



Annual Report 2018

“I know now, more than I ever have in my life, that I am worthy of love. I know that I am a smart and capable woman, that I am a good mother and that I can show my son a better life by example. He will see me grow and thrive and be compassionate and loving and he will live his life by following the path I set for us right now.”

- *Amora, Survivor*

In Fiscal Year 2018, REST served over 620 victims and survivors of sexual exploitation.

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REST Principles of Care

Everyone is worthy of love.

We believe that every person is made in the image of a beautiful Creator, is bestowed with inherent dignity and worth, and is undeniably deserving of love. Yet, harm meets all of us in different ways and plants seeds of shame that tell us we are unworthy. For exploited individuals, this shame often becomes paralyzing. However, when met with a non-judgmental, fully accepting and unconditionally caring love, the shame gets unraveled, hopes are restored, and dreams are reactivated. Effective services are essential, but a community that offers an authentic, healing love makes an incredible difference.

Individualized

We understand that each person is different, with unique needs, strengths, and culture. We tailor our services and interactions to the individual, so that they are more invested in the relationships, the programs, and their goals.

Relationship-Based

It is often a harmful relationship that leads to exploitation. Therefore, it often takes a trustworthy and consistent relationship to give someone the courage to walk away from their trafficker. Building trust, safety, belonging, and a supportive community are essential components to the intervention and restoration programs within REST.

Strengths-Based

Survivors of sexual exploitation have consistently received the message that they have no value apart from selling their body. Yet, we see incredible strengths that have

enabled survivors to endure the harshest of circumstances and navigate constant threats of danger. So rather than focusing on deficits, we celebrate and build off of their strengths, skills, hopes, and dreams.

Trauma-Informed

Survivors of trafficking have experienced many layers of trauma, so the way we interact and care for them must start with an understanding of the effects of trauma. We know that the brain holds trauma responses for a long time and, therefore we may see trauma responses even when someone is no longer in danger. Knowing this, we craft our services in a way that accommodates for trauma responses and provides an environment that is truly conducive to healing.

Self-Determination and Empowerment

In the world of exploitation, choices are often taken away. We seek to restore choice and build self-efficacy. Rather than choosing for someone, we help uncover their goals and work together to develop a plan that matches their unique strengths and culture. We help survivors think through options, consider possible outcomes, and identify the choices most aligned with their goals. When they believe in their own ability to make positive changes in their lives, they are more equipped to face life's challenges in the future.

Faith Integration

We are a Christian organization that desires to offer respectful services to individuals of all faith backgrounds. Our faith shows most strongly in our values of providing unconditional care, focusing on relationships, recognizing strengths, minimizing barriers, and walking with our clients on their journey to freedom, rather than acting as “saviors,” or attempting to proselytize. We don't require faith engagement at REST. Instead, we simply offer a healing environment where survivors are free to incorporate their own spiritual beliefs or exploration in whatever way is comfortable for them.



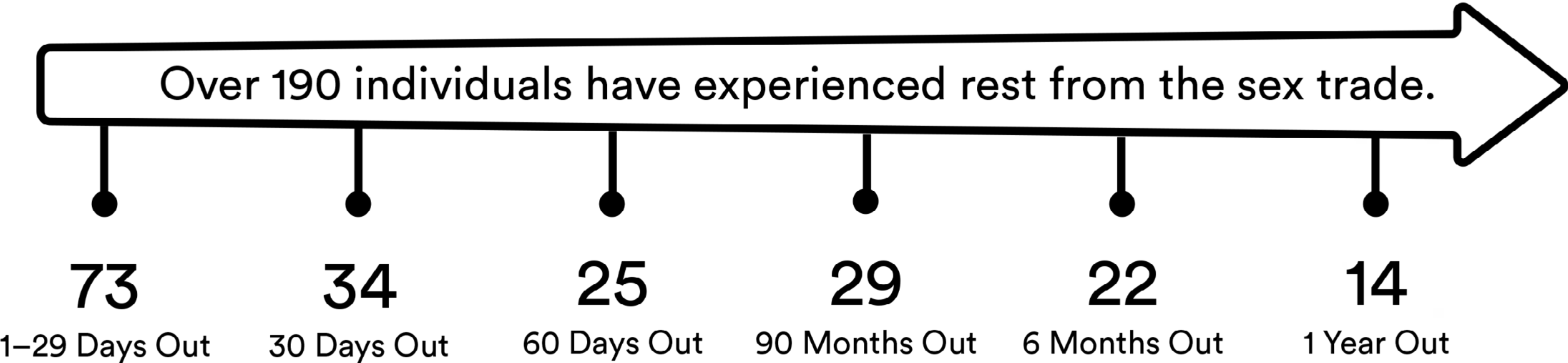
In the Seattle area...

- There are an estimated 2,000–3,000 women, men, and children being exploited in the sex trade.
- 300–500 of them are youth.
- Over half of exploited individuals in our community are unstably housed—they have no safe place to sleep or keep their belongings.
- There are 19 beds in the Seattle area dedicated for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation—13 of them are at REST.

We know that survivors in our community can often take years to stabilize after being exploited in the sex trade due to the extreme trauma, making the need for adequate local resources great.

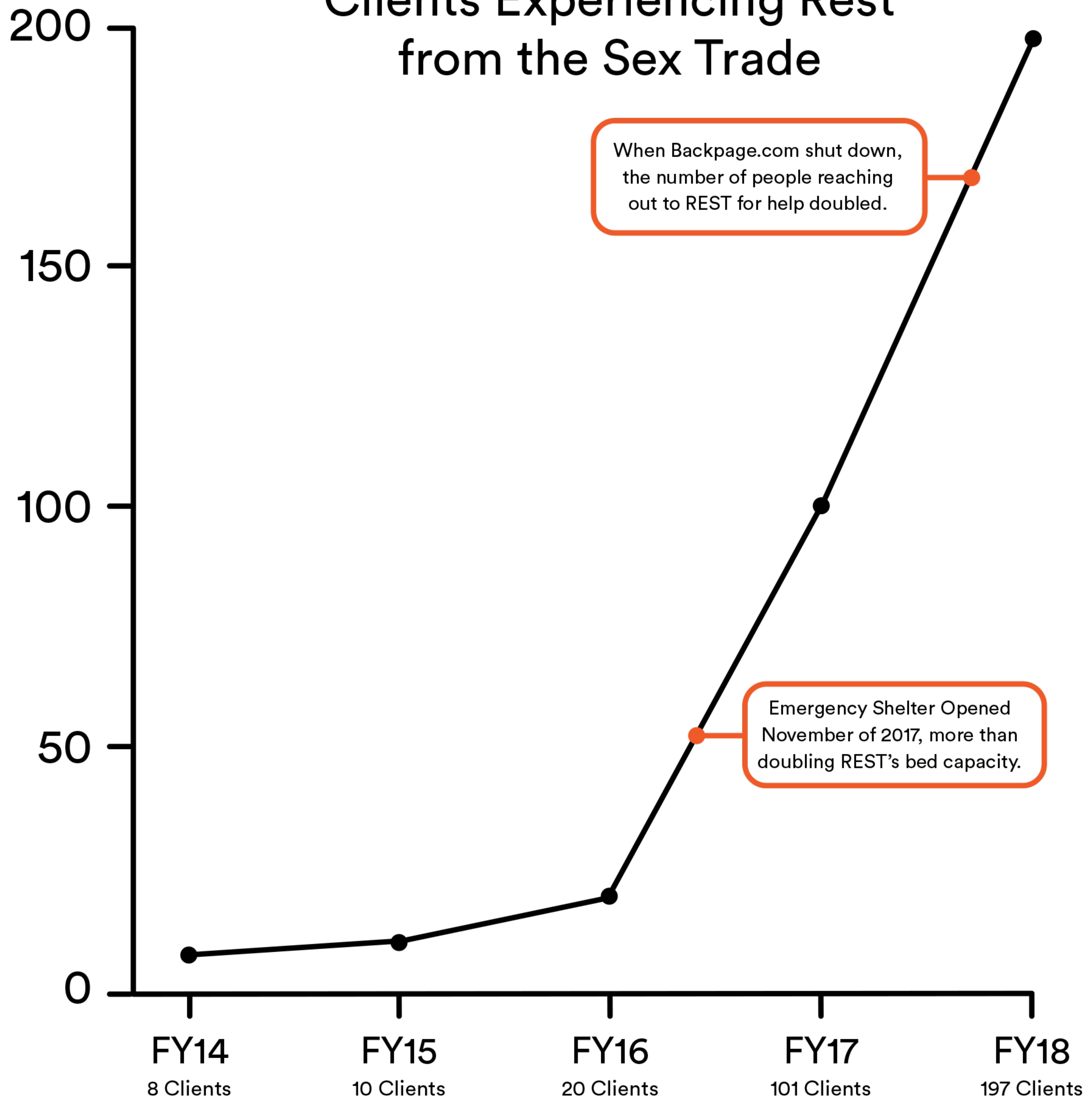
The journey out of the sex trade...

Exiting the sex trade is a journey. Most survivors try to leave the sex trade several times before leaving for good, and even then it can take years to stabilize after enduring the extreme trauma of the sex trade. Factors such as homelessness, mental health and chemical dependency issues, trauma bonding, PTSD, and others can make exiting the sex trade an extraordinary challenge.



Through a trauma-informed and holistic approach to care and services, REST was able to help 197 individuals experienced 235 interruptions to life in the sex trade in fiscal year 2018. This year, 14 of them reached the milestone of at least one year out of the sex trade.

Clients Experiencing Rest from the Sex Trade





Amora

Amora was a teenager growing up in the Midwest when her father passed away. After his death, she went to live with her mother, who was mentally ill and abusive. Life became chaotic.

She moved to Washington in 2015, fleeing a domestic abuse situation, but the pattern continued. With no support in her new city, and having recently been unjustly kicked out of a shelter, she faced homelessness and being forced to place her son in foster care. At the same time, a smooth-talking friend of hers had been calling from jail, telling her how she could make some money to keep her son off the streets.

“Without many good options, I chose the one that kept my son with me, safe. Every choice I made after that was for survival—mine and his.”

By the winter of 2015, she was being exploited in the sex trade. Pimps would approach her, the new woman in town with no support, and tell her about the dreams that prostitution could fulfill—if she had the right “help.” They didn’t tell her about the dehumanizing stripping of her rights and autonomy, or the consequences if she failed to obey once she was under their control.

Amora knew what was happening wasn’t okay, and that both she and her son were not safe. She took the initiative to get in touch with REST’s Outreach Coordinator Jackie.

“Every time I called, she would answer, and would remind me that I started this for my son, and that this was not the life I wanted for him and that I deserved better.”

Even as the hope for herself and her son grew, she encountered countless barriers to leaving that life. She got a job, but was quickly fired because her employer found the ads of her online that had been used to connect with sex buyers. She attempted to leave many times—but was caught by her pimp at a hotel or the airport. She even made it to safety a couple of times—but the trauma, abuse, and many barriers she encountered kept her returning to the life.

In January of 2018, Amora was ready to make big changes in her life. She moved into the REST House. “By being in the REST House,” she said, “And knowing that I have a year of sleeps in a safe place, where I am supported, loved, encouraged, and allowed to heal, I’ve been able to accomplish so much.” Today, she has graduated from trauma therapy, is employed full time in an apprenticeship and pursuing a license in her field, has built a team of support both inside and outside of REST, and is spending her first Christmas with her son in two years. Her journey to stability isn’t over yet, however—she’s still looking for safe, affordable housing for her and her son. The journey out of a life of exploitation is a long and arduous one that requires a great deal of strength, courage, and hard work—but it all starts with experiencing love and finding hope for the future.

“I couldn’t dream about loving myself the way I do now or believing in myself and how far I’ve come... I know now, more than I ever have in my life, that I am worthy of love. I know that all the things the men who exploited me told me were lies, lies they told me to keep me in a position of obedience. I know that I am a smart and capable woman, that I am a good mother and I can show my son a better life by example... I learned to love myself and dream about my future.”

- *Amora, Survivor*



Rest House

The REST House is a six-bed, one-year restorative program where women who are committed to exiting the sex trade can go to help them begin the healing process, and stabilize as they begin to dream about and plan for their future. We know that the longer a guest stays at the house, the more likely she is to leave to safe and stable housing, and stay clean, sober, and out of the sex trade.

- In FY18 at the REST House, we provided more bed nights and operated with a higher occupancy rate than ever before.
- 12 residents stayed 1,852 nights.
- The house was at 85% occupancy.
- 4 of the 7 women who moved out have maintained stable housing.



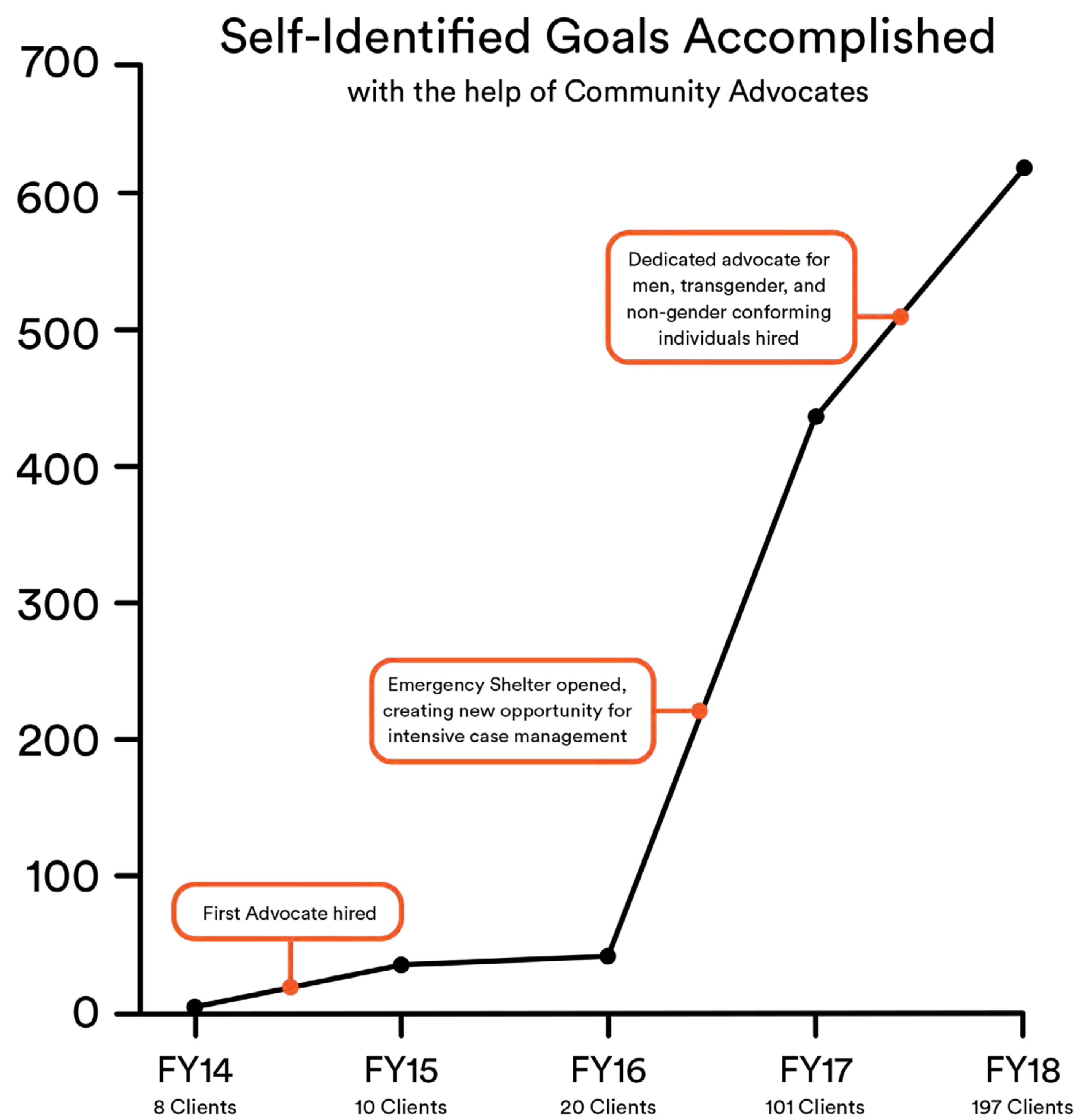
REST Emergency Receiving Center

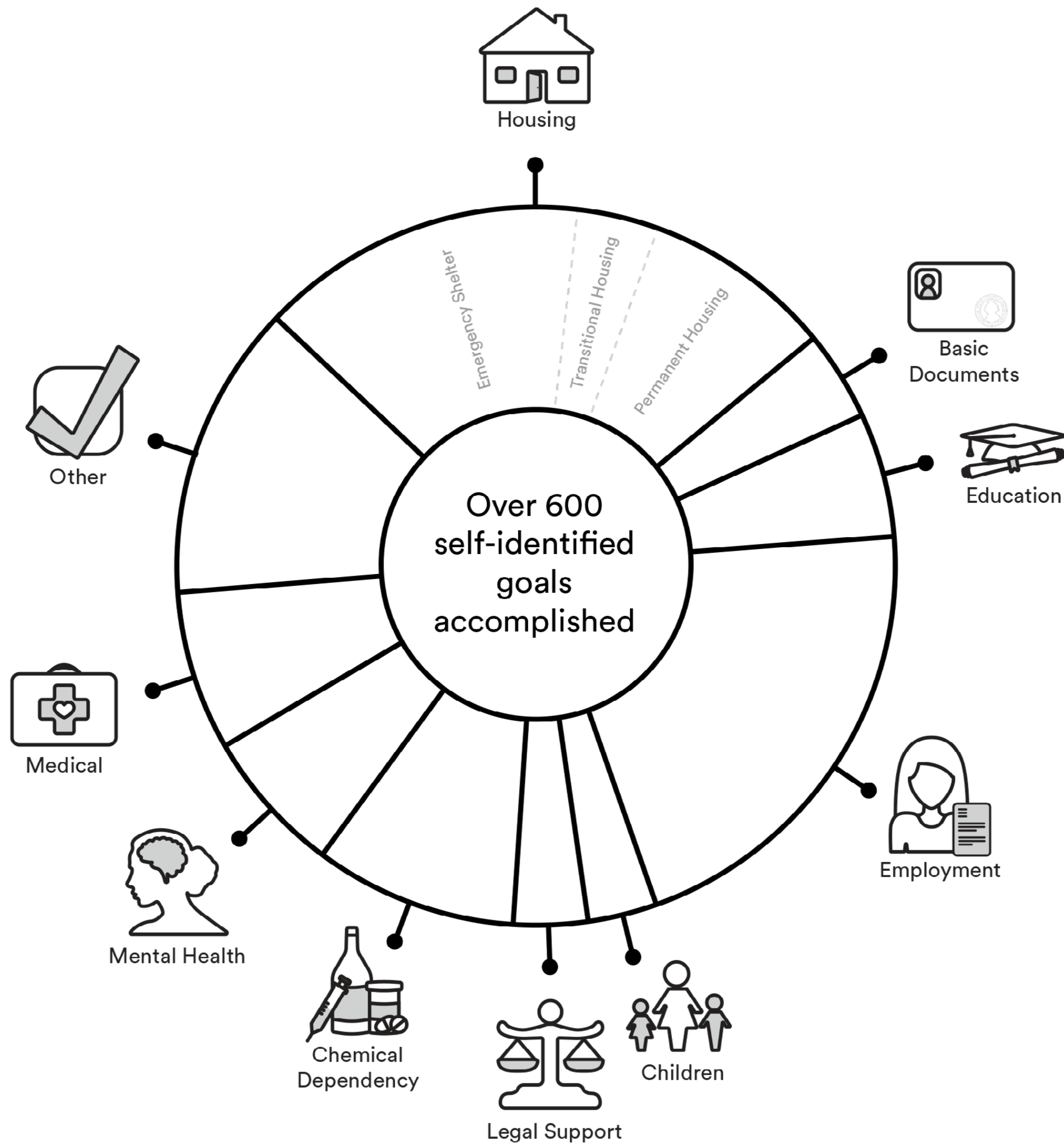
The REST Emergency Receiving Center (ERC) program includes our emergency shelter and drop-in center where we provide hot meals, a survivor support group and activities, and a place to meet with our Community Advocate Team. The REST Shelter is a seven-bed low-barrier shelter for adult female-identified individuals who have experienced the sex trade. It was opened in November of 2016 to meet tremendous demand for trauma-informed emergency shelter, and in the first full year the shelter was open—it operated at 93% occupancy.

- 237 individuals visited the Drop-In Center 2,427 times.
- 93 Drop-In guests participated in groups, activities, and workshops 471 times.
- 73 women were guests at our shelter.
- 2,372 nights of rest were provided at our shelter.
- 13 shelter guests connected to stable housing directly from our shelter.

Community Advocacy

Our Community Advocate team exists to provide support and empowerment to survivors of the sex trade as they dream and plan for their futures, and pursue their own self-set goals. Advocates provide trauma-informed, wraparound case management to REST clients as they seek to access housing, employment, mental health and chemical dependency services, education, and a wide array of other goals that enable our clients to achieve and sustain a life out of the sex trade.





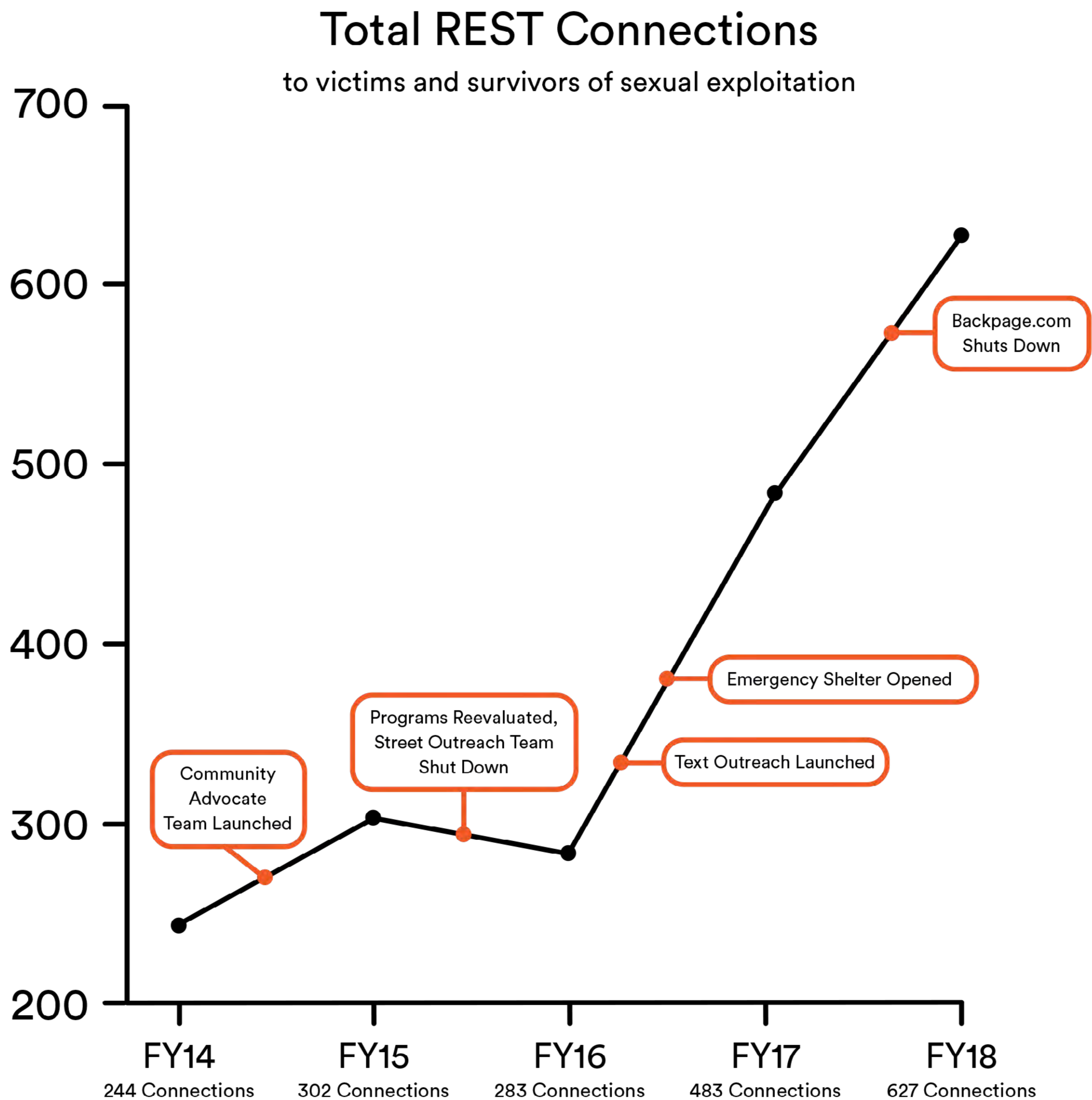
In FY18, 160 women and men who have been sexually exploited enrolled with one of REST's community advocates and accomplished over 610 self-identified goals.

Outreach

In recent years, REST's outreach focus has been online. This was because we saw a major shift from on-street trafficking to online ad-based trafficking. Through a special technology developed with Seattle Against Slavery and volunteers during Microsoft's Hackathon, we would scrape numbers from ads, primarily on Backpage.com, and send outreach texts to potential victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Toward the end of our Fiscal Year, however, Backpage was seized and shut down by the federal government—and we witnessed a massive upheaval in the “business model” of the sex trade. It required a fast pivot on REST's part—suddenly, our texts weren't reaching victims—and there was a resurgence in street trafficking. In one month, we saw the number of new individuals seeking help from REST double.

That's why this spring we shifted our focus, again. While we are still doing text outreach, we have rebuilt our street outreach team, and are seeking to reach potential victims where they are being exploited.



If you'd like to know more about this shift, you can read our blogs [When Backpage Disappears](#) and [When They go back to the streets, so do we.](#)

Mariya

At REST everything we do is based on the belief that everyone is worthy of love. Our Community Advocates turn that belief into action every day—offering pathways to freedom, safety, and hope for victims of sexual exploitation.

“I believe that every person has inherent value and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect because we are all made in God’s image. Grievously, the reality of marginalized individuals is often to be treated as subhuman; I wanted to be a part of providing a different experience.”

Mariya came to the United States when she was a young girl as a refugee. She witnessed her parents start their lives over from scratch, and spent much of her childhood in poverty. This experience, alongside her faith, created a deep desire to see marginalized people treated with grace, and kindness—and as one of REST’s Community Advocates, she does just that.

The tasks of a Community Advocate can vary greatly from day to day, but starts with meeting victims of sexual exploitation where they’re at—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. From this place, advocates are able to develop a trusting relationship, offer acceptance and unconditional care, help them figure out what they want out of life, and support them on their journey.

“Unconditional care means that REST will always be a place they can turn to. It means that we expect challenging behaviors that may have led our clients to be discharged from other programs. We have a trauma-informed

lens that we view these behaviors from, meaning that we understand that the behaviors often demonstrate pain, a tangible way of showing us that they are having a difficult time... ultimately, unconditional care means not giving up on the person.”

Leaving the sex trade is an uphill battle. The effects of complex trauma and extreme PTSD, as well as untreated mental health and addiction issues, can often get a survivor labeled as “difficult” by other service providers, and even be barred from receiving service. It makes basic tasks that many take for granted—like holding down a steady job, taking public transit, providing for basic needs like housing and food—extraordinarily difficult.

But, as Mariya continues to be there day after day for her clients, showing them that they are worthy of love, she begins to see hope grow and changes happen. “Hope makes even the pursuit of change possible.” she explains, “For some people in the life, change feels so out of reach. I share hope with clients and bear it on their behalf when needed. Hope is what allows someone to take steps toward healing.”

Bearing witness to another’s pain has an impact on those engaging survivors’ suffering. Walking alongside someone in their fight for their life outside of the sex trade is often difficult and exhausting—but it is working. In our last fiscal year, REST saw clients experience 235 interruptions from the sex trade, with 14 of our clients achieving the milestone of one full year out of the life.

“If someone felt loved during our interaction, then that’s a success. Loving people works, and makes a difference by cultivating the soil of the heart that allows someone to further open up to the idea hope—they already have at least a seed of hope, which is evidenced by their mere engagement with us. Hope, which believes that things can be different, then leads them to take steps towards change.”

Prevention

REST's Prevention Team is a response to the fact that most adult sexually exploited individuals were abused as children, unstably housed in youth, and recruited into the sex trade as minors.

Our Prevention Team serves at-risk youth through our local courts, juvenile detention and diversion programs. Though many have already experienced extreme hardship, and may have already been exploited, the goal is to prevent further harm and give them access to resources that will contribute to their success. Our workshops for boys also aim to prevent boys from becoming future traffickers or sex buyers.

In FY18, the REST Prevention Team:

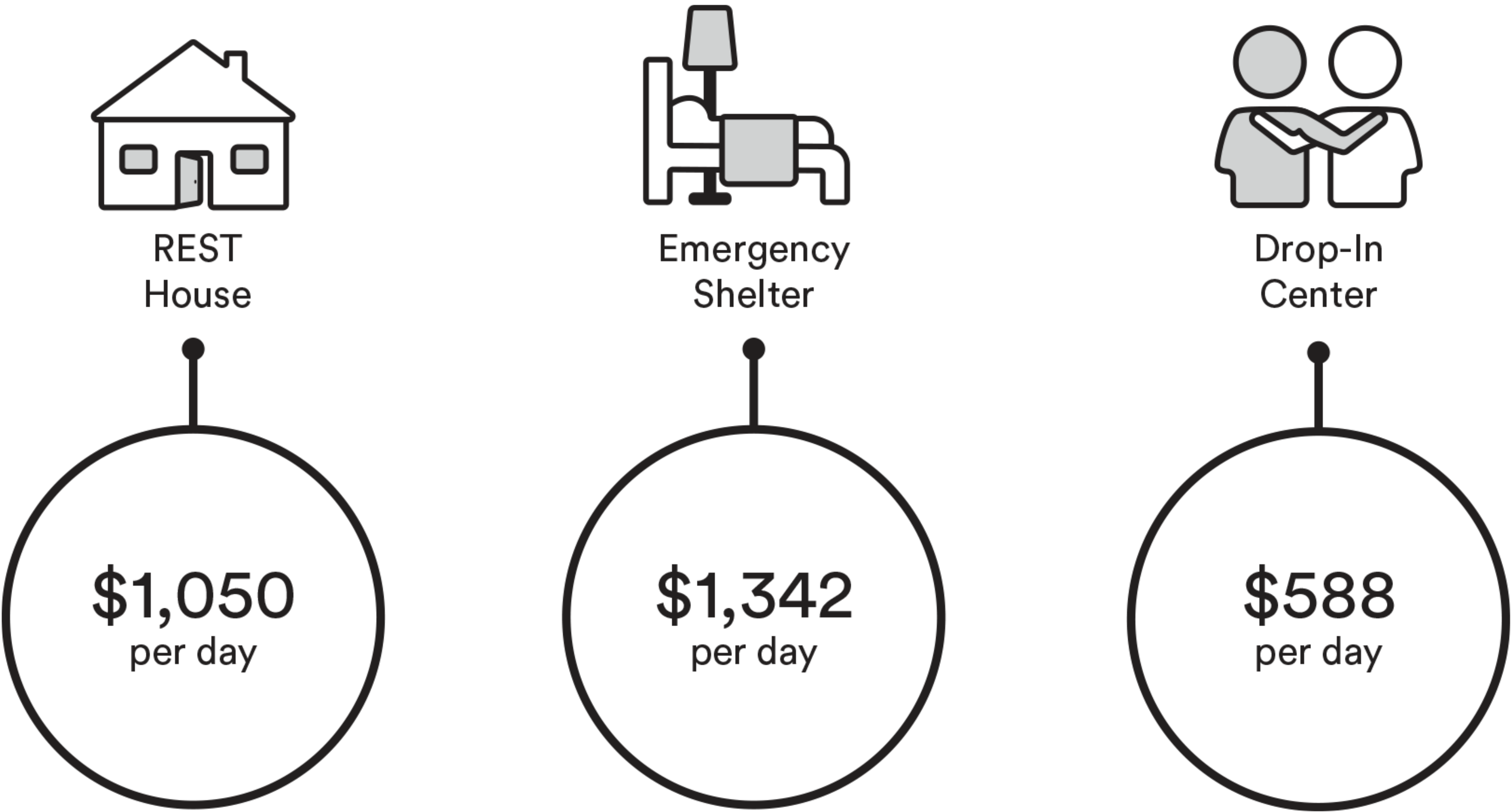
- Facilitated 21 workshops, with 124 youth in attendance.
- We connected to 101 new youth, and met with them 216 times.
- 75% of youth showed improvement in their knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence, and how to advocate against it through pre and post-course testing.

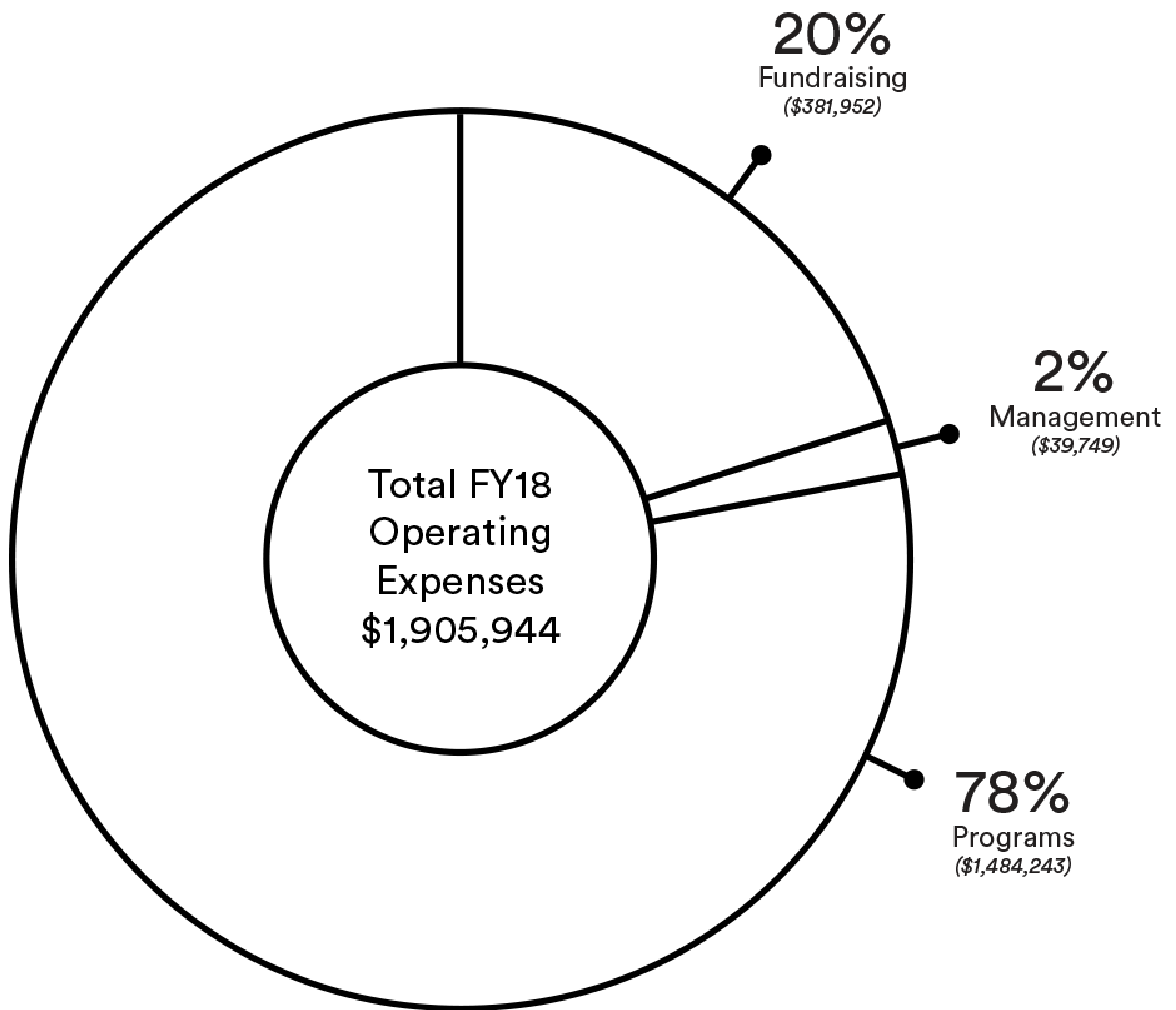


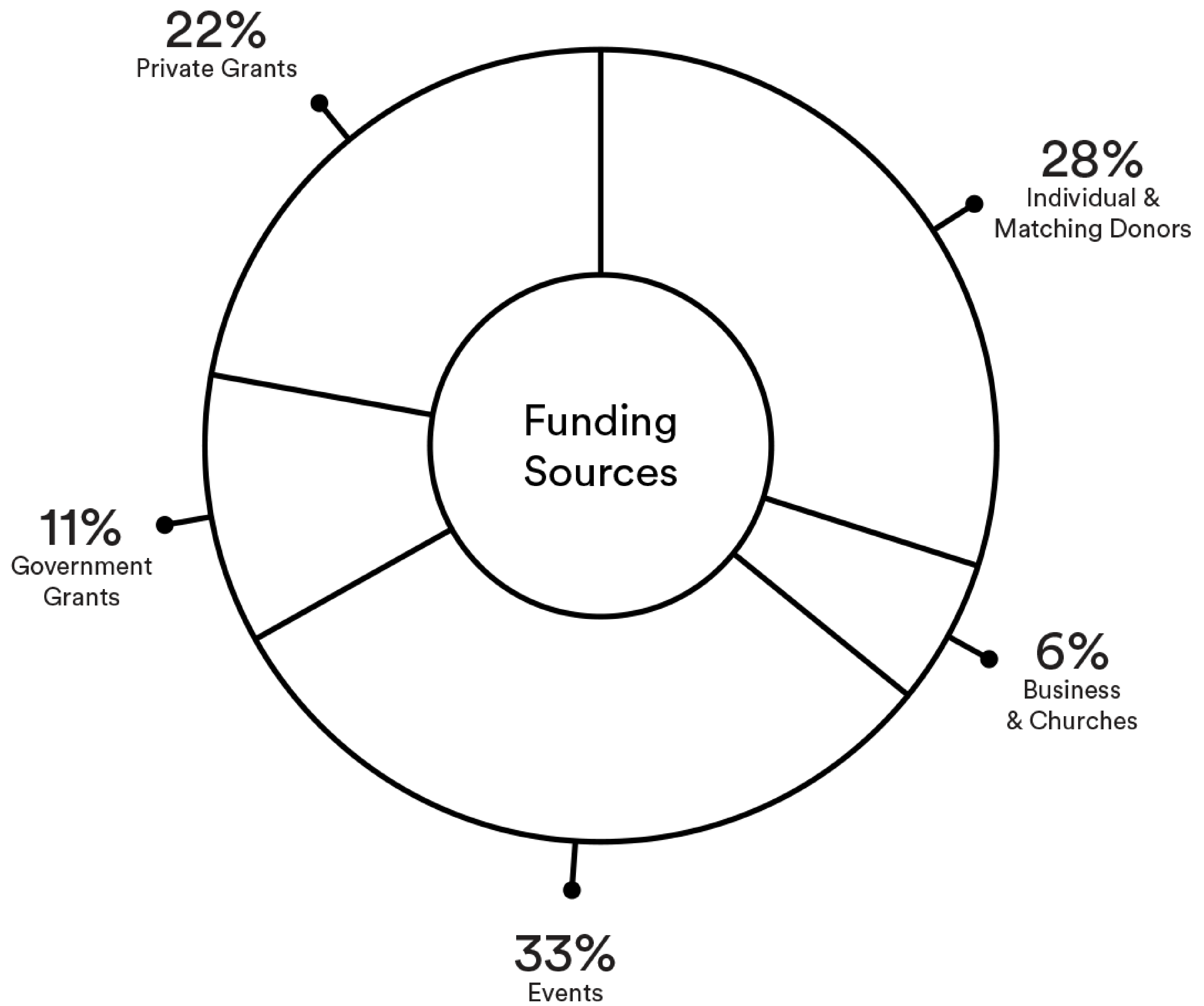
Finances

Every dollar entrusted to REST by individual donors, businesses and churches, grants, and events, is crucial. Each donation, gift, and grant allows us to provide love-based services to sexually exploited women and men in our community, providing pathways to freedom, safety, and hope.

Every day, it costs \$3,040 to keep the REST House, Drop-In Center, and Emergency Receiving Shelter open.







Leadership & Board

Leadership Team

Amanda Hightower / Founder & Executive Director

Julie McNamara-Dahl / Director of Engagement

Mandy Hewitson / Director of Programs

Rudy Vazquez / Business Manager

Kim Merrikin / Media & Communication Manager

Learn more about our current executive and leadership team here.

Board of Directors

Each of our board members is devoted to ending exploitation. We are grateful for their continued passion and expertise as they help us achieve our mission.

Brent Turner, Board Chairman / Chief Operating Officer, Rover.com

Karen Cobb, Board Secretary / Attorney at Law, Frey Buck, P.S.

Will Little, Board Member / Co-Founder & Chief Technology Officer, Code Fellows

Renee Wallace, Board Member / Health Care Access Advocate, YWCA, Survivor

Jesse Bryan, Board Member / Founding Partner & Creative Director, Belief Agency

Jonathan Lamb, Board Member / Managing Director, Regent Advisors Investments

Erik

Erik was an exceptional student as a child. As the son of a Filipino-American U.S. Navy family stationed in Japan, he grew up attending a rigorous international school. When Erik was 14, his family was re-stationed to Naval Magazine Indian Island. He was excited to come to the United States—and eager to fit in.

Unfortunately, cultural barriers made fitting in difficult, and Erik found himself isolated and lonely. His first day in his new school, he wound up eating lunch alone in the bathroom—and after being repeatedly bullied on the school bus, started walking miles to and from school.

It was during that lonely season that Erik met Brian online. Unlike his peers or his parents, Brian was present and attentive to Erik. “He made me feel really special,” Erik explained. “He said he’d drive all the way from Federal Way to come visit me, and I couldn’t even get my parents to come to watch me at my track meet.” Brian did make the drive to see Erik. And he picked him up and took him to a local park, where Brian gave Erik methamphetamine for the first time—and molested him in the back seat of his car.



Brian, who was in his 30s, continued to give 14-year-old Erik a variety of drugs, getting him addicted to opiates, and sexually abusing him while they were high. Brian continued to give Erik the attention he so craved, but wasn't getting at home. "I fell in love with him. He came out to see me every night." It was not long after meeting Brian that other men were invited over to use Erik's body.

Erik was trafficked by Brian for two years between the ages of 14 and 16. He was in the sex trade and addicted to substances for another decade after that. He recalls feeling abandoned, unseen, lost, and unguided.

His journey out of the life was nothing short of a spiritual transformation. "I started to have some hope when I started to follow things that my grandmother taught me. My Lola had taught me to pray when I was really little... and I didn't know what that meant, but I knew I believed in something." So Erik began to pray, and his hope began to grow.

Slowly but surely Erik began to see stopping points—he would tell dates no, or stop a friend in the sex trade from recruiting another young man. After a friend died from a fentanyl overdose, he decided it was time to leave and went to rehab in Texas.

Exiting the sex trade (and overcoming addiction) is rarely a one-and-done moment, and it wasn't for Erik. While he made major positive changes like going back to school and becoming a student leader, he found himself taking dates to meet basic needs, like a place to stay. The last time he traded sex was four years ago—for HIV medication.

As Erik left the life, he became a fierce advocate for survivors in our community. He began participating in REST's survivor support group, Thrive, while he was a case manager for another local agency, and was one of the first men REST served. "I started coming, and I just loved it," he said. Erik now works at REST, and says, "When I walk through those doors, it feels like home. REST is a special place. It feels like an honor to lift up the stories of the people around me."

Erik continues to accomplish incredible things for survivors and youth of color in our region through speaking publicly, training law enforcement, advocating in local government and at the national level. And while pain from the physical, mental, and emotional trauma of being in the sex trade continues to be real—and deep—his faith in God is strong and persistent, driving him to seek healing and justice for himself, and those around him. Erik fights fervently to let other survivors know that they, like him, are worthy of love.

“Love means remaining committed to nourishing someone to wellness. Love means actions. Love means that you’re going to be around. Love means that there’s not violence present, it means that exploitation isn’t present and abuse is not part of this equation.”

- *Erik, Survivor*

Thank you.

You deserve to be loved.

REST Fiscal Year: July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018

King County trafficking data can be found at endingexploitation.com

Photography information: Many of the photographs in this annual report are stock photography, and feature models used for illustrative purposes only. With a few carefully evaluated exceptions, we do not share photos of clients. All other photos taken by Kim Merrikin.