



Days Numbered For Child Prostitute Help Program?

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ATLANTA -- Organizers of a program that helps find and take child prostitutes off the streets say their days are numbered.

The money the state gave them to operate in the coming year is now off the table, leaving potentially dozens of at risk women with no money.

As a girl, Paulette Clarke says she was giddy, a people pleaser, always in pursuit of a good time. But as a teen, fun meant something different.

"They said this girls' a partyer -- she likes to have fun. The image portrayed, guys can look at you this way -- hey they liked me; I liked them, not knowing what the ride was entailing," she said.

Clarke eventually found herself on the streets as a prostitute. It's a similar story for Sharon Saffold -- who left home at 14 after being pregnant.

"You try to figure out, how am I gonna survive, eat, keep from getting arrested and sent to foster care or back to my mom's house," she said. "I need an adult who can shelter you. And in my case, that was a 23-year-old drug dealer."

Kathy McCullough is with the organization called A Future Not A Past -- which helps young women just like Clarke and Saffold.

"These are not easy victims," McCullough said. "Adults in their lives betrayed them in one way or another."

Specifically McCullough and her colleagues find these exploited girls and get them into an assessment program for physical and mental health to help them rebuild their lives. Since June, they've helped 30 victims.

It's work that was expected to continue when the legislature gave them more than \$500,000 for the coming year. But that money is now gone in a budget shortfall -- meaning some will have no way out of a life Clarke said she wouldn't wish on anyone.

"I went all the way to the bottom -- all the way to the bottom with no help," she said.

Members of the Juvenile Justice Fund and others are now lobbying the governor's office to free up at least some funds. As it stands, they don't have the money to take in any additional girls.

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