



**A Dark  
Intersection: The  
Relationship  
between Youth  
Homelessness  
and Sex  
Trafficking**



# **PRESENTERS:**

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# “Supportive” Housing

By: Angel Powers

# Sex Trafficking Conceptualization

- Industry as a continuum
- Human Rights Approach
- Sex Trafficking – coercion by a third-party

# A Dark Intersection: Objectives

- 1. Identify the intersection between youth homelessness and sex trafficking\***
- 2. Develop research agenda based on most pressing gaps**
- 3. Identify awareness levels among the youth homelessness sector in Canada – goal of determining training needs and methods**

# Methodology

Participatory Action Research

Mixed Methods

Anti-Colonial Framework

# Niswi Kwe Consulting – Parallel Project

- Niswi Kwe is passionate about lifting up Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We provide an Indigenous lens that supports communities in empowering knowledge mobilization, collaboration and leadership
- Development of an engagement strategy for our First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members
- Engagement with Community Elders and Knowledge Keepers – grounding work, guidance, safe Indigenous lead solutions, and historical information shared
- Engagement with community to identify and create safe spaces for sharing
- Two upcoming sessions are scheduled for winter

# Preliminary Results

**Objective One:  
Identify the  
intersection  
between sex  
trafficking and  
youth homelessness**

**23 Interviews  
with survivors**





# The Intersection – Part One

**Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
are not only more vulnerable to  
being trafficked, they are actively  
targeted by traffickers**

# Recruitment at Shelters

- Grooming & Recruitment
- Vulnerability factors
- Basic needs
- Causes of homelessness – risk factors for trafficking (colonization, neglect, family conflict, abuse, child welfare)

# Increasing Safety in Shelters

- Awareness among staff and youth
  - Vigilance among staff: red flags
  - Education for youth
- Safety planning
- Peer support

# Safety in Shelters

## Survivors felt safer when:

- In smaller spaces
- There were fewer staff to interact with (that were caring)
- Signage - the good and bad
- Female-identified only
- Age range is not as wide (e.g. 16 vs. 24)
- Outside competent security/cameras that are monitored
- Remain inside during the day
- Concerns are taken seriously by staff
- Trauma-informed, transparency

# The Intersection – Part Two

Survivors may not be able to escape/sustain an escape if they do not have a safe, affordable place to go

Survivors who are exploited during their youth will have limited education, employment experience, life skills, and very likely PTSD, meaning they will remain vulnerable to homelessness without adequate support

# Housing Options

Rethink bringing survivors escaping into the homelessness system

- Safe houses
- Transitional houses
- Independent housing (e.g. SPP)
  
- Most participants preferred their own space
- Program rules can trigger trauma of control from traffickers
- Some participants did feel safer in a confidential location with 24/7 staff, other survivors

# Supports with Housing

- Clear need for income support, education, employment, life skills, mental health support...BUT

Process may take years, several attempts

- A trauma-informed approach that meets survivors where they are
- May mean most pressing needs are:
  - **Safety, Respite, Community**
  - The role of lived experience

# A Few Notes...

- Process may take years, several attempts
- Housing and supports – open-door policy for each escape
- Age range and transition – e.g., the “adult system”
- Misconceptions - No “ideal” exit (e.g. SPP) or “victim”



# Next Steps

- More interviews with survivors, including in Vancouver; interviews with staff
- Awareness levels & training needs of youth homelessness sector
- Research & knowledge mobilization event
- Framework of socioeconomic inclusion for youth with intersecting histories of homelessness and sex trafficking

# Poverty Pandemic

**Thank You!**

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