survey are not reflected in the Texas DFPS data. Accordingly, the 2014 - 2015 number of DFPS reports and substantiations are lower than the actual number of reports made by educators during their project period.

*The years referenced in the following statistics refer to the Texas DFPS data years.*

### **DFPS DATA: DID DFPS REPORTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE INCREASE?**

It is likely that large increases in reporting rates are due to greater reporting of previously unrecognized child sexual abuse, rather than increases in the prevalence of abuse. The results of this survey would be corroborated if there are sudden and scientifically significant increases in reporting from 2014 to 2015.

- From 2014 to 2015, DFPS reports of child sexual abuse increased 11.2%. This contrasts with an overall drop of 12.0% from 2011 - 2014.

**DFPS DATA: DID DFPS REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE INCREASE DISPROPORTIONATELY IN RELATION TO REPORTS OF OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE?**

- In the 2014 - 2015 data year, the increase in child sexual abuse reports was responsible for 28% of the total increase in reports for all forms of abuse, yet sexual abuse consistently represents only 17% of total reports for all forms of abuse.

**DFPS DATA: IS THE VOLUME OF INCREASES IN DFPS REPORTS PROPORTIONATE TO ESTIMATED INCREASES IN REPORTS RESULTING FROM THIS PROJECT?**

DFPS only accepts reports on abuse perpetrated by family members or by those with continuing access to a child. Law enforcement agencies accept reports on abuse by acquaintances, strangers, and all other categories of perpetrators. When reports are made to the wrong agency, callers are referred or reports are transferred to the correct agency.

About 33% of sexual abuse is perpetrated by family, 58% by acquaintances, and 9% by strangers.<sup>33</sup> Based on these statistics, about 70% of educator reports should be handled by law enforcement and 30% should be handled by DFPS.

Using this “formula” to develop estimates, Texas DFPS should have been receiving at least 2,386 reports of sexual abuse per year by educators prior to the training and up to 6,132 reports per year after training, or a maximal increase of 3,746 reports from October 2014 to October 2015.

- If educator reports between October 2014 and October 2015 increased by up to 3,796, as hypothesized, there should be a corresponding increase in DFPS figures. Child sexual abuse reports made to DFPS actually increased by 4,961 between the 2014 and 2015 data years.
- There are variables in evaluating the number of additional reports coming from educators.
  - Because the method for calculating prior-year pre-training reporting rates among teachers with many years of experience likely produced rates that were artificially low, the increase in anticipated educator reports is probably overstated.
  - The proportion of reports expected to be made to law enforcement and DFPS could be incorrect.

- Teachers could have reported to school administrators rather than to DFPS or the police. In turn, administrators could have chosen not to report. While illegal, this is still known to be a common practice throughout the nation. The survey question generating post-training allegation data asked for the number of reports made to the “authorities,” including school administrators, social service agencies, and law enforcement.
- More than one teacher or administrator could have reported abuse for an individual child.

### **DFPS DATA: CONFIRMED OR SUBSTANTIATED CASES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

If a case of child sexual abuse is labeled as unsubstantiated, it does not mean that sexual abuse has not occurred or that the report is false. It means that the case cannot be proved. It is very difficult to prove cases of child sexual abuse. Many believe that a large number of genuine cases of sexual abuse are not substantiated. In Texas, about 12 - 13% of reports of child sexual abuse are typically substantiated.

### **DFPS DATA: IS THE VOLUME OF INCREASES IN DFPS SUBSTANTIATIONS IN PROPORTION TO INCREASES IN ESTIMATED REPORTS RESULTING FROM THIS PROJECT?**

Given the survey results and the increase in DFPS reports in 2015, the expectation is that the number of reports substantiated by DFPS investigation will increase proportionately. This expectation is not entirely borne out by DFPS data.

- From 2011 – 2015, the number of reports of sexual abuse to DFPS was not consistently in proportion with the number of cases substantiated.
- In 2014 - 2015, the *percentage* of sexual abuse reports confirmed by DFPS investigation decreased 7.1%. This means that, despite large increases in reported cases, a much lower percentage of these cases were substantiated by DFPS.
- Despite a decrease in substantiation rates, the *number of substantiated cases* of sexual abuse did increase by 576 from 2014 – 2015. The large increase in reports moderated the effects of lower substantiation rates.

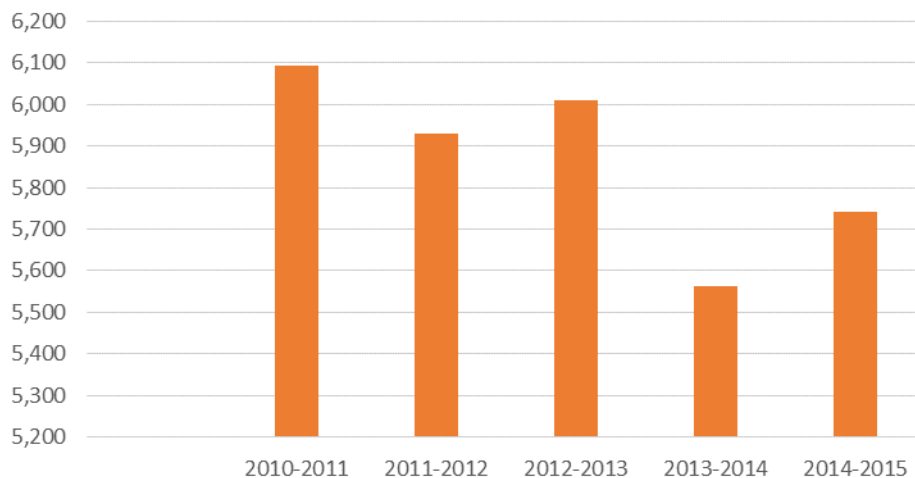
Some possible reasons that substantiation rates decreased by such a large degree in 2014 - 2015 include:

- The law requires that educators report *reasonable suspicions* of child abuse, not just *known* cases. Because of education about the law, educators participating in the *Texas Educator Initiative* may have reported more suspicions of abuse in the year following training than in prior years. In the past, these educators may have confined reports to known cases of abuse.
- The sudden, large increase in reports across all forms of abuse (6.3%) might have taxed DFPS staff resources. This could have inadvertently raised the threshold for DFPS investigation and substantiation.

Reports of Sexual Abuse to DFPS



DFPS Confirmed Sexual Abuse Victims



**DFPS DATA: ARE THE DFPS DATA RESULTS STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT?**

While the DFPS data from 2011 – 2014 clearly illustrate trends, fluctuations for all forms of abuse were substantial in 2011 - 2015. It is important to note that 2014 - 2015 results may reflect fluctuations rather than changes attributable to the training project. Because of a history of large year-to-year fluctuations in DFPS data, the increases in child sexual abuse reports in 2014 - 2015 are not considered statistically significant.

Year	Total Reports	% Total Reports Confirmed	# Total Confirmed Victims	Reports Sexual Abuse	Sexual Abuse as % of Total Reports	Confirmed Sexual Abuse Victims	Sexual Abuse as % of Total Confirmed	% of Sexual Abuse Reports Confirmed
2014-2015	290,491	23.00%	66,892	49,456	17.02%	5,742	8.60%	11.61%
2013-2014	273,091	24.40%	66,572	44,495	16.29%	5,563	8.40%	12.50%
2012-2013	258,995	25.10%	66,398	44,024	17.00%	6,009	9.00%	13.65%
2011-2012	275,959	23.30%	64,366	46,041	16.68%	5,931	9.20%	12.88%
2010-2011	297,971	22.40%	65,948	50,577	16.97%	6,094	9.20%	12.05%

## CONCLUSIONS

### DOES STEWARDS OF CHILDREN TRAINING LEAD TO DIRECT POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?

It is not possible to determine if any or all of the DFPS child sexual abuse data shifts are attributable to the *Texas Educator Initiative*. However, when coupled with the survey results, the DFPS increases in reports allow for the possibility that the *Stewards of Children* training, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, is effective in increasing reporting. The DFPS data also allows for the possibility that training leads to additional children who are confirmed as sexual abuse victims.

Children who are substantiated as sexually abused are often referred to community intervention resources such as Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs). The intervention services that CACs and other community resources provide can mitigate many of the negative effects of child sexual abuse. Proper intervention can lead to the best possible outcomes for many victims of child sexual abuse.<sup>16</sup>

In short, increased reports of child sexual abuse and resulting substantiations do suggest more intervention services for victims. Intervention services imply positive outcomes for victims.

Accordingly, the data allow for the possibility that the *Stewards of Children* training for educators, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, leads to direct positive outcomes for children.

## **COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING**

*Darkness to Light* was able to provide online training to 79,644 Texas educators for approximately \$3 apiece. It cost approximately \$238,932 to train the entire group.

Self-reported data from the one-year post-training survey show that 1 out of 3.9 trained educators will make a report to the authorities in the year after training. If this survey data is accurate, it costs \$11.70 to generate an additional report of child sexual abuse. If 7% of child sexual abuse reports made to CPS agencies are substantiated (a national estimate based on National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System data) it will cost about \$167 for educators to identify a CPS-confirmed victim of child sexual abuse.

Experts estimate that a single incident of child abuse costs \$210,000 over a victim's lifetime.<sup>34</sup> By spending \$167 to recognize and intervene early in the cycle of child sexual abuse, many of the negative effects of the abuse can be mitigated. This not only benefits the child, it creates substantial savings for society.

## **SUMMARY**

The survey conducted as part of *Darkness to Light's Texas Educator Initiative* suggests that child sexual abuse training for educators, alone or in tandem with state-specific mandated reporter training, produces significantly more reports of abuse to the authorities.

While the results of the survey cannot be statistically corroborated by DFPS data, large increases in reports of sexual abuse made to DFPS in 2014 - 2015 allow for the possibility that educator training was responsible for more reports, substantiations, and intervention services.

Increased intervention services for child victims of sexual abuse imply improved, direct positive outcomes for children.

This is the first and only evidence that child sexual abuse training may produce direct, positive outcomes for children.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

These survey results produce a number of important research questions.

- Can these results be replicated through a scientifically rigorous study?



- Are these results specific to the *Stewards of Children* program or do other training programs produce the same results?
- How much of the increase in reporting is due to the *Stewards of Children* program, and how much is due to state-specific mandated reporter training?
- Who are the children being identified as victims? Do the demographics of the children identified after educator training match the demographics of children identified prior to training?
- Under what conditions is training most effective? Is mandated training as effective as self-chosen training? Do older, more experienced teachers benefit more than younger, less experienced teachers?
- Do social service and law enforcement agencies consistently provide services that actually produce positive outcomes for children?

These results demand that this survey and evaluation be replicated, preferably as a randomized controlled trial.

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