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HOME Seeks to Close Service Gap in Orlando, One of Nation's Highest Areas of Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Minors

Orlando, FL (February 15, 2013) — Looking to close a significant service gap for sexually exploited and trafficked youth, the House of Mentoring and Empowerment (HOME) is opening its doors in Orlando on March 1, 2013. Orlando has the second-highest rates of sex trafficking in the country but no specific organization to meet the needs of victims exploited in these situations.

Seeing the need to provide a safe haven and resources for victims of the commercial sex industry — particularly minors caught in a vicious cycle of homelessness, prostitution, and abuse — founder Dr. Monica Mendez is working to fill this service-gap in the internationally renowned tourist mecca.

“Because we’re known as a great city for family entertainment and recreation, we often overlook what else the tourist industry brings to Orlando,” says Dr. Mendez, an expert on gender violence and abuse. “In bringing HOME to the city, we want to provide a direct service to youth who have run away or have been otherwise caught up in the brutal sex trade.”

HOME will provide shelter, ID acquisition assistance, job training, and counseling to victims. In conjunction with government agencies, including Orange County, the City of Orlando, Osceola County, and their respective foster and child care agencies, HOME will provide follow-up, development, and aid to survivors.

Additionally, HOME will work in partnership with existing organizations and shelters to deal with victims of exploitation that overlap in domestic and child abuse, prostitution, and homeless youth cases.

“It’s crucial to provide basic services and follow-up to these young victims as soon as possible,” adds Dr. Mendez. “Often, even the lack of an identification document will make it impossible for them to seek out legitimate help or employment, thereby ensuring they’ll be stuck in a vicious cycle.”

HOME’s mission is to educate and empower runaway, sexually exploited and trafficked youth by providing them with services, guidance, resources, and options that will help them exit homelessness and the commercial sex industry. Please visit our website at: www.homefl.org

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