



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN CANADA

Contextualized to the Issue of Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children

BRIEF PRESENTED TO

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

March 22, 2018

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN CANADA & THE ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

As Director General of the Missing Children's Network, we would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for giving us the opportunity to share our experience and insight regarding the serious issue of human trafficking in Canada.

Child sex trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, or advertising of a minor child for the purpose of a commercial sex act. Traffickers often prey upon a child's vulnerability and use psychological pressure and intimidation to control the child for financial benefit relating to their sexual exploitation. Purchasers of children for sex encompass all racial, socio-economic and cultural statuses. Child sex trafficking has devastating consequences for its minor victims, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease or even death.

According to the RCMP's Annual Report, every year on average, there are over 5,000 cases of missing children reported to law enforcement in Quebec. Runaways account for nearly 90% of all these cases and involve youth between the ages of 12-17. The reasons why youth run away are complex, but are generally associated with them attempting to gain some control over their lives. While most runaways return home within a few days, a smaller number of youth may spend periods of time on the street, in shelters or other unfamiliar environments.

These alarming statistics prompted the Missing Children's Network to delve deeper into the issue of runaways and the dangers that youth expose themselves to while on the run. With the help of an Intern, we began the task of analyzing 500 cases that our agency handled over a 7 year span. We looked at the children's ages, gender, duration of the run, from which area in the province they ran from and so on. To our astonishment, we learned that **one in every three runaways** are victims of sexual exploitation and that **youth enrolled in the child welfare system** are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. A summary of our findings can be found in Annex 1.

It is important to know that, behind almost every case, there is an adult who is responsible for the process leading to the exploitation of a young person. Whether we call him enabler, pimp, or even the boyfriend, he is the one who will manage all the hard-earned money. It is thus difficult to view these young girls as voluntary sex workers, in full control of their fate. Therefore, we will not use the terms prostitute or escort because these minors are duped by false promises, threatened, intimidated, exploited by adults, and are vulnerable due to being runaways or having difficult living situations - they are victims.

It is our hope to highlight to the Committee the intersection between missing children and the sexual exploitation of our youth.

HOW DOES A CHILD BECOME A VICTIM?

Child sex trafficking victims could be anyone - your daughter, neighbor, or nephew. Traffickers recruit victims in schools, online through social media, at shopping malls, bus stations or even foster care or group homes. Perpetrators of sex trafficking often target children believing their age makes them easier to manipulate and control.

In order to help our youth, we must first try to understand the root cause. We must keep in mind that exploiters exercise control over their victims by exploiting their **unmet core needs** such as love, affection and a sense of belonging. The teen may be:

- Looking to escape an abusive or intolerable situation/issue;
- Experiencing conflict or abuse within the home or school: e.g.: mental or physical illness, physical or sexual abuse, a feeling of being unloved, unaccepted or abandoned, strict rules, lack of freedom, bullying, etc.;
- Seeking to feel accepted, cared about and valued;
- Looking for financial autonomy;
- Sense of belonging to a group;
- Looking for love, affection and attention;
- Struggling with poor self-esteem and body image during adolescence: Many young female teens come to value that their self-worth is based on physical attributes. Therefore, how they are perceived by others matters greatly at this time.

WHY ARE RUNAWAYS MORE VULNERABLE?

It is important to understand that youth who run away are vulnerable as soon as they leave home - potentially falling victim to substance abuse, theft, crime, homelessness and sexual exploitation. Child sexual exploitation is the sexual abuse of minors and involves youth being manipulated into exchanging sexual favours for money, shelter, clothing, drugs, food, transportation, love or acceptance.

The sexual exploitation of youth can take many forms: prostitution, pornography, stripping, dancing topless, escort services and erotic massages. Victims can be of any age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or religion. Exploiters target and prey on the vulnerability of young people and groom them by gaining their trust and promising a better and glamorous life.

Our research and interviews conducted with victims of sexual exploitation revealed that gangs use direct and effective strategies to subtly introduce them into the prostitution milieu. Too often, the context of running away represents a perfect opportunity to recruit young people because:

- Runaways need a Good Samaritan who will provide them with shelter and clothing. However, this “hand-out” must be paid for.
- Young people will sometimes join friends who are already under the influence of a gang or a pimp.
- Having nowhere to go and fearing the police, they will find safety with the group.

RECRUITMENT: BEFORE OR WHILE RUNNING AWAY

Gang members know where to find girls they intend to prostitute, since they:

- Hang out in places where young people can be found: bus terminals, parks, etc.
- Take in runaway girls: recruiters know the habits of young vulnerable girls, without resources or contacts and, above all, without money.
- Use Internet and social media: an ideal place to make contacts and develop a trusting relationship. A great way to get to know a young woman's problems, to give her support, love, and to offer her help.
- Recruit through other girls: unfortunately, too often, teenage girls will share the contact information of "good guys" who can help them the next time they run away.

A GRADUAL PREPARATION FOR PROSTITUTION

Despite efforts at prevention, recruitment and seduction techniques have changed very little and always work well with young people. Why? Because these men offer what every teenager is looking for: the dream of a better future, freedom, the idea of "false" financial independence, love, belonging to a group, and a sense of security.

THE GREAT GAME OF SEDUCTION

Usually the main goal is to develop a romantic relationship with a young girl, or even with several girls in different environments. These young affluent men know how to make her happy and offer her the lifestyle and attention she is so desperately seeking. As she is later introduced to his group of friends, she becomes part of the "gang". Then comes the moment when:

- The friend asks to be reimbursed for everything he has paid for; nothing is free, after all...
- He needs a "favour", done out of love, to help him out of his temporary financial difficulties: to pay off a debt by spending the night with someone he knows, for example.
- He uses a strategy of "destroy to rebuild", i.e. targeting her vulnerability (hang-ups concerning her physical appearance), reinforcing her self-esteem, and then developing a pattern of domestic violence, alternating between the honeymoon phase and violence.

ISOLATION FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- To gain more control over the young girl, the "boyfriend" tries to physically and psychologically isolate her from family and friends. Among other things, phone calls are screened and going out alone is forbidden.
- The relationship will be marked by signs of jealousy, possessiveness, and control. The young girl becomes his property - she will be watched closely. Unfaithfulness to the boyfriend or to gang members comes at a high cost, and the young girl risks being subjected to physical and psychological violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMITTEE

As a result of our findings over the past 7 years, we have come to understand that the issue of sexual exploitation is complex and multi-dimensional. There are roles for law makers, service providers, community organizations, and survivors. By collaborating and joining forces, we can all share in solving this issue. The Missing Children's Network recommends the following:

- 1) Educate youth by increasing their knowledge of sexual exploitation issues, the dangers facing runaways, how to protect themselves and where to go for help;
- 2) Develop Prevention Programs that help children develop healthy and egalitarian friendships and relationships and setting personal boundaries;
- 3) Sensitize parents, guardians and educators about the issue and help them gain deeper insight on issues facing teens today and how to support teens in this phase of their lives;
- 4) Build a stronger and more informed community that is able to respond to prevent sexual exploitation of children and youth. Equip professionals and practitioners to recognize and report potential situations sexual exploitation of minors thereby contributing towards a broader involvement of the community in the fight to end sex trafficking;
- 5) Improve referrals and support for youth survivors and their parents by creating a reliable national data-base of community resources readily accessible for child protection agents, law enforcement and other professionals working with youth victims in Quebec and in Canada;
- 6) Incite our elected officials to adopt Bill C-452, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons) - the focus should be on the trafficker's actions, not the victim's beliefs, history or behaviour;
- 7) Prosecute all those who are purchasing sex from children.

CONCLUSION

The sexual exploitation of youth is occurring right here in Canada. Children as young as 12 years-old from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds are being victimized, leaving them with lifelong scars. This is one of the worst forms of child abuse and it must STOP!

THE MISSING CHILDREN NETWORK - A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR ORGANIZATION

Founded in 1985, the Missing Children's Network has been a reassuring presence in our community providing the public with assistance, support, education and hope. We are the *only* organization in Quebec that families can turn to for support and assistance when their child disappears. Our mission is unique and critical - we fill a gap in our society that is not filled by law enforcement, child welfare services or the media. Our Family Assistance and Support team proactively help families, law enforcement, social service agencies and mental health agencies by providing a support network for child victims and their families.

Through the years, we have built solid relationships with law enforcement all across Quebec, as well as gained the trust of government and child welfare agencies, and the media. In the Fall of 2012, the *Our Missing Children's Program* of the RCMP awarded our organization with the Award of Excellence in honour of our collaborative efforts in bringing missing children safely home. We have assisted law enforcement in recovering **1,350 children and reuniting them with their families.**

For nearly 33 years, we have been working diligently with our community and corporate partners to make child safety a priority in our province. In May 2003, we collaborated with law enforcement in the implementation of the **Amber Alert** program, an indispensable tool that allows us to galvanize an entire community by enlisting their help when a child is kidnapped; modernized our Child Identification Program by creating **SIGN4I**, an Application that parents can download in order to record and store their child's photo and description directly on their mobile devices, as well as published dozens of new publications that assist parents in helping their children and teen develop sound personal strategies.

SHINE - A NEW INNOVATIVE PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

In January 2018, the Missing Children's Network implemented **SHINE** (*Self-esteem, Healthy relationships, Independence, No means No, Empowerment*), a new prevention program tailored for **students enrolled in Grades 5 & 6, as well as Secondary 1**. The goal is to help students **develop healthy and egalitarian relationships, thus preventing their aggression and exploitation**. These workshops are conducted throughout the province of Quebec, both on-site and via a web platform for schools located off the island of Montreal. As well, the contents will be customized to meet the particular needs of the Native Communities and at-risk youth.

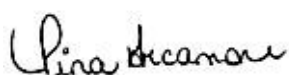
SHINE is designed to help students build a positive self-image, recognize the components of healthy and egalitarian relationships and learn to set boundaries. We provide students with the tools and resources that will help them build a positive self-image, develop effective communication skills and learn the importance of respecting themselves and others. In our workshops, we address the following topics:

- ✓ Trusting one's instincts and the right to say **NO!** (consent)
- ✓ Developing healthy and egalitarian relationships
- ✓ Identifying and setting one's emotional, physical and virtual boundaries
- ✓ Recognizing gender stereotypes that influence one's perception
- ✓ Identifying safe adults to approach in difficult times
- ✓ Disclosing abuse and/or any inappropriate behaviours

Since 1985, the Missing Children's Network has envisioned a world where children can be just kids ... safe, loved and protected! By renewing our commitment to protecting our children from abuse, we can save lives and prevent untold suffering and grief among the most vulnerable of our society.

It is with firm resolve and conviction that we will continue to work on behalf of children and their families. Our children deserve no less.

Respectfully submitted,



Pina Arcamone
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ANNEXE 1 – STATISTICS ON RUNAWAY YOUTH CASES

PERIOD: JULY 1, 2010 TO DECEMBER 31, 2017

497 runaway cases registered involving 396 teens of which 68 ran multiple times

AGE		
ÂGE	NUMBER	%
12 years and under	7	1,4%
13 years-old	32	6,4%
14 years-old	68	13,7%
15 years-old	106	21,3%
16 years-old	171	34,4%
17 years-old	113	22,8%

GENDER		
GENDER	NUMBER	%
Females	373	75%
Males	124	25%

LINKS WITH SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

EXPOSITION À L'EXPLOITATION SEXUELLE	NUMBER	%
No links with sexual exploitation	300	60,3%
Possible link but not enough evidence of victimization	83	16,7%
Possible link with sexual exploitation (under Youth Protection)	46	55%
Victims of sexual exploitation confirmed (according to police, educators, family members)	114	23%
Confirmed victims who were under the care of Youth Protection	70	61,4%
<i>100% of the victims were all females</i>		

WHERE YOUTH RAN AWAY FROM

	NUMBER	%
Family residence	193	39%
Under Youth Protection or Foster Care	289	58%
Unknown	15	3%

CITY FROM WHICH THE CHILD RAN AWAY

CITY	NUMBER	%
Montreal	213	43%
Laval	80	16%
Québec	49	10%
Longueuil	22	4,3%
Sherbrooke	13	2,6%
Gatineau	11	2,2%
Saint-Hyacinthe	9	1,8%
Joliette	7	1,4%
Drummondville	6	1,2%
Trois-Rivières	6	1,2%
Canada	4	0,8%
Other	77	15,5%