

The Unheard Speak Out:

Street Sexual Exploitation in Winnipeg

By Maya Seshia

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The Unheard Speak Out: Street Sexual Exploitation in Winnipeg

Executive Summary

This study examines street sexual exploitation in Winnipeg. It was our objective to answer the following questions: what factors increase a person's vulnerability to street sexual exploitation?; what types of resources do experiential participants themselves consider prerequisites to making a successful transition, when willing and ready, out of the sex trade?; how and by whom, in their opinion, are these resources best delivered? It was also our intent to give a voice to people who are ignored, stereotyped, and misunderstood by mainstream society.

When conducting this research we truly believed and followed the idea that experiential women — women who have been, or are being, sexually exploited — are the most knowledgeable about Winnipeg's sex trade. They are best able to identify their needs and provide successful solutions. Using this approach we attempted to answer our questions by conducting interviews with experiential women and those who provide support to sexually exploited youth and adults.

We found that there was no single reason why a person becomes vulnerable to sexual exploitation; rather there are many. Common factors that emerged from the interviews included: poverty and survival, including homelessness; the legacy of residential schools, the continuation of colonialism, and racism; lack of stability and being placed in multiple care homes; childhood abuse; gender discrimination, including discrimination against Two-Spirited/transgendered people; pimps and peer pressure; generational sexual exploitation (having a parent or family

member who was or is sexually exploited); substance dependency; and effects of low self-esteem.

Healing does not happen over night. The same factors that cause persons to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation also entrap them. Nonetheless, transitioning out of street sexual exploitation is possible. When discussing who or what contributed to their successful transition the most outstanding finding was that the simple act of sharing stories with others who have experienced sexual exploitation, and who have made a successful transition, can be extremely empowering. Peer support — support provided by others who have exited or who are attempting to exit sexual exploitation — can remove feelings of isolation, shame, and blame. Experiential women also credited resources offered by and individuals working at community organizations for helping them on their healing journey.

Participants identified a number of resources that are lacking in Winnipeg. These include: the need for transitional housing and a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week safe house for sexually exploited youth and adults; a women's-only addictions centre that is designed by women and transgendered individuals specifically for sexually exploited adults and youth; and more resources for sexually exploited transgendered women.

We found that participants commonly said that they could relate to and more readily trust survivors of sexual exploitation, addictions, rape, and/or racism. Therefore, when answering how and by

whom resources are best delivered we conclude that experiential women must be given a voice. They must be given power. Sexually exploited women should be given the option to access experiential support staff and should be involved in the design and delivery of programs and should be able to affect the structure of community organizations.

The primary purpose of this study was to allow the unheard to speak out about their

struggles, successes, needs, and solutions. We wanted women's voices to be heard. For change to occur we need to listen to their opinions and act on their recommendations. This requires a shift in thinking and a change in perceptions. For there to be less violence on the streets, less sexual exploitation, and less oppression we have to question the stereotypes that mainstream society perpetuates. We must listen to what women, who are struggling each day to survive, have to say.

The Unheard Speak Out: Street Sexual Exploitation in Winnipeg

By Maya Seshia

This paper explores street sexual exploitation in Winnipeg. While many studies discuss issues surrounding sexual exploitation, most of this information is not geographically specific to Winnipeg. Accurate statistics about Winnipeg's street sex trade are difficult to find. Further, statistical analysis may not be the best method for understanding this issue. Research often relies on crime statistics and police reports to determine who and how many are being sexually exploited. Shaver argues that such research paints an inaccurate picture: "Over-reliance on official crime statistics, police reports, as well as clinical and social agency samples provides an incomplete and misleading portrait of prostitution and prostitutes. Field study interviews with sex trade workers present a different picture."¹ Canadian field studies have been undertaken but they have been conducted in larger cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal.² Therefore, little is known about sexually exploited youth and adults in Winnipeg. This paper seeks to fill that gap.

While Shaver's observation should be kept

in mind, some information about street sexual exploitation in Winnipeg is available. Transition, Education, and Resources for Females (TERF), a Winnipeg based "transition program that provides self-development and healing through education to women and transgendered people, age 13 and up who have been sexually exploited through the sex trade", conducted a study with participants in 2000 and 2001.³ This research revealed that the average age of involvement in sexual exploitation is 13.5 years, and 35 percent of TERF youth were exploited when they were under the age of fourteen. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of adults entered the sex trade before the age of eighteen. The average duration was twelve years.⁴ Most sexual exploitation takes place indoors: in hidden venues such as drug houses, hotels, massage parlours, and over the internet. It is estimated that street sexual exploitation accounts for 5 to 20 percent of all sexual exploitation.⁵ What is seen on the streets is minimal compared to the amount of sexual exploitation taking place indoors.

1 Shaver, Frances, Traditional Data Distorts Our View of Prostitution, <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/shaver-distort.html>, accessed October 2004.

2 For Montreal and Toronto Field Studies see Shaver, Traditional Data Distorts Our View of Prostitution, accessed 2004; for Vancouver Field study see Lowman, John, Violence Against Persons Who Prostitute: The Experience in British Columbia, 1995, <http://mypage.uniserve.ca/~lowman/ProLaw/prolawcan.htm>, accessed September 2004.

3 Berry, Jennifer, Easing the Path: A qualitative study of the service needs of women who have experienced an addiction and are exiting the sex trade in Manitoba (Canada, Status of Women Canada, August 2003), p.7.

4 Ndaawin, "Protecting Children: Information Guide: Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth through Prostitution", p.14.

5 Kingsley, Cherry and Melanie Mark, Sacred Lives: Canadian Aboriginal Children and Youth Speak Out About Sexual Exploitation (Canada: Save the Children, date unknown) p.54.

This paper intends to give a voice to people who are ignored by mainstream society. It is guided by the idea that experiential women—women who have been, or are being, sexually exploited—are the most knowledgeable about Winnipeg’s sex trade and is premised on the idea that they are best able to identify their needs and provide successful solutions. This is consistent with the community development (CD) approach. According to Kingsley and Mark, the “Community Development approach recognizes the effectiveness of tailoring solutions to the specific needs of the community by involving people on a local level. Diverse members of the community come together to begin to identify local strategies and develop local action plans. Community Development is based on the principles of capacity building, meaningful exchange and participation.”⁶ Using this approach this study attempts to answer the following questions by conducting interviews with experiential women and those who provide support to sexually exploited youth and adults:

- What factors increase a person’s vulnerability to street sexual exploitation?
- What types of resources do experiential participants themselves feel are needed in order for them to make a successful transition, when willing and ready, out of the sex trade?
- How and by whom, in their opinion, are these resources best delivered?

This paper is divided into six parts. Part One provides a history of Winnipeg’s sex trade. Part Two describes our method and

methodological considerations. Parts Three, Four, and Five—the most prominent sections—consist of the stories and opinions of experiential women. Part Three examines Winnipeg’s street sexual exploitation in-depth. Through the education provided by respondents we identify risk factors that increase a person’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and also discuss the transition journey out of sexual exploitation. Part Four describes what supports experiential participants, themselves, consider necessary in order that they may successfully transition, when willing and ready, out of sexual exploitation. Part Five discusses how and by whom participants feel these resources are best delivered. Finally, Part Six synthesizes the findings contained in Parts Four and Five and draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

Definitions and Language

Various terms are used to refer to individuals who choose to sell, or who are coerced into the selling of, sexual services. Deciding on what language to use is not a simple task because this decision is related to the controversial theoretical issue of choice and its relation to the sex trade. Amongst feminists and academics there is no consensus about the extent of choice involved in working or being forced to work the streets. Brock, for example, argues that sexually exploited people exert a “practical consciousness about how their work is organized and their identities constructed.”⁷ In contrast, the information obtained from the various interviews used in this research supports the view that there is little choice involved. For youth

⁶ Kingsley and Mark, p.2.

⁷ Brock, R., Deborah, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) p.138.

under the age of eighteen there is no choice whatsoever in the matter and adults typically enter the street sex trade in order to survive and/or because they were sexually exploited and coerced into the lifestyle at a young age. In deciding what language to employ in this paper we have relied on the opinions of and feedback from research participants.

If you want to call it a choice, it's a choice to survive to the next day, yeah. That's what you're pretty much surviving to, the next day.
— *Experiential Woman*

I always think choice means you have options and then you make a choice, right? And again it's not something that anybody's going to sit down with all the information and say 'I choose the sex trade'. It is just not that simple.
— *Community Organization Representative, TERF*

There's not one person out there that is straight or just out there because they are choosing to.
— *Community Organization Representative, HSLS*

We oppose the use of rhetoric that degrades sexually exploited youth and adults. Examples of denigrating language include but are not limited to terms such as 'hooker', 'kiddie hooker', 'prostitute', 'child prostitute', 'whore', and 'slut'. Commenting on the use of the term 'sexually exploited' versus 'child prostitute', Kingsley and Mark state that "the

former term refuses to ignore that children and youth in the sex trade are sexually exploited, and moves the true responsibility of exploitation where it belongs, to those who purchase and profit in any way from children and youth in the sex trade."⁸

We are aware of the efforts made by some women to reclaim words such as 'whore' and 'prostitute'; however, we feel that mainstream society does not use such language as a means of empowerment.⁹ Based on the feedback from experiential participants and individuals who work closely with sexually exploited youth and adults we believe such language adds to the blame and shame experienced by sexually exploited youth, women, men, and transgendered people. As such, we have chosen to use the terms sex trade, sexual exploitation, and experiential people and youth.

Sex Trade

Benoit and Shaver define the sex trade as "activities that involve selling sexual services or fantasies for money or payment in kind. Such services may include: exotic dancing, erotic massage, phone sex, escort services, pornography and street work/prostitution."¹⁰ According to Kingsley and Mark the sex trade "includes any transaction whereby" children, youth, and adults "exchange sex for food, shelter, drugs, approval, money or for any sense of safety and security."¹¹ They further note that the "sex trade is not just involve-

8 Kingsley and Mark, p.2.

9 For example, Margo St.James, representative of Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), has made attempts to reclaim the word 'whore', see Bell, Laurie, ed., *Good Girls, Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987) p.82.

10 Shaver, Frances, *Traditional Data Distorts Our View of Prostitution*, <http://www.walnet.org/cs/papers/shaver-distort.html>, accessed October 2004.

11 Kingsley and Mark, p.3.

ment in street prostitution or escort agencies, and it occurs in all venues in both rural and urban communities.”¹² These broad definitions encompass a variety of activities, occupations, and forms of sexual exploitation, many of which are beyond the scope of this study. All forms of sexual exploitation and involvement in the sex trade are related, but this paper specifically looks at street sexual exploitation in Winnipeg.

Sexual Exploitation

The Manitoba Strategy Responding to Children and Youth at Risk of, or Victims of, Sexual Exploitation defines child and youth sexual exploitation as the “act of coercing, luring or engaging a child, under the age of 18, into a sexual act, and involvement in the sex trade or pornography, with or without the child’s consent, in exchange for money, drugs, shelter, food, protection or other necessities.”¹³ Similarly, Kingsley and Mark define commercial sexual exploitation as “the exchange of sex for food, shelter, drugs/alcohol, money and/or approval.”¹⁴ The term sexual exploitation is typically used to refer to youth, under the age of eight-

een, who are forced into the sex trade. Based on the opinions of respondents we feel that women, men, and transgendered people over the age of eighteen can also be sexually exploited. We use this term to refer to both adults and youth who are coerced in any way into the sex trade. It is important to note that the experiential women interviewed view themselves as survivors of the sex trade and sexual exploitation, not as victims.

Experiential People and Youth

The term experiential people and youth is used to refer to individuals who have been sexually exploited or who are currently being sexually exploited.¹⁵

Two-Spirited/Transgendered

Two-Spirited and transgendered are defined as “someone whose gender identity or expression is different from their physical sex” or their sex at birth.¹⁶ We use these two terms interchangeably. When discussing Two-Spirited participants this paper uses female pronouns such as “she” and “her” and refers to Two-Spirited participants as women.¹⁷

12 Kingsley and Mark, p.3.

13 Ndaawin, p.14.

14 Kingsley and Mark, p.2.

15 Kingsley and Mark, p.3.

16 Transgender Handout for the Diversity and Sensitivity Training Programs of the DC Metropolitan Police Department, Fire Department, and Emergency Medical Services, http://www.gaydc.net/gllu/PDFs/DSTP_handout.pdf, accessed March 2004.

17 Two-Spirited/transgendered participants in this research identify as women and prefer to be referred to in female terms. In fact, using male pronouns and terminology to refer to transgendered individuals who identify as women is considered offensive.

Part One—Background: A Brief History of Winnipeg’s Sex Trade

Winnipeg’s Sex Trade: 1800-1970

Prior to the 1970s, sexually exploited people rarely worked Winnipeg’s streets and most sexual transactions took place in indoor brothels and hotels. The predominance of brothels during this period was not unique to Winnipeg. Lowman observes that nearly two decades “after its incorporation in 1886 Vancouver, like most Canadian and many American cities, contained a recognized and apparently largely accepted ‘restricted district’ where prostitutes worked out of ‘brothels’—houses where anywhere up to ten women might work at one time.”¹⁸ Limited conventional employment opportunities for women coupled with the overwhelming number of male immigrants in comparison to females enabled Winnipeg’s brothel industry to thrive. By the early 1880s “prostitution was so well established in Winnipeg that the existence of segregated brothels was generally accepted by the citizenry.”¹⁹

Winnipeg’s first recognized segregated brothel district was located in the Colony Creek area, around the streets that are now known as Colony and Balmoral. From the early 1800s through to 1883 these brothels were openly tolerated and, even with the establishment of an official law enforcement body in 1870, they were able to operate free from interference. In fact, brothel owners and workers enjoyed a cooperative relationship with the police and although the police did make rounds

to the houses owners and workers rarely faced charges.

The Colony Creek brothel days came to an end in 1883 when Manitoba College was constructed only a few hundred yards away from the houses. The College’s close proximity to the brothels ignited concern for the morality of the students; in turn, this concern caused a shift in attitude amongst the public, politicians, and media. Public, political, and media pressure compelled the police to act. By June 1, 1884 the brothels had relocated.

Minto Street (formally called Thomas Street) was the chosen location for Winnipeg’s new segregated brothel industry. Here six brothels were built and, due to its isolated location, concern over the sex trade industry dissipated. From 1884 through to 1904, segregation and tolerance was again “the accepted policy of the city.”²⁰ However, as the population of the city grew so too did its boundaries and by the early 1900s Minto Street was no longer isolated.

Residents who had recently settled around the areas of Minto Street began complaining about late night noise generated by the intoxicated men who frequented the brothels. Like the Colony Creek brothels, the increased visibility of the Minto Street sex trade caused a surge in moral angst over the well being of area residents and children. In 1903 Roman Catholic Reverend, Frederick G. DuVal,

18 Lowman, John, *Street Prostitution: Assessing the Impact of the Law*, Vancouver (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Justice Canada, 1989) p.179.

19 Gray, H, James, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986), p.6.

20 Gray, p.36.

“launched an all-out campaign to close the Minto Street establishment.”²¹ Shortly after, controversy over how to deal with the sex trade erupted.

With the appointment of a new police commissioner in 1904 the cooperative relationship between the police, brothel owners and sexually exploited people changed. On January 7, 1904 the police were given orders to raid the houses on Minto Street. However, rather than remedying sexual exploitation, the closure of the Minto Street brothels scattered sexually exploited people throughout the city and onto the streets. Gray writes, “Soon it seemed ... that Portage and Main Street were being overrun” and “there was no way in which the city policemen on patrol duty could cope with the streetwalkers.”²² By 1909 the police, politicians, and the majority of Winnipeg’s citizens concluded that having a segregated indoor sex trade district might indeed be the best way of dealing with the industry. Thus, cooperation between the police and those involved in the sex trade resumed and possible locations for Winnipeg’s segregated district were discussed. Subsequently one street in the Point Douglas area, Annabella Street, was chosen. A short time later a second street, McFarlane Street, was added.

Despite frequent complaints by residents in the Point Douglas area, brothel owners, workers, and the police again enjoyed a cooperative, and at times a protective relationship. The police did not patrol the segregated area but certain rules were enforced. For example, brothel workers

were not allowed to ply their trade on the streets and they had to undergo regular medical checkups.²³ In theory, having a semi-regulated sex trade industry seemed like an ideal solution to a complex problem; yet this solution was not without its flaws. Only a year after its establishment, concern grew over the rowdiness of the streets and the conditions inside the brothels; as a result, a Royal Commission (the Robson Commission) was struck. Although the Commission drew a number of conclusions, none of the findings called for the closing of the Annabella/McFarlane Street brothels. Thus, until the 1940s the brothels continued to operate.

Outlawed activities are not immune from racism. In Winnipeg’s early days the sex trade was racially stratified and some women were considered more “valuable” than others. When discussing the sex trade industry in the American West, Butler notes that from 1865 through to 1890 “[w]omen in brothels enjoyed the best status, both in and out of the profession, with the order descending to the woman who plied their trade on the streets”.²⁴ Gray’s discussion of the evolution of the prairie’s sex trade is incomplete because he mostly looks at the development of brothel life. But some women who were involved in or forced into the sex trade at that time were not allowed to participate in this relatively higher-end industry. For example, Aboriginal women were barred from brothel life but were sexually exploited and could be permanently bought. Razuk reported, “Oral narratives of late-nineteenth-century Lakota women suggest

21 Gray, p.35.

22 Gray, p.42.

23 Gray, p.48.

24 Butler, M., *Anne, Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitution in the American West, 1865-1890* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985) p. xvii.

that the NWMP [North West Mounted Police] had easy sexual access to Aboriginal women whose families were starving.”²⁵ Reverend Samuel Trivett, a missionary on the Blood Indian Reserve located near Fort Macleod, Alberta, observed that Aboriginal girls were being sold into slavery. “White men came onto the reserve ... bought the girls, and when they grew tired of them, turned them out as prostitutes onto the streets of Macleod.”²⁶ Trivett, like Gray, blames the parents of these girls without casting any blame on the men who bought and discarded the women.

According to Lowman and Khom, prior to the 1970s street sexual exploitation appears to have been limited and its increased visibility was usually associated with the closure of brothels.²⁷ The evolution of Winnipeg’s brothel industry demonstrates that the attitudes of citizens, politicians, and police have shifted and changed over time. When the sex trade was isolated and hidden an attitude of tolerance or perhaps acquiescence prevailed. However, when it became more visible, moral concern over the well being of neighbourhood residents emerged and public pressure tended to motivate the police to act. While a historical account of the evolution of Winnipeg’s brothel industry is interesting, it is also selective. The women who worked in brothels likely

enjoyed, in relative terms, some level of security and comfort. The history of other sexually exploited peoples who were barred from brothel life is poorly documented with evidence that some women, such as Aboriginal women, were bought and sometimes discarded on to the streets.

Winnipeg’s Street Sex Trade: 1970-2000

Kohm indicates that the “period between the end of segregated prostitution in Point Douglas and the rise and prominence of street prostitution in the 1970s is poorly documented.”²⁸ It is known that across Canada street sexual exploitation became more visible. By the late 1970s three zones in which street sexual services were solicited emerged in Winnipeg. The first – commonly referred to as the “high track” – was located in the Exchange District around Albert, King, Princess, Rorie, McDermot, Bannatyne, and Arthur Street. The women who were sexually exploited in this area tended to be young and Caucasian and their prices were set higher than those offered on other strolls.²⁹ The second zone was located east of Main Street, between Portage and Selkirk Avenue. Sexually exploited women and girls in this zone were mostly young and of Caucasian or Aboriginal descent and their prices were set lower than those in the high track.³⁰ The third zone was located

25 Razack, H., *Sherene, Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping White Settler Society*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2004) p.131.

26 Gray, pp.12-13

27 Kohm, A., Steven, *The Geographies of Winnipeg’s Sex Trade: A Spatial and Temporal Analysis of the Business of the Selling of Sex* (Winnipeg: Department of Geography, 1997) p.18; Lowman, 1989, p.179.

28 Kohm, p.179.

29 Brannigan, Augustine, Louise Knalpa, and Christopher Levy, *Street Prostitution: Assessing the Impact of the Law*, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Justice Canada, 1989)pp.194-195; Kohm, p. 27.

close to the Forks, downtown, and Legislative area, on or just off of Assiniboine Avenue. Sexually exploited people in this area were almost exclusively male or transgendered.

Brannigan, Knalfa, and Levy's 1987 survey of Winnipeg's strolls revealed that the three zones that had emerged in the 1970s remained essentially intact. Their research indicates that by the late 1980s the second stroll had spread so that it now incorporated the streets around Higgins Avenue.³¹ Kohm observes that the second zone had expanded, moving "north and eastward from Main Street in the direction of the Red River."³² Throughout the 1990s the second zone continued to rapidly spread. Also, in the 1990s a new zone emerged in the West End area of the city and, like the second zone, this area quickly expanded.

Current Patterns of On-Street Sexual Exploitation in Winnipeg

Three community organization representatives suggested that the geographic location of Winnipeg's street sex trade is dynamic and constantly changing.³³ One community organization representative argued that because sexually exploited persons can be highly mobile, "there are no real boundaries".³⁴ It is therefore difficult to accurately articulate the location of specific zones. Over the past decade com-

munity pressure groups have increased their antagonism to sexually exploited people resulting in previously defined areas becoming more diffuse. Individuals on the streets are highly mobile, and if they are pushed out of one area they simply move to another. Such dislocation is not specific to Winnipeg, and Lowman's research on the effects of community pressure groups on the location of street sexually exploited youth and adults demonstrates that Vancouver has experienced the same dislocating phenomenon.³⁵

Although it has become increasingly difficult to define specific zones it is clear that the North End and West End zones have continued to grow. Kohm points out that "[s]ome believe the expansion of this 'low track' is the direct result of extreme poverty caused by the recession."³⁶ Other factors accounting for the expansion of the North and West End areas may include the failure of various 'systems' (such as the education system, welfare system, and Child and Family Services), the rise in availability and use of crack cocaine, and increased community and police pressure on street sexually exploited adults and youth.

The dispersal of sexually exploited individuals in an area is cause for concern. Sexually exploited women, men, and transgendered people are safer when working in pairs or in close proximity to

30 Kohm, p.29.

31 Brannigan, Knalfa, and Levy, pp. 195-196.

32 Kohm, p.28.

33 Enns, Gloria, personal interview, 10 January, 2005; TERF Representative, personal interview, 11 January, 2005; Runner, Jane, personal interview, 19 January, 2005.

34 Enns.

35 Loman, John, Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution in Canada, *Violence Against Women*, Volume 6 Issue 9, (September 2000).

36 Kohm, p.29.

each other. In Winnipeg, harm reduction community organizations such as Sage House encourage women and transgendered people to work in pairs. This system is commonly referred to as spotting, whereby sexually exploited persons work with another individual (this person may be another sexually exploited person, a partner, or another person not

involved in the sex trade) who takes down the license plate number of customers. This action is either reciprocated or the spotter is given a cut of the earnings. Though aware of this system, some individuals working the streets may not always employ a spotter. This, together with dispersal, may jeopardize their safety.

Part Two—Methodology and Methodological Considerations

In keeping with the community development perspective, and in order to achieve this paper's objectives, experiential women and other individuals close to the sex trade were consulted. Throughout the process of this study, their intelligence, feedback, and guidance have been invaluable. Two groups were interviewed: individuals who work for community organizations which provide support for, and resources to, sexually exploited youth and adults; and experiential women.³⁷

Methodology

Group One: Individuals who work or volunteer for community organizations

Over the course of three months, six people representing four community organizations were interviewed. Respondents include: two representatives from Sage House³⁸; two representatives from TERF; one representative from Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters (HSLs); and one representative from Resources Assistance for Youth, Inc. (RAY). The information they provided has educated us and fundamentally altered our thinking and perceptions.

An open-ended interview format was used. With the exception of two, all interviews were tape-recorded. Interviews

lasted an average of sixty minutes. All participants were asked six main questions; however, other questions naturally did arise. These six questions were:

- What are the services your organization offers?
- Based on your observations why do you think people get involved in or are lured into sexual exploitation?
- Is working the streets a choice? Why or why not?
- What are the struggles that street sexually exploited youth and adults deal with when trying to make their transition off the streets?
- Over the last decade how has street sexual exploitation changed?
- What gaps in programming, the law, and government services do you see?

Group Two: Experiential Women

The researcher volunteers at a drop-in program that is open to sexually exploited youth and adults. Individuals participating in the program were asked if they would like to take part in this research. Seven experiential women were interviewed. All participants had begun their healing journeys out of sexual exploitation. Three experiential women had initiated their transition approximately five or more years ago and four began

37 The project received approval from the University of Winnipeg Department of Politics Ethics Committee in November, 2004. Signed consent was obtained from all participants and a verbal briefing of the interview process and the rights of the participant were provided. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time and that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not wish to. Confidentiality was an essential component of this research. As such, the names of respondents remain anonymous and any information that could identify experiential respondents is omitted.

38 One Sage House representative sat in on the second roundtable discussion involving experiential participants. She was not interviewed on a one-on-one basis.

transitioning two to three years ago. Out of the seven interviewed, four were Two-Spirited.

Two methods of interviewing were employed: an oral history method³⁹ and roundtable discussions. Of the seven interviewed, six participated in roundtable discussions, with two of the six also participating in oral history interviews. One woman did not participate in any roundtable discussions. Two roundtable discussions were held. One woman participated in two roundtables.

Oral History Interview Process

There was no time constraint put on the length of the interviews. Most interviews lasted forty-five to sixty minutes. Consistent with the oral history method, informed consent was sought. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. If the participant did not wish to be tape-recorded or at times requested that we temporarily turn off the recorder, the request was respected.

Experiential participants were asked five questions:

- What is your story? How did you become involved/lured into Winnipeg's sex trade?
- What made you realize you wanted out?
- What steps did you take to get out?
- What and/or who contributed to your successful transition off the streets?
- Based on your experience, what gaps in programming, the law, and government services do you see?

Roundtable Discussions

In February and March, 2005, two roundtable discussions were held. The discussions were casual and conversational. In the first roundtable a variety of issues were discussed. The second discussion focused on what resources experiential participants felt were lacking and needed in Winnipeg.

Three adult women took part in the first discussion. Two participants were transgendered. Four adult women took part in the second discussion. Three of these participants were transgendered. Both discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. These discussions were unique because the majority of participants were Two-Spirited. In Winnipeg there is a severe lack of research on and programming for sexually exploited Two-Spirited people. This discussion gave insight into supports experiential transgendered participants feel are working and what further supports are needed.

Methodological Considerations

True community development not only involves experiential people in research but it entails them doing that research. The researcher is not experiential in the sense that she has not been sexually exploited. In order to produce truly solid findings, this type of research ought to be conducted by survivors of sexual exploitation. Experiential people are increasingly doing their own research and writing their own funding proposals. We fully support this.

³⁹ Reid describes the oral history method as "one or more persons narrating, often in an interview situation, an account of a life story or an event, usually in the past, to someone, usually a researcher, who listens and asks relevant questions as the interview progresses. It is current normal practice for the researcher to record the interview, transcribe the recording either in full or in part, and analyse the findings."; Reid, Lindsay, "Using Oral History In Midwifery Research", *British Journal of Midwifery*, Volume 12 Issue Number 4, (April 2004). p1.

Part Three—Vulnerability and Strength: Being Lured into Sexual Exploitation and Transitioning Out

A. Risk Factors that Increase a Person's Vulnerability to Sexual Exploitation:

The most prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was that there was not one reason why a person becomes vulnerable to sexual exploitation, rather there are many; everyone has her own story and interprets and deals with experiences differently. This finding is consistent with Kingsley and Mark's intensive Canada-wide study that involved consultations with sexually exploited Aboriginal youth.⁴⁰

Everybody's got their own stories, but you know there's not one reason why people become involved, it's just a whole bunch of reasons put together.

—*Experiential Woman*

Common factors that emerged from the interviews and literature review included:

- Poverty and survival, including homelessness or the threat of homelessness.
- The legacy of residential schools, the continuation of colonialism, and racism.
- Lack of stability and being placed in multiple care homes.
- Childhood physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse.

- Sexism, gender discrimination, and discrimination against Two-Spirited/transgendered people.
- Pimps and peer pressure.
- Generational sexual exploitation (having a parent or family member who was or is sexually exploited).
- Substance dependency.
- Effects of low self-esteem.

Other factors identified in various literature sources include the failure of our education system; lack of job opportunities and skills; over-representation in the judicial system; the role of the media; and lack of role models.⁴¹ Not all sexually exploited youth and adults “may experience every one of these factors, all of these issues are linked, and each in itself can provide pathways to sexual exploitation in the sex trade.”⁴²

Poverty and Survival

Poverty and the need to survive increases a person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. A 2001 TERF study indicated that 38 percent of TERF youth were homeless and 86 percent were runaways.⁴³ In 1991 it was reported that “eighty-six percent of sexually exploited youth had experienced homelessness for forty consecutive days or more.”⁴⁴ Scheirich states that while some sexually exploited youth “had been

40 Kingsley and Mark, p.12.

41 Kingsley and Mark, pp.11-32.

42 Kingsley and Mark, p.12.

43 Ndaawin, p.14.

44 Scheirich, Wendy, “Manitoba's Strategy: Responding to Children and Youth Involved in Sexual Exploitation”, *The Manitoba Journal of Child Welfare*, Volume 3 Issue Number 1, (April 2004) p.5.

evicted from the parental home ... most homelessness was a result of running from conflict at home, from child welfare placements, or from the criminal justice system.”⁴⁵ Kingsley and Mark add: “Runaways fear the police and/or a punitive care accommodation; therefore, children and youth who have left their homes or care placements are among the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation.”⁴⁶

Experiential peoples’ stories of how they became lured and entrapped in the lifestyle confirm these findings. One woman described how at eighteen she moved into an apartment and, the day she moved in, all her money and valuables were stolen. She had not yet paid her damage deposit and rent. After being rejected by welfare, she turned to the streets in order to pay her bills. When asked what her story was she replied:

I had my place broken into and it was like my first day I moved into this place and I had like no money in the bank 'cause I never keep money in the bank anyways. Got like two thousand five hundred dollars stolen from me. Everything and anything in my house that was worth anything, even my freaking piggybank was stolen and I didn't pay my damage deposit yet and I don't know. Like I, you know, didn't know what the hell I'm gonna do, you know, like oh my god I'm going to be homeless. I'm eighteen, how did I get here already, you know what I mean? I went to welfare, they said they won't help me. So one of my friends convinced me to be logical, to work. It would be easy to make the money quickly and it was, at first,

very easy. I did make the money back quickly, I made it back in one night. Well I made the rent money back and one hundred dollars left or something after but god it was gross.

Another woman described how at seventeen a male drove up in a car, flashed her money, and asked if she would like to earn it. Not having a steady source of income and coming from a financially disadvantaged background made the offer a powerful lure. When discussing her story she said:

At that age, I had no income and I had no one really supporting me at that age other than my mother.... Some people have money but for me, at that age, I did not have money. And so that is how I got involved in the sex trade, was totally by accident.

A third woman described how the money received from sexual exploitation enabled her to buy “the necessities”, food and clothing, as well as numbing substances used to cope with the harsh realities on the streets. She added that the money provided her with a sense of belonging and acceptance amongst her friends. When asked what made her vulnerable she stated:

Just money and when I had money everybody was my friend.

This testimony of how they became lured into sexual exploitation demonstrates that survival, specifically poverty and the threat of homelessness, were compelling factors to becoming sexually exploited.

45 Scheirich, p.5.

46 Kingsley and Mark, p.20.

The Legacy of the Residential School System, Continued Colonialism, and Racism

A disturbingly disproportionate number of sexually exploited youth in Winnipeg are Aboriginal peoples. TERF statistics estimate that 70 percent of sexually exploited youth and 50 percent of adults are Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁷ What causes Aboriginal children and youth to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than dominant society? The answers are rooted in Canada's colonial history, including the legacy of residential schools. Time and again, individuals who support sexually exploited youth and adults mentioned observing the effects of residential schools play out in later generations and nearly all experiential respondents had a parent, grandparent, or abuser who were victims of the residential school system. When asked what increases a person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, one woman replied:

My personal experience when my friends were the same age as me, their parents lacked parenting skills [as a result of being victims of the residential school system]... People who were around my age had to learn their own basic skills and how to survive, and one of the ways we learnt on our own was through the sex trade.

Compounding the legacy of residential schools is the fact that colonial attitudes, though insidiously covert, continue to this day and penetrate the ways in which the mainstream, dominant society thinks and is organized. Razack convincingly argues that there are "no better indicators of con-

tinuing colonization and its accompanying spatial strategies of containment than the policing and incarceration of urban Aboriginal peoples."⁴⁸ She further asserts "the evidence that Aboriginal peoples live in a state of colonization as direct and coercive as prevailed two centuries ago is nowhere better demonstrated than in the high rate of suicides among Aboriginal peoples in Canada."⁴⁹ These suicide rates, which are four times that of non-Aboriginal peoples, are "an expression of the 'collective anguish' of three hundred years of colonial history."⁵⁰ The continuation of colonial attitudes and structures, coupled with the legacy of residential schools, contributes to the oppression of Aboriginal peoples thereby increasing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Racism was also mentioned by respondents as a factor influencing their sexual exploitation. One woman stated that racism "was a contributing factor that helped get me in the sex trade." She discussed how negative stereotypes and racist name-calling shaped her perceptions of herself; this, in turn, led to a loss in self-esteem and confidence in herself, her capabilities, and culture. She said the following:

I realized at a young age that because of other people's misperceptions of who I was as an individual, you know, their misperceptions that oh I'm only a dirty Indian, you know, I'm a squaw. Their misperceptions of who I was as an individual helped define my road towards the sex trade. At that age I heard a lot of talk from a lot of people about welfare, you

47 Ndaawin, p.14.

48 Razack, p.133.

49 Razack, p.134.

50 Razack, pp.134-135.

know. We're only welfare bums, you know. We're only looking for handouts. It's like in that sense that really demeans us and I realized at a very young age that that became ingrained in my subconscious.

The effects of racism and its self-fulfilling prophetic effects are echoed in Kingsley and Mark's research. They found that for sexually exploited youth racism "was one of the largest influencing factors in their lives.... Being told all your life that you are inferior because of the colour of your skin shapes your thoughts, your actions, and your sense of self-worth."⁵¹

Lack of Stability and Experiencing Multiple Placements

An unstable family setting can increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Winnipeg surveys reveal that 63 percent of sexually exploited youth have had experiences with the child welfare system and 77.8 percent had been in agency care and lived in foster or group homes for years.⁵² These statistics are consistent with one community organization representative's observations that "the majority of [sexually exploited] kids have been in care since they were very young."⁵³ Cusick points out that the social stigma associated with being in care can decrease a person's self-esteem. She adds that children in care have a greater chance of being introduced into sexual exploitation by others in care facilities.⁵⁴ Experiencing multiple placements and not having any say in their fu-

ture contributes to feelings of low self-esteem, lack of belonging, fewer emotional supports, lack of parental connection, and makes it difficult to fit in and remain in the mainstream, dominant school system.

What I have seen with our kids, and not all of our kids, but the majority of kids have been in care since they were very young. Multiple, multiple placements. They don't have a sense of belonging. They just feel like everybody has given up on them. Their self-esteem is really, really low.

—Community Organization Representative, HSLS

Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Abuse

Physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse is widely recognized as increasing vulnerability to sexual exploitation. According to TERF statistics, 68 percent of sexually exploited youth in Winnipeg were sexually abused as children and 48 percent were physically abused.⁵⁵ In Canada, approximately 80 percent of sexually exploited youth reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse.⁵⁶ Despite the strong correlation between abuse and sexual exploitation it is important to remember that not all sexually exploited youth have experienced abuse, and not all youth who have experienced abuse become sexually exploited.

The topic of abuse can be traumatic and those interviewed in this study were never

51 Kingsley and Mark, p.24.

52 Sheirich, p.4.

53 Anderson, Jackie, personal interview, 27 January, 2005.

54 Cusick, Linda, "Youth Prostitution: A Literature Review", *Child Abuse Review*, Volume 11, (2002) p.64.

55 Ndaawin, p.14.

56 Kingsley and Mark, p.14.

directly asked or pressed to discuss this issue. Two experiential women shared stories of childhood sexual abuse and rape. They described how these experiences led to feelings of low self-esteem and, as they grew older, self-abuse. Both identified these traumatic experiences as increasing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation later in life. On a more positive note, both mentioned that facing up to these childhood horrors was an important component of their healing journey, for it provided them with an understanding of why, throughout much of their lives, they felt shameful and low.

For some women, and not all, it's a background of childhood sexual abuse ... that has contributed to them using the streets. It is often said that if you're going to have to put out then you might as well get money and have some control over who you're putting out for. And that's a very sad commentary on the longer-term effect of childhood sexual abuse.
—Community Organization Representative, Sage House

Gender Discrimination, including Discrimination Against Two-Spirited People

Gender discrimination, especially discrimination against Two-Spirited people, was identified as a factor that could potentially increase a person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Women make up 75 to 80 percent of all people who are sexually exploited.⁵⁷ The feminization of poverty partially explains why the majority

of sexually exploited people are women. In 1999, it was reported that 19.9 percent of Manitoba women age eighteen and over had incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoff (LICO).⁵⁸ Poverty amongst some populations is greater than others. For example, in 1995 it was reported that in Manitoba, 47.2 percent—almost half—of Aboriginal women fifteen years of age and over were poor.⁵⁹ For every dollar earned by Aboriginal women, non-Aboriginal men earned \$2.34.⁶⁰

Research regarding sexually exploited transgendered people is shockingly absent. All studies lump Two-Spirited people into the same category as sexually exploited women. There are similarities amongst experiences but there are also differences. Finding accurate Winnipeg statistics on sexually exploited transgendered people is difficult.

What is evident is that Two-Spirited people face an enormous amount of discrimination and harassment, both before becoming sexually exploited and after. Prior to their exploitation, they may experience disapproval from friends, family, and society at large, and finding a mainstream job is difficult if not impossible. Discrimination inevitably leads to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, shame, and alienation. When asked what increased people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation one Two-Spirited participant stated:

We weren't accepted as transgendered way back and we turned to the streets.

In our heterosexual-dominated society,

57 Kingsley and Mark, p.28.

58 Donner, Lissa, Angela Busch and Nahanni Fontaine, Women, Income and Health in Manitoba: An Overview and Ideas for Action (Winnipeg, Women's Health Clinic, 2000) p.1.

59 Donner, Busch and Fontaine, p.9.

60 Donner, Busch and Fontaine, p.10.

the streets are one of the few places in which transgendered people can make some sort of an income and feel accepted.

Certainly with transgendered individuals there's homophobia and transphobia, so that they don't really have a lot of choices.... So often the streets appear as the only place where they are welcome to be.
—Community Organization Representative, Sage House

Pimps and Peer Pressure

The predominance of pimps in Winnipeg is reportedly lower than that of other cities. This does not mean that they do not exist. Pimping almost certainly exists in this city but the relationship between the man or woman doing the pimping and the youth or adults who are exploited may not reflect the common definition of what a pimp is.⁶¹ For example, an adult may pressure or force a youth to try crack cocaine, offer it for free for a while until they are hooked, and then tell the youth that they owe them or else be ready to face consequences. One way to get out of this situation is to make money through sexual exploitation.

During the interviews it became apparent that gangs in Winnipeg may have a number of girls whom they exploit. Girls are forced to earn money through sexual exploitation and they are expected to recruit their peers to do the same. One community organization worker said that a “gang might have ... several girls in the gang who are working and then the girls’ job is to get their friends involved”.⁶²

Pressure exerted by friends can be a pow-

erful coercive factor in becoming exploited. Sheirich states some youth “became involved by following the example of a friend or acquaintance who touted the glamour and financial rewards” of being sexually exploited.⁶³ It is important to remember that the peer coercing their friend may be doing so because they have obligations to someone exerting power over them—a gang member, pimp, or drug dealer, for example.

Three experiential respondents mentioned that influence from a friend was one factor that increased their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Two mentioned that their peers introduced them to the lifestyle as a means of making quick money but their friends did not use direct coercive tactics or threats; rather, they discussed the idea of sexual exploitation and the potential income it could provide. The third woman alluded to severe peer pressure. When reflecting on her recruitment into sexual exploitation she stated that her friends “kind of forced me out there too, and if I didn’t do it they wouldn’t be my friends no more, they’d all ignore me”. It appears that if someone is already vulnerable and lacks a sense of belonging, a strong support system, and self-esteem, peer pressure can be a compelling reason to become sexually exploited and remain entrenched in it.

Generational Sexual Exploitation: Having a Parent or Relative Who was or is Sexually Exploited

Having a parent or relative who is or has been sexually exploited can expose youth to the lifestyle thereby increasing their vul-

61 A “pimp” is typically used to describe a male who “manages” sexually exploited youth and adults. See Lowman, 2000, p.8.

62 Runner.

63 Sheirich, pp.4-5.

nerability. Though not well documented, one community organization representative from TERF has observed an increase in generational exploitation, where TERF has “worked with their moms in some situations and with the kids”.⁶⁴ She further notes that sexual exploitation “has just been part of that family’s norm.... And the children are just raised that way that the sex trade and that type of culture is just the way of life around them and that’s all they know”.⁶⁵ The community organization representative points out, however, that generational sexual exploitation is not found in the majority of sexually exploited youth and adults. Whether there is, in fact, an increase in generational sexual exploitation or whether families are increasingly utilizing supports, such as TERF, is unclear. More research needs to be done on this issue.

Substance Dependency

There is much debate about substance use and sexual exploitation.⁶⁶ Based on interviews with people who provide supports to sexually exploited youth and adults it appears that substance dependency and addiction occur once they enter and become entrenched in sexual exploitation. One community organization representative asserted that with the majority of sexually exploited youth and adults, “once they get involved in the sex trade then their usage becomes an addiction or a problem”.⁶⁷ Experiential participants confirmed this observation. One woman said:

From what I’ve seen so far, most people in the sex trade start using because they’re in the sex trade. It just becomes a vicious cycle because you can’t do that sober, it’s so fucking disgusting.

This finding is consistent with a 1993 Vancouver-based survey of street-involved adults: 84 percent of respondents reported a change in their drug use whilst being sexually exploited; 96 percent stated that their use increased while “working”; and 80 percent stated their use increased in order to “work”.⁶⁸

Over the past five years crack cocaine has become widespread in all areas of Winnipeg. A common theme during the interviews was that drugs go through phases. As one community organization representative noted, “drugs go through different trends”.⁶⁹ In the 1980s many people were concerned about the prevalence of injecting Talwin and Ritalin (commonly known as Ts and Rs), and in the 1990s injecting cocaine grew in popularity. Today crack cocaine and crystal methamphetamine have replaced injection use of Talwin and Ritalin and cocaine as the more common substances on the streets. While some respondents mentioned that scares with diseases, such as HIV and Hepatitis C, had partially caused injection drug use to be replaced with smoking crack, others attributed this change to economics, that is the supply and demand, and thus prices for drugs.⁷⁰ Smoking crack is commonly thought of as a cleaner and therefore a safer method of using,

64 Runner.

65 Runner.

66 Cusick, pp.238-239.

67 Runner.

68 Lowman, 1995, Section 9, p.4.

69 Enns.

however, there is still the potential of catching HIV and Hepatitis C through the sharing of pipes.

It is unclear whether more people are becoming dependent on hard drugs, such as crack, and specifically whether youth are using more. Some people interviewed believed that there are more dependencies being created by crack cocaine use.⁷¹ Amongst the younger population it was reported that drug use by injection is less frequent and the more common dependencies are those created by crack and crystal methamphetamine. These drugs are so powerful that trying them even once can create an addiction. Triggers, defined as cravings for the drug, can be experienced for decades after not using and can occur by being in the presence of others who are high or simply being around others who are talking about the drug. When discussing substance use one experiential participant stated:

Addictions is huge, it's so controlling.

Another said:

Don't try crack. The very first time you [try it] you don't turn back.

Sexually exploited youth and adults have reportedly been forced to engage in drug use. One community organization worker discussed how predators who prey on youth force them or severely pressure them to try drugs. Once they get them addicted the predator has full power over youths' bodies and lives.⁷² One woman shared her story of how she was manipulated into becoming hooked to crack. In another province she met a man who said

he could get her to work on the "high track" of the city where she could earn more money, as long as she gave him a cut of her earnings. Soon after he asked her if she smoked marijuana and, without her knowing, began supplying her with cocaine-laced marijuana. After a month of using she realized what had happened but by then she was addicted. Once she had clued into his tactics the man became extremely violent to the point where each day, she feared for her life.

When discussing drug dependency it is important to remember that sexually exploited youth and adults use in order to cope with the harsh realities in their lives. Degradation, humiliation, and violence are experienced on a daily basis and substance use can temporarily help numb the pain inside them and help them escape their reality. The correlation between substance use and sexual exploitation is often misunderstood. The majority are all too ready to judge and label sexually exploited drug dependent adults and youth as "deviants" whose life "choices" have set them on the wrong track.

With coke it's different because you become totally numb immediately. You just become totally numb ... What those men put you through you need to be numb in order to be there ... you'd lose your fucking mind if you did that sober.

—Experiential Woman

I was taking morphine, like whatever. I didn't even know what these pills were. I'd just take them. It didn't matter, just as long as it would take me away from my reality

—Experiential Woman

70 Runner.

71 Roundtable Discussion, February, 2005.

72 Anderson.

I never thought I would ever have a bad date and when I did that just shocked me, it was like, that pushed me even greater into addictions.... I really got trapped into that cycle. Once it ensnared me it dragged me down and it's only in retrospect, looking back now, I realize I did go to an all-time low.

— *Experiential Two-Spirited Woman*

Effects of Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem and lack of confidence can increase a person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. In addition, experiences with institutions that do not work in their favour (for example the justice system, police force, school system, Child and Family Services) can cause sexually exploited youth and adults to feel frustrated and hopeless, and mainstream society's negative perceptions of them further serve to reinforce feelings of unworthiness. Kingsley and Mark observe, "Part of what diminishes their worth are labels of 'trouble' or 'high risk' which come to define them."⁷³

Entrapment

Poverty can keep one trapped in the cycle of exploitation. One woman said that it took her "a while to actually get off the streets" and she "had to work ... just to be able to get by." Although she had managed to quit using substances, the money provided to her by social assistance did not cover all her necessities and for various health reasons she was not able to immediately seek employment in the mainstream job market.

In addition to poverty, peer pressure, lack

of belonging, substance use, low self-esteem, and dealing with societal judgments and stereotypes on a daily basis are just some of the many factors that can make exiting from street sexual exploitation difficult. One community organization representative pointed out that peers, if not exiting at the same time, can pull transitioning sexually exploited youth and adults back into that lifestyle, and finding a new support group can be challenging.⁷⁴ Having negative experiences with mainstream institutions can further isolate certain peoples and groups and force them to reside in poverty stricken areas and on the streets. To some, the streets appear as one of the few places where they feel they fit. This can lead to depression, suicidal thoughts, shame, blame, and extreme feelings of unworthiness.

B. The Exiting Journey

When discussing the journey out of sexual exploitation it became evident that this type of healing does not happen over night. Facing up to past traumas, such as abuse, rape, and other violence, is emotionally difficult and facing present life issues, such as addictions, low self-esteem, and societal judgments, can at times seem insurmountable. Kingsley and Mark report that, "Several returns to the trade are almost inevitable."⁷⁵

The Turning Point

A variety of experiences may lead sexually exploited youth and adults to initiate the beginnings of their healing journey. There is no one reason that leads a person to attempt to exit; there are many.

73 Kingsley and Mark, p.31.

74 Runner.

75 Kingsley and Mark, p.64.

Each person interprets and deals with experiences differently. What might be a life transforming event for one individual might not be for another.

When discussing transforming events that compelled participants to take steps to heal and transition out of sexual exploitation three common themes emerged: near death experiences; motherhood; and role modeling and support from others, especially those with similar experiences.

Near Death Experiences

For street sexually exploited youth and adults, violence is an everyday reality. Winnipeg-specific studies on violence against sexually exploited youth and adults are virtually non-existent. A Canadian study carried out by Prostitution Alternative Counseling and Education (PACE) Society found that one-third of street involved women had experienced “an attack on their life” whilst being exploited.⁷⁶ In British Columbia, the murder rate for street sexually exploited youth and adult women is more than 120 times the rate of other adult women.⁷⁷ Lowman has extensively documented violence against street sexually exploited youth and adults in British Columbia, particularly those residing in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver. Since the mid-1980s there has been a steady increase in murders of sexu-

ally exploited youth and adults in Canada. When analyzing twenty-eight British Columbian murder cases and police data on these cases, Lowman found that a “striking feature of this information is that the police use the term ‘overkill’ to describe the force brought to bear in 37 percent of the murder cases.”⁷⁸ The perpetrator(s) used excessive force—more “than would be necessary to kill someone.”⁷⁹ When reading details of cases described as overkill Lowman states that “one is left with the impression of an attacker in a blind rage, acting out a hatred that only he can understand.”⁸⁰

Murders are “just the extreme end of a continuum of violence” against sexually exploited youth and adults; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are commonly experienced.⁸¹ A Vancouver study that involved experiential people administering surveys to other sexually exploited women (70 percent of respondents identified as Aboriginal peoples) in the Downtown East Side found that 98 percent of sexually exploited women had been “victims of violence as a result of a ‘bad date’ at least once whilst they had been working.”⁸² A bad date is defined as, “any date which involved any physical, sexual or emotional acts of violence as well as any form of robbery/financial loss as a result of a customer.”⁸³ 94 percent of these women had been physically beaten or as-

76 Amnesty International, “Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada: A Summary of Amnesty International Concerns”, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR200012004>, accessed January, 2005.

77 Lowman, 1995, Section 5, p.1.

78 Lowman, 1995, Section 3, p.3.

79 Lowman, 1995, Section 3, p.3.

80 Lowman, 1995, Section 3, p.3.

81 Lowman, 2000, p.19.

82 Lowman, 1995, Section 9, p. 7.

83 Lowman, 1995, Section 9, p.7.

saulted; 90 percent were victims of robbery; 89 percent had been sexually assaulted and/or group raped; 48 percent were assaulted with a knife, gun, or other weapon; and 11 percent were held against their will.⁸⁴ 97 percent of the women interviewed thought “that some identifiable groups of persons were victimized more than others.”⁸⁵ The three groups identified to be more at risk of violence are: sexually exploited youth, both boys and girls (99 percent); transgendered people (61 percent); and Aboriginal women (31 percent).

Two women believed that an experience with a bad date was one of the factors that compelled them to initiate their transitioning journey. When asked what made her initiate her healing journey out of sexual exploitation one woman replied:

I got raped twice in one week. And just after the second one I remember walking down the highway and going ‘you know that’s really enough’.

She had been thinking about starting her transition but these incidents reinforced feelings of wanting out. Since that experience she took transitioning steps, such as dealing with her substance use, but for financial reasons she continued to rely on sexual exploitation as a means to survive. It was another near death incident that made her realize even more that she wanted out. She stated:

I still worked until I was seven months pregnant. Some guy pulled a knife on me.... I jumped out of the car and I was just huge. I had to roll ‘cause I jumped out of the car. I was like flying down the back

lane. He had a knife. I was fucking terrified.... And that really gave me a wake up call, like really you don’t fit here.

When asked the same question another woman answered:

When I went on a bad trick with that guy. He held a knife to my throat and all that and tried to, tried to rape me. I remember it, he held a knife to my throat and how I got away was that I screamed and he kind of reacted and I just jumped out of the car. And I got away.... [A]fter that bad trick I didn’t want to go back out there. I was hurt. I felt degraded, humiliated, vulnerable, like you know.

In addition to surviving violent attacks, nearly all participants have had a number of close friends and family members who have been murdered. One woman said:

I lost a few friends on the streets. Girls I use to hang around with, they got, they got murdered out there. It makes you think, you wonder. I’ve been hanging around there for so long it make me wonder could’ve been me dead, dead down there.

In street sexual exploitation it is evident that a social atmosphere of violence exists. In this atmosphere customers, pimps, and other exploiters, most of whom are men, gain some sense of identity, of “who they are, and, more importantly, who they are not”, and pleasure out of severely and violently exerting power and control over their victims (mostly poverty stricken marginalized women and transgendered people).⁸⁶ Lowman persuasively argues: “As to the extent which violence against

84 Lowman, 1995, Section 9, p.8.

85 Lowman, 1995, Section 9, p.8.

86 Razack, p.127.

prostitutes is a matter of violence against women in general rather than 'prostitutes' in particular, too much analytic separation should be resisted."⁸⁷ To support his assertion, he details cases in which the perpetrator had a history of physically and sexually assaulting sexually exploited women *and* later murdered women not involved or exploited through the sex trade. Lowman closes by concluding that though violence against sexually exploited people "ought to be understood as part of a continuum of violence against women more generally", it is nonetheless "likely that some men are more easily able to rationalize violence against a 'prostitute' because of her moral-political marginalization than against other women."⁸⁸

Motherhood and Childbirth

Pregnancy and motherhood were mentioned by two participants as a life-transforming event that compelled them to take steps to heal. A Winnipeg-based study reported that one-third of sexually exploited adults became pregnant when they were under the age of eighteen and actively being sexually exploited.⁸⁹ According to Scheirich, with sexually exploited girls and women the babies are usually produced with a partner and not usually the result of having intercourse with exploiters and "dates".⁹⁰ Scheirich reports, "In most cases the pregnancies do not proceed to full term or the babies are

taken into custody, further reducing their self-esteem and often resulting in greater drug use and entrenchment in the sex trade".⁹¹ Berry's research involving forty-seven sexually exploited women and transgendered women in Winnipeg who had experienced addictions and were exiting the sex trade found that respondents had dealings with Winnipeg Child and Family Services and many mentioned that their children had been apprehended. She reports that, "many of the women talked about feeling quite hopeless with regard to parenting their children again and how those feelings of guilt, shame and loss only contributed to their continual drug and alcohol abuse."⁹² Scheirich notes that some sexually exploited women and girls were able to keep their babies and become successful mothers: "For these young parents, pregnancy and motherhood are often cited as life transforming, helping them to leave a life of drugs and sexual exploitation."⁹³

Two oral history participants mentioned that pregnancy and birth caused them to take steps to deal with their substance use and sexual exploitation. One woman said that although her child was apprehended shortly after being born she has since "been cutting down hanging" around certain places. Another women described how becoming pregnant motivated her to stay sober:

I got pregnant and that forced me to stay sober. I had no fucking choice 'cause I was

87 Lowman, 2000, p.21.

88 Lowman, 2000, p.21.

89 Scheirich, p.8.

90 Scheirich, p.8.

91 Scheirich, p.8.

92 Berry, p.16.

93 Scheirich, p.8.

pregnant. You know. I don't believe in hurting a child, so I didn't. So that kept me clean right through. As soon as I found out I was pregnant I never relapsed anymore after that, I stopped.

For some, motherhood can be a powerful motivator in attempting to break the cycle of sexual exploitation. It is worthwhile to note that even if children were apprehended and placed in care, sexually exploited women continued to talk about their child or children in loving ways and all demonstrated a deep concern for their child's or children's future.

Role Modeling and Support from Survivors

Role modeling and support provided by survivors of similar experiences (such as sexual exploitation, addictions, rape, and/or abuse) can be a powerful factor

in compelling a person to begin their transition journey. Seeing others successfully transition out of sexual exploitation can provide hope and motivation. One woman said:

I think what made me realize that I had the power to walk away from that lifestyle was the empowerment I got from other sisters who have also been sexually exploited, whether it be rape or child abuse. It's like coming together and sharing our stories we find that empowerment to move on. We use that as a source of strength.

Another woman cited the support provided by a survivor who works for a program that supports sexually exploited youth and adults as influencing her to initiate her healing journey. According to this woman, "she [the woman who works for the program] put it in my head that maybe I don't fit here anymore".

Part Four—Experiential Insight: Transitioning Supports

Once people decide that they want to leave their involvement with street sexual exploitation, what do they need to successfully make that transition? By drawing on the opinions of experiential participants this section discusses what supports they feel have helped them in transitioning out of sexual exploitation, and what additional resources are needed.

A. Supports Guiding Experiential People on their Journey

Our starting hypothesis was that sexually exploited participants appreciate current programs and supports, but that gaps exist. Our findings confirmed this. All respondents expressed great appreciation for the resources currently offered by community organizations such as TERF, Sage House, and Dream Catchers. When discussing who or what contributed to their successful transition out of sexual exploitation, those interviewed predominantly credited: individuals who work at community organizations; the programs offered to sexually exploited youth and adults; and other peers participating and utilizing these programs.

1. Individuals Who Provide Support to Sexually Exploited Youth and Adults

Nearly all experiential participants discussed the strong role individuals from community organizations played in their transition journey. Having someone who is able to connect with people trying to leave sexual exploitation can contribute to an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and determination. The persons usually described by respondents went beyond their role as a service and/or support pro-

vider. Not only did they provide essential one-on-one counseling sessions but they also referred transitioning people to helpful programs, supports, and conferences; advocated agencies (such as welfare) when needed; and were vital supports which transitioning individuals could rely on in times of need and stress. Their actions showed transitioning people that others care about and believe in them.

We found that many individuals cited were themselves survivors; that is they had overcome and healed from such things as abuse, substance use, and/or sexual exploitation. Shared experiences helped foster connections, trust, and openness while simultaneously empowering experiential women in the belief that they too could be survivors.

2. Programs and Community Organizations

Participants also discussed the positive role various programs and community organizations played, and continue to play, in their transition journey (see Appendix One for a list of Winnipeg-based community organizations and programs that support sexually exploited adults and youth). These supports helped them deal with and overcome personal struggles and issues. One woman mentioned that the programs at TERF helped her improve her communication skills:

Before I went to TERF I had really, really bad communication skills. Like I was really rude. I didn't know how to get my point across without making somebody upset.... Like before I went to TERF I guess I was thinking more about myself.

She also mentioned that Dream Catchers helped her in overcoming her substance use:

Dream Catchers helped too 'cause it taught me coping skills of how I'm going to get through this craving.

Programs do not function without people running and using them. When discussing positive aspects of programs we must also credit the individuals who work at these programs and organizations and transitioning peers utilizing programs.

3. Peer Support

The most outstanding finding was that the simple act of sharing stories with others who have experienced sexual exploitation, and who have made a successful transition, can be extremely empowering. Peer support can help remove feelings of isolation, shame, and blame. Two participants mentioned that their involvement in the Dream Catchers Peer Mentorship program was instrumental in their healing journey. Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers is a weekly sobriety support group for sexually exploited youth and adults. It runs out of Klinik Community Health Centre and offers mentorship training to persons transitioning out of sexual exploitation. Once graduated from the Peer Mentorship program, people have the opportunity to provide support to other transitioning sexually exploited youth and adults. When asked who or what contributed to her transition out of sexual exploitation one woman replied:

It was the rest of my sisters who were part of this Peer Mentorship program that I graduated from. They were very much

instrumental in my healing journey and the road to recovery because hearing their stories, hearing what they went through, the hell that they went through, realizing that I'm not the only one, was really a source of strength. It really was a source of strength because realizing that I'm not the only one and that there are others out there who have gone through the same things that I've gone through, that really was a source of strength because that gave me courage to face those demons.

Interviews with persons who work for community organizations demonstrated that they too recognize the importance of peer support. As one community organization representative noted:

The only thing that I can see that is helping them [sexually exploited adults and youth] out is that peer support that they are getting. And obviously organizations. I am not saying that we're not there to help them or that our support is negligible. I think for some people it can be critical and at points in time it's critical. But overall, on the twenty-four hour seven-days-a-week basis, it's the peer support that pulls them through. Their peer groups, their support groups of people like themselves who have been there and done it and have left the streets.⁹⁴

We conclude that the support provided both by peers, and by individuals who work at community organizations has changed their lives in positive ways. Other important supports discussed include family members and partners who do not use substances and who are understanding, patient, and willing to provide a listening ear in times of need.

94 Enns.

B. Additional Supports Needed in Order to Make a Successful Transition

Participants identified additional resources and supports that are needed when transitioning out of street sexual exploitation. These include:

- Transitional housing and a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week safe house for sexually exploited youth and adults.
- A women's-only addictions centre that is designed by women and transgendered individuals and is specifically for sexually exploited adults and youth.
- More resources for sexually exploited transgendered women.
- More resources and supports in general.

1. More Transitional Housing and a Safe House

The most prominent recommendation made by respondents was the need for a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week safe house for women and transgendered women who are transitioning out of the sex trade. One woman said:

There needs to be like a safe house for girls. Like a three stage housing or something for women that like, just when they get the thought, 'cause it doesn't come often, to get the hell off the street.

Another woman simply said:

[T]hey should have houses for the women.

A woman who has transitioned out of the sex trade concurred:

Housing is really big. Having a safe, clean, affordable place to live.

Nearly all Two-Spirited participants mentioned that they would like to see a safe house and transition housing that is specifically for Two-Spirited women. When asked about gaps in programming one transgendered woman replied:

Have a safe house for transgenders. It's needed.

One Two-Spirited respondent mentioned that there should be Two-Spirited housing and she suggested that other transgendered women could volunteer at these houses and provide support to those who were transitioning. When discussing programming gaps she stated:

[The] possibility for transgender housing. Like there's experiential transgenders like me... [who] could actually volunteer our time to help the new transgenders.

Some also suggested that there should be a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week safe house where sexually exploited people could go to be safe, regardless of whether they were transitioning. One oral history participant said:

There just needs to be a safe place for women to go. Like all the time, like twenty-four hours a day. I'm sorry, sex trade workers don't work nine to five. I'm sorry, you know, it's just not the way it goes. We sleep nine to five if we have a home, you know what I mean? And the reality is ninety percent of them don't even have fucking homes. And they need to be given that option.

She also suggested that instead of fining sexually exploited adults it might be more effective and beneficial if the police referred them, but not forced them, to a safe house:

There just needs to be a safe house for the

women. Like even if they get the thought, even if they only go for a couple of days. You know. And be safe you know. Because it's not right. They get arrested and thrown right back. What's the point in arresting them if you're just going to throw them back out on the street? You're trying to teach them something? Throwing them back out on the street ain't teaching them shit except this is where you belong, that's the only fucking thing it's fucking teaching them.

Community organization workers said they fault the welfare system for making it extremely hard for sexually exploited adults to exit. One community organization representative said: "I really fault the welfare system and the way it treats adults because in Winnipeg the only housing that single adults can get on welfare is rooming houses and most rooming houses are located in heavily drug-using neighbourhoods. So it is very, very difficult for somebody who is transitioning to get away from a drug-using neighbourhood because they can't afford it".⁹⁵ Overcoming an addiction is extremely difficult and having any form of contact with the drug can produce cravings. Individuals who worked at community organizations and experiential participants repeatedly discussed how difficult it is for transitioning people to overcome their addictions when they are submerged in areas where they frequently come into contact with other users and drug dealers. When discussing this issue during one roundtable discussion one woman said:

Like that's my problem. When I go to programs and I come back to the city I fall back into the same situations. Like I always relapse and I fall back. I come back, as soon as I came back to the city I came and hanged around [omitted] eh, and everybody's using. And I was like 'kay I'm not going to use, I'm going to walk away from it. I did good for awhile but as soon as I started hanging around with the group I went crazy again.

Currently, in Manitoba there are two safe houses, each with six beds, that are specifically designated for sexually exploited youth. It is estimated that there are more than 600 sexually exploited youth in this province.⁹⁶ The waiting lists to get into these houses are extremely long, leading one community organization worker to say: "When I look at some of the struggles and the barriers, there's only twelve beds across Manitoba and there are thousands of kids. I get calls every other day from referrals coming to our program. I get calls from youth themselves that have heard about us that want to be here. So that's a challenge. It's hard when I can't accept them".⁹⁷ For sexually exploited adults there is no transition housing whatsoever in Manitoba. There is clearly a need for transition housing and a safe house for sexually exploited youth and adults in Winnipeg. Over the course of this research the strongest recommendation made by participants is that, to make a successful transition out of street sexual exploitation, people must be given the option to access safe transitional housing and a safe house.

95 Enns.

96 City of Winnipeg Volunteer Committee for the Monitoring, Supervision, and Regulation of Sex Trade/Prostitution in Winnipeg, (Final Report, Canada: City of Winnipeg, 2001).

97 Anderson.

2. An All Women and Transgendered Addictions Centre for Sexually Exploited Youth and Adults

A second recommendation made by participants is that there is a need for a women's- and Two-Spirited people's-only addictions centre that is designed by experiential women and Two-Spirited women and is specifically tailored for sexually exploited youth and adults. Participants complained that addiction centres are man-made institutions, the majority of programs are coeducational, and most say they do not feel they can comfortably discuss their substance use and its relation to sexual exploitation. When asked about gaps in programming one woman said:

For women and transgenders there's no addictions centres for us. All the addiction centres are man-made. They're models for men, you know. A lot of them are coed. And there's nothing like where women can go and talk about their abuses on the street. If you were to go to treatment, or to an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or CA [Cocaine Anonymous] meeting and talk about those issues you'd be sitting there and talking about it with men that pick up girls for sex, you know. You don't feel safe. You don't feel comfortable. Centres for transgenders and for women, it's all role modeled after men, you know.

Respondents frequently said that sexually exploited youth and adults utilizing addictions programs sometimes come into contact with 'tricks' (men who have purchased sexual services). One woman said:

For a long time I was trying to get into rehab. And I remember the first time I walked in the door there was a trick

standing right in front of my face. The guy working at the front desk at rehab was a fucking trick. I was like, no, and I left.

This finding is consistent with Berry's research. She found that, "Many of the women reported having to be in treatment with men who had been their 'tricks' and how difficult this was for them, as the women would continually be approached for their service."⁹⁸ Participants in her research repeatedly said that they did not feel safe in coeducational treatment; they could not share their experiences about sexual exploitation; when they disclosed their involvement in sexual exploitation they were later approached by others in the group and asked for sexual services; and the treatment programs and institutions were male designed and structured.⁹⁹

Over the course of our research participants said that due to their abuses on the streets they did not trust all men. As a result, they did not feel safe or comfortable in coeducational treatment or in centres that employed male workers. One woman said:

They have ones [addictions centres and programs] for women but it's different because there's men working there and they just can't have that. I'm telling you that because women in the sex trade don't trust men ... They are so scared of men because, just control issues and so many things that happened in the sex trade.

Addictions and the sex trade are interconnected and in order to overcome one you must deal with the other. Berry reported: "most of the women felt that if they did not deal with the issue of being sexually

98 Berry, p.18.

99 Berry, pp.18-19.

exploited that they would not be successful in dealing with their addictions issue.”¹⁰⁰ One community organization worker stated:

*What bothers me is that sex trade workers don't even have their own sobriety meetings. Because when you go to a CA meeting you're going to stand up and say I used cocaine but you don't stand up and say I was a sex trade worker because half those guys in there have been tricks, or whatever, and because then people are just down on you the minute you say that. But if you're going to fix one thing, you can't fix one thing without bringing in the other.*¹⁰¹

In response to her comments one Two-Spirited woman stated:

That's one of the reasons I don't go [to treatment programs]. Because I don't want to bring up the whole issue that I'm transgender, I'm a sex trade worker. I will not bring that up.

Not having adequate access to a women's-only addictions centre that is specifically tailored for sexually exploited youth and adults is clearly a huge barrier for people who are attempting to exit sexual exploitation. There is one women's-only addictions centre in Manitoba, but its design and structure are not meeting the needs of sexually exploited youth and adults. Participants complained that it was male structured and the programs do not deal specifically with the issues surrounding sexual exploitation. Berry's research, workers at community organizations, and most importantly, experiential participants argued that for sexually exploited youth and adults to successfully

transition they need to have access to a women's- and Two-Spirited people's-only addictions centre that is designed by women and transgendered people and deals specifically with issues surrounding sexual exploitation.

3. More Resources for Sexually Exploited Two-Spirited Women

Another gap identified by all Two-Spirited participants was that, in Winnipeg, there is a total lack of resources and support systems specifically for them. Time and again transgendered respondents expressed frustration with the lack of support systems offered to them and, as a result of their chosen gender identity, many felt uncomfortable and judged when accessing mainstream support services such as the Salvation Army and other food banks. One Two-Spirited participant stated:

There are some places where transgressors will not go to. They will not go eat at the Salvation Army. They will not.

During a roundtable discussion, when asked if there was any programming specifically for transgendered people one Two-Spirited woman replied:

There is a support group ... but it's very, very informal.

In response, another participant said:

That's not what we're looking for. We need a support group that is for transgressors and most of us are Aboriginal.

One transgendered woman shared her story of coming to the city and being

100 Berry, p.17.

101 Roundtable Discussion, March, 2005.

placed with a family who disapprove of her identity. Drawing on her personal experience she suggested:

We need actual availability to food banks for transgenders that are not doing very well because some of the people, the transgenders that come from the reserve have no resources right away. And they're going to families that don't accept them at all and they're out on the streets, like what happened to me. So food bank, a little bit of clothing, and mostly shelter.

Two-Spirited women face a number of barriers in mainstream society. Young transgendered people are socially excluded from mainstream institutions. This is especially true of Aboriginal Two-Spirited people. In our society Aboriginal Two-Spirited people are extremely marginalized for they persistently experience transphobia and racism. On the streets harassment and violence is experienced daily. When asked about her experience with violence on the streets one Two-Spirited woman replied:

Being hit with rocks, being bombed by anything, eggs.

When asked about violence against sexually exploited people, one community organization representative stated:

Violence is across the board. I see, in terms of violence, the group that is singled out is the transgendered group for violence. Certainly they suffer on-going violence on the streets. And just standing there on the streets they get things thrown at them. We have seen a higher percentage of violent deaths to the transgender community.¹⁰²

As a result of gender discrimination many feel uncomfortable in the mainstream school system and drop out and, even with a high school diploma, they continue to face prejudices applying for mainstream jobs. To partially address this issue one transgendered participant said:

What would be good would be to have a little school, they should have a Two-Spirited school. Lots of these young transgenders, they drop out of school.

As further evidence nearly all individuals who work for community organizations felt that there was a lack of resources specifically for Two-Spirited people. One community organization representative stated that there "are so few transgender friendly places.... Besides the transgender issue, transphobia is rampant, in the systems, in the social programs, in the services, and in the community-based programs they're still transphobic and resistant".¹⁰³ Commenting on programming gaps another community organization representative said that there should be "more services for transgender, that is specific to transgenders".¹⁰⁴ A third community organization representative asserted that "there's not only a lack of respect but a lack of resources for transgendered young people".¹⁰⁵

When assessing the needs of sexually exploited people, transgendered individuals are often ignored. Our research suggests that street sexually exploited Two-Spirited women feel discriminated against and uncomfortable in certain heterosexual dominated supports. The total absence of transgendered specific sup-

102 Enns.

103 Enns.

104 Runner.

105 Anderson.

ports is leaving sexually exploited Two-Spirited people feeling frustrated and hopeless. At the very least, having a few simple resources, such as creating a transgendered support group or drop-in, could partially ameliorate these feelings.

4. More Resources in General

During the second roundtable, participants said more programs are needed. They said that Friday and Saturday evenings are the most stressful times for sexually exploited youth and adults; yet, other than the outreach van run by the community organization Street Connections, there are no supports, particularly in the West End. One woman discussed having more drop-ins and programs:

It would be nice if there was somewhere you could go so if you didn't want to work that night it could help you not work. It could help you stay sober for the night.

Another respondent said there should be more programs about healing and overcoming the trauma experienced on the streets. When asked about programming gaps one Two-Spirited woman replied:

More programs about healing, about all the abuse that people went through. Because you go through a lot of shit when you're standing out there, you go through a lot of shit to try to cover it up, like with drugs and that, to cover up what you've

been through, you know. So there's a lot of healing that needs to be done, recovery too of what you've been through.

Another woman said that transitioning adults entering the job market experience many difficulties:

It's so hard to get a job after because a lot of us have been out there for twenty years, some people maybe more, longer.... And what are you supposed to put on a resume after? Like where have you been all that time? Sometimes you don't even think you have skills because you think of yourself as a prostitute. And you don't realize that you're a woman and a mother and a friend and all that. You just have that label 'prostitute' on you.

One transgendered participant said that in all her years of being involved in programs and on committees the one addiction that has never been discussed is the addiction to money. When speaking about barriers transitioning youth and adults face she said:

It's never addressed. The fact that not having it [money] anymore the way you used to have it. The trigger for, okay I got no money I'm going to go out there and get some. I just need a break once, I just need a break once. And this whole cycle starts again. So that's a hidden addiction that no one has ever noticed.

Part Five—The Delivery of Supports: How and By Whom Supports are Best Delivered

A. How Supports are Best Delivered

When discussing the transitioning process, especially in the beginning stages, respondents repeatedly stressed that trusting others takes time. One woman said:

At first when I started hanging around Sage House I didn't have no trust for them. At first when I started hanging around with them I didn't trust them, and then my trust started building up. I started trusting them.

Fostering trust can take time. In a healthy environment, building relationships with transitioning adults and youth can happen sooner. Based on the education provided by experiential women, as well as the opinions of individuals who work for community organizations, we found that supports are best delivered in a voluntary, value-based environment that employs a harm reduction philosophy, does not have time-frames, incorporates culture and hires and involves experiential people.

Voluntary and Value-Based Environment

For any program to be effective it should be voluntary. Mandatory supports and resources are not successful. A person cannot be forced to heal. Sexually exploited youth and adults have to make the decision to begin healing themselves and for them to be receptive to support they must want to be there. Also, sexually exploited youth and adults rarely have been given the opportunity to be in any kind of deci-

sion-making role; this is especially true when it comes to making choices that directly affect their lives. Exploiters, rapists, Child and Family Services, and the dominant society in general, including the state, are all responsible for pushing sexually exploited youth and adults into powerless positions. In marginalized positions their voices, and thus their choices, are unheard. Forcing them into a program further takes away choices and self-determination.

As well as voluntary, programs ought to be value-based. By value-based we mean programs should not focus on rules but rather on positive values, life skills and assets that participants have or can develop. When discussing the importance of values versus rules one community organization representative stated: "Looking at where these kids are coming from, that's [rules] something they fought their entire life through—different systems, through different homes. These kids were not nurtured with routine and stability right from birth.... So you start doing that and it's going to put them further at risk out there".¹⁰⁶

Harm Reduction Based

Harm reduction is an essential aspect of any programming that deals with sexually exploited youth and adults. Instead of abstinence, harm reduction concentrates on reducing negative consequences for health, crime, and society (for example, by advocating the use of and providing condoms).¹⁰⁷ This philosophy is cru-

106 Anderson.

107 Berry, p.25.

cial when supporting sexually exploited youth and adults because many use substances in order to cope with their disadvantaged circumstances. Accepting sexually exploited youth and adults wherever they are in life and trying to improve their safety in non-coercive ways is essential.

No Timeframes

Timeframes, deadlines, and time in general are what structures mainstream society. However, for some life situations timeframes simply do not work. Repeatedly respondents mentioned that healing does not happen overnight and we cannot put a timeframe on healing. During one roundtable discussion one woman pointed out:

People don't heal overnight. It took seventeen years to get all the shit inside of you and it's probably going to take twenty years to get it out of you.

Another participant replied:

The aftercare. The follow up ... they've been addicted for seventeen years, okay, it's going to take them twenty years to get rid of all the baggage that they were carrying. And going to some program isn't going to heal. It's just a band-aid solution. What they need is healing.

One community organization worker observed that, "there are so many programs that are six months, three months. This type of healing does not happen in six months. For some kids it may not ever happen at all until they're adults".¹⁰⁸ Although we habitually place deadlines and timeframes on virtually everything, mainstream society must realize some life circumstances defy time. Having expectations of quick healing is unrealistic.

¹⁰⁸ Anderson.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson.

Culture and Aboriginal Involvement

A disproportionate number of Aboriginal women and Two-Spirited individuals are sexually exploited. The legacy of residential schools, assimilation, colonialism, and racism are responsible for Aboriginal peoples' marginalized status in mainstream society. Programming for sexually exploited people should aim to build cultural pride and empowerment. Not only should programming be culturally based but Aboriginal survivors must be visible and have clout within the organization. They should have influence in how the organization is institutionally structured and how programs are delivered.

Involvement of Experiential People in the Design of Programs

Finally, any program tailored for sexually exploited people ought to involve them in its design. Experiential people are best able to identify their needs and discuss how to best address these needs. Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters (HSLs), part of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, is an example of a program that has involved survivors of sexual exploitation in its design. When discussing the design of HSLs one representative stated that, "with this program we felt that rather than a bunch of professionals sitting around a table saying what it should look like we actually formulated an experiential advisory counsel. There were five women involved in everything, right from the hiring for my position, hiring the other staff, looking for the location, right down to choosing the colours, purchasing the furniture, everything. These women had a really, really strong force in regards to how they wanted this home to be run".¹⁰⁹

When asked how survivor involvement has affected the program she feels that it has affected HSLS “in every aspect” and she believes their involvement is why the program is successful.¹¹⁰ Involving experiential people in the design of programs can enhance success rates whilst simultaneously empowering those involved.

B. Who Should Deliver Resources

We previously concluded that sexually exploited people felt that survivors of similar experiences played instrumental roles in their healing journeys. Similarly, when discussing by whom resources are best delivered, nearly all respondents said they were more able to relate to and trust others who have overcome similar experiences, whether it be sexual exploitation, racism, abuse, and/or addictions. When discussing her transition out of street sexual exploitation one woman said:

It was good to have experiential women that had been there and exited and were strong as hell. It was important. It was like so important. Because the people that hadn't been there I didn't feel like they had a fucking clue. It took me a long time to realize that they did have a clue but just a different kind of clue. It took me a really long time to accept that they could come and work with us and be like, be trusting of them. It took me a long time to realize that.

Another person said:

I think experiential [support] really helped me a lot to get to where I am now. Because they know what you went through, and you trust them even more.

When reflecting on their lives before transitioning, experiential participants commonly mentioned that they experienced feelings of isolation, hopelessness, self-blame, and had thoughts of suicide. Participants mentioned that having access to survivors lessened feelings of isolation. One person stated:

Listening to other people's stories and their road to recovery, where they once were and where they are now, was really a wakeup call to life itself. It's like wow, you know I am not alone, I am not alone. It's like others out there go through the very things I have gone through.... It was just a real source of empowerment to realize I'm not alone.

The few Canadian studies involving sexually exploited youth and adults demonstrate that for transitioning youth and adults, having access to supports and resources provided by experiential people can minimize feelings of isolation and hopelessness. Berry found that the majority of respondents “expressed that they felt more comfortable with women who understood the barriers that sexually exploited women needed to overcome to successfully exit the sex trade”.¹¹¹ Also, “Many of the women felt that a person who had not been sexually exploited would not have the same understanding of some of the issues these individuals are presented with in attempting to overcome an addiction and exit the sex trade”.¹¹² Berry concluded that “having access to women with similar experiences was one of the strongest messages that came through in each group and most interviews.”¹¹³ One of the most overwhelming findings of Kingsley and

110 Anderson.

111 Berry, p.21.

112 Berry, p.26.

113 Berry, p.26.

Mark's research was that sexually exploited youth continuously mentioned that when exiting and healing, having access to understanding experiential counselors was essential.¹¹⁴

One community organization representative observed that people can be experiential in different ways. She stated that the staff at the organization she works for all "come with life experiences of some kind".¹¹⁵ For example, a person may have not experienced sexual exploitation but they might be a single mother on welfare or they may have had an abusive partner or dealings with the law. Experiential participants recognized that survivors of other life experiences can act as valuable supports.

*Just knowing some of the women had gone through those issues, it was kind of an inspiration to know that they made it through so that I could do it too, they acted as role models, definitely.*¹¹⁶

—*Easing the Path, Experiential Woman*

*You need somebody out there who actually has experience, somebody to tell you their story, and that 'this is what I did to get out of this. This might work for you, it might not. If it does great, if it doesn't, we'll find some other way'.*¹¹⁷

—*Sacred Lives, Female Experiential Youth*

You don't want to go some place and have a suit sitting there saying 'come over here and talk to me, I'll fix you'. You know what? I'm just going to walk out the door and never come back, if you walk in and you don't see people who you think you can trust, who look familiar, similar people

*that you know ... you walk over and say 'hey I just need to talk'. And they say 'have seat, or do you want to go to the next room or are you hungry? Do you want to clean up? Do you want a shower?' A suit's not going to do that, they're already clean, they don't worry about that.*¹¹⁸

—*Sacred Lives, Female Experiential Youth*

Willingness to be Involved

Experiential respondents consistently demonstrated concern about others who are still being exploited. One woman said:

It hurts now when you walk down the streets like you see these young girls, thirteen, fourteen years old working the streets. It makes you wonder, well it makes me think, I used to be down there doing that. And you see these younger ones, the next generation are down working down there.

Respondents also expressed overwhelming desires to help others entrapped in sexual exploitation. For some, sharing their stories and supporting other sexually exploited youth and adults were an essential component in healing. One transgendered woman said:

If I can spread that message that there's still hope for other people who are still involved in the sex trade then, if I can plant that seed of hope within them that they can find peace and totally remove themselves from that lifestyle and begin the road to recovery and growth, well then I could have done my job. And so that is my source of empowerment, the fact that

114 Kingsley and Mark, pp.61-67.

115 Enns.

116 Berry, p.22

117 Kingsley and Mark, p.61.

118 Kingsley and Mark, p.61.

my story can impact other people. And that is really what's keeping me in the game so far, is the fact that I can help other people and that is what I am hoping to do as I continue on my healing journeys, help other people realize that there is hope.

Another woman employed at a community organization said that being an experiential role model to others was empowering both to herself and to others transitioning. When asked about survivor support she said:

I think it's good. It's empowering.... I see it as a way that I don't have to be ashamed of where I came from. That I'm here because of that and it made me stronger, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger because if you're weak you won't survive out there. So I see it as letting go of that shame about it and not giving a fuck.

Others discussed how they have reached out to sexually exploited youth on their own and shared their stories, and referred them to various agencies.

Potential Drawbacks of Experiential Involvement

Participants did discuss potential difficulties surrounding experiential support. When discussing survivor support one woman replied:

The only thing with the experiential stuff, I find, a lot of times there's still the street mentality with some people. And it's hard to overcome, especially if you had issues with them in the past. And then you're going to be going to them as a support or help, you might not feel you can go there. So it's good to have both kinds of people involved. Kind of like a mediator. Because everybody doesn't get along out there.

She also pointed out that it is up to the

person seeking support to decide whom they feel most comfortable with. When asked whom she thought is most supportive when transitioning she stated:

I'd say anybody who you feel is a support to you. Because people can be supports in different ways—emotionally, financially, physically, you know. So you might want someone educated as your counselor or you might want someone who's experiential. It all depends on the person and where they find their supports.

Discussion

The strongest finding emerging from this research is that experiential participants said they value and benefit from interactions with other transitioning peers and the support provided by survivors. The simple act of sharing stories can partially remove feelings of isolation, shame, and blame. Participants mentioned that they trusted and connected better to survivors who had overcome sexual exploitation, abuse, rape, addictions, and/or racism. They said that such people truly understood their struggles and can provide important first hand advice. They can act as role models and provide motivation to transition by instilling hope that leaving sexual exploitation is possible.

We have concluded that programs are best delivered by involving sexually exploited youth and adults in both program design and delivery. A few participants did point out the disadvantages of hiring only experiential persons as supports and some stated that programs should offer the option to access people with a variety of life experiences and types of education. While this should be kept in mind, we feel programs must, at a minimum, offer the option to access support from survivors who have healed and overcome similar life experiences.

Part Six—Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendation #1. Transitional Housing and a Safe House

Based on our findings we have concluded that if transitional housing and a safe house were to be implemented in Winnipeg, sexually exploited people must be consulted and they must influence the physical and internal structures of these houses. This includes determining the houses' values, their institutional structure and physical design, and the types of people hired.

HSLs is a very good example of a safe house that employed true community development. HSLs was a direct recommendation from the Manitoba Strategy on Sexually Exploited Children and Youth and officially opened on November 10, 2003. It is a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week, six-bed safe house in Winnipeg.

When constructing HSLs, an Advisory Committee consisting of five transitioning women was formed. These women were able to articulate their own vision of community development and they "provided guidance and direction to ensure the relevance of programming, site and staff selection, home décor and overall infrastructure that is consistent with the needs of young women and transgendered youth accessing the service."¹¹⁹ Programming offered at the house includes family and group decision-making, cultural opportunities, education, employment, training, mentoring, life skills and volunteerism.

HSLs is voluntary and value-based and it employs a harm reduction philosophy,

does not have timeframes, intensely incorporates culture, and hires survivors. When discussing the ideology of HSLs and of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre as a whole one representative asserted, "we truly believe and follow that we need to build our community's capacity by getting them involved, asking them, by hearing their voice, and that's what we did with this program".¹²⁰ During the opening ceremony of the home HSLs Site Manager Jackie Anderson discussed the approach used in constructing the home: "The approach recognizes the inherent and essential role of family and community in the healing and support that builds on their gifts, strengths, self-esteem, self-identity and confidence to care for one another."¹²¹ HSLs is a true model of community self-determination and development.

Recommendation #2. Implementation of a Women's and Transgendered Addictions Centre

Currently there is one women's-only addictions centre in Manitoba. Based on our research we believe that its values do not reflect those discussed by respondents. The Centre advocates complete abstinence versus a harm reduction philosophy and programming does not deal with sexual exploitation. Experiential participants also reported that they have come into contact with tricks at programs and centres. This deters sexually exploited individuals from accessing supports and it contributes to an uncomfortable environment in which many do not feel safe. If

119 "New Safe Home Opens Doors to Support Sexually Exploited Youth", <http://mamawi.com/einfokit/pdf/files/hslsrelease.PDF>, accessed March, 2005.

120 Anderson.

121 "New Safe Home Opens Doors to Support Sexually Exploited Youth", <http://mamawi.com/einfokit/pdf/files/hslsrelease.PDF>, accessed March, 2005.

the basic need of safety is absent, then it is very unlikely that sexually exploited youth and adults accessing such services will succeed. Berry's research revealed that when some women "did not succeed in treatment, they reported that most of the reasons given for their non-compliance or incompleteness were attributed to pathology. This left many of the women feeling like failures".¹²²

Many addictions programs and centres are not succeeding for sexually exploited youth and adults. Based on our findings we have concluded that the structure and values of these institutions are at odds with the values and needs of sexually exploited youth and adults. It is not, as many believe, that sexually exploited youth and adults are failing to succeed in addictions programs, rather, it is the structure of these institutions and programs that are failing them.

We strongly recommend that a centre specifically for sexually exploited youth and adults in Manitoba be considered. Consistent with the previous findings, rather than it being a man-made institution that reflects dominant values and practices, we recommend that this centre, and its programs, be designed by sexually exploited youth and adults, and healed survivors be hired as supports. We support Berry's recommendations that existing addictions centres offer the option to access survivors as support staff.¹²³

We encourage the continued funding of the few addictions programs and supports that are specifically tailored for sexually exploited people—Sage House, TERF, HSLs, and Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers, for example. Offered by Klinik

Community Health Centre, Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers are weekly sobriety and support groups that work with sexually exploited youth and adults. These two programs employ survivors and provide experiential peer support. Throughout this research we have found that experiential participants feel that the Dream Catchers program has benefited them on their healing journey.

Recommendation #3. More Two-Spirited Specific Programming and Support Systems

This study was unique because over half the experiential participants were transgendered. Some of the recommendations made included implementing a small-scale school for Two-Spirited people, offering basic necessities for those migrating from reserves to urban areas, having a transitioning house, and having access to more transgendered support groups.

We conclude that there is a vital need for more resources and supports for Two-Spirited women. We understand that organizations are doing what they can to integrate them into their programming, and we support this. However, transgendered participants have articulated that they need supports and programs that are specifically designed by and for them. During the course of this research transgendered women repeatedly demonstrated the will to organize and we believe those who are healed have the capacity to design and run their own programs and support groups. We support and encourage any such initiatives.

¹²² Berry, p.23.

¹²³ Berry, p.26.

Recommendation #4. More Resources and Supports in General

In general there is a lack of programs and services for sexually exploited youth and adults in Winnipeg. Programs such as TERF and HSLs have extremely long waiting lists and places such as Sage House have only enough space and funds for resources and staff. The interviews with workers from all community organizations revealed that they are doing extraordinary jobs and are working extremely hard in supporting sexually exploited youth and adults. All are attempting to involve survivors and all hire experiential staff. We recommend the continued funding of all programs that support sexually exploited and street involved people. This includes but is not limited to Sage House, Street Connections, RAY, HSLs, Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers, and TERF.

There is a need for more services and supports. This requires money, which requires an increase in public funding. For more public funding, there needs to be public concern over the well-being of our sexually exploited youth and adults. This lack of concern disheartened a number of participants and some expressed frustration with the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. One woman stated:

We need so much more out there. And we're never going to have it. We never will because they don't give a fuck. The government, the three levels of government. We try to get the city to do something about it and they're like, no, it's the provincial, or no, it's the federal. No—it's all fucking all of you guys man. You all need to pitch in.

Additional Gaps

Numerous other gaps were identified and discussed by participants. The predominant ones mentioned were: improvements in the way the police deal with and treat sexually exploited individuals; more thorough investigations of, and more public concern over, missing and murdered cases of sexually exploited youth and adults; and educating mainstream society about the issues and realities of sexual exploitation and street life.

Improvements in the Winnipeg Police Force

Nearly all individuals who work for community organizations commended the Winnipeg Police Force for improving their relationships with sexually exploited people. Specifically, the Morals Unit and the Sex Crimes Unit have been highly praised. The Morals Unit works with issues surrounding sexual exploitation of adults and youth. The Sex Crimes Unit was formed in 2000 and deals with cases of sexual assault. One community organization representative stated that the Morals Unit takes “it seriously when they [sexually exploited youth or adults] report bad dates or sexual assaults”.¹²⁴ Likewise, when speaking about the Morals Unit a second community organization representative said, “We have a really good relationship with the police.... They are trying to get the girls off the street. They have been charging some johns and stuff like that. They're a lot more supportive because they're open to understanding where these women are coming from. So certainly they have to wear the suit and follow the ethics of being in the police force but they've got really big hearts and they really empathize with what these women

124 Runner.

and these kids are going through".¹²⁵ A third community organization representative said, "I think our relationship with the police has improved".¹²⁶ In a roundtable discussion one woman thought that over recent years the Morals Unit has improved and some of the people in that Unit have worked intensively to understand and reach out to sexually exploited youth and adults. She applauded the Morals Unit for respecting sexually exploited youth and adults when they reported bad dates.

Improvements in the Morals Unit and Sex Crimes Unit have been attributed to an increase in education in the police force. Experiential women and community organizations make presentations and educate new recruits to the force about the issues surrounding sexual exploitation. It is evident that the majority of organizations enjoy a relatively positive relationship with some police units.

Despite the positive feedback we feel that major gaps continue to exist. During the course of our research we heard disturbing stories of police disrespect and outright police brutality. One woman reported being driven to the outskirts of this city. The officer wanted to make a drug bust and when she could not provide him with the wanted information she was driven to the highway and forced to walk back. It was January. This is not an isolated incident. Other respondents' stories have confirmed that there are

abusive and racist police officers misusing their powers.

We argue that the uprooting and disposing of Aboriginal women by White men in power is not a new phenomenon. Both Razack and Gray discuss the discarding of Aboriginal women by White men in positions of authority. Razack points out that in the late 1800s "White men in positions of authority often beat Aboriginal women, sometimes fatally."¹²⁷ Gray's research reported that in the late nineteenth century White men were known to come onto reserves, purchase Aboriginal women, take them to cities, and when tired of them, discard them onto the streets.¹²⁸ Today, over one hundred years later, the disposal of Aboriginal women continues. The praise given to the Morals Unit and the Sex Crimes Unit is proof that things have improved. Despite this, we believe further improvements are needed.

More Thorough Investigations into Unsolved Missing and Murdered Cases and More Public Concern

Relatedly, across Canada there are many unsolved cases of missing and murdered sexually exploited youth and women. In Winnipeg over the last twenty years there have been, at minimum, twenty sexually exploited women and transgendered people murdered; approximately four cases have been solved.¹²⁹ Edmonton police are currently investigating over twenty unsolved murders over the last two decades.

125 Anderson.

126 Enns.

127 Razack, p.131.

128 Gray, pp.12-13.

129 Runner.

130 Walton, Dawn. "Task Force Joins Probe After Body Found In Field," *The Globe and Mail* 18 April 2005: A9.

Since 1997 nearly a dozen bodies of women in fields around Edmonton have been found.¹³⁰ In June, 2005 the RCMP confirmed what many people on Edmonton's streets had suspected for years—a serial killer or killers is targeting the city's street sexually exploited women, brutally murdering them, and dumping their bodies in fields outside the city. In British Columbia over the last decade, over sixty women—most of them street involved—have gone missing. Robert William Pickton has been charged with murder in twenty-two of these cases (this number is likely to rise), making him the worst serial killer in Canadian history.

Unfortunately, many of these unsolved missing and murder cases are Aboriginal women. The Native Women's Association of Canada estimates that five hundred Aboriginal women have been reported missing or have been victims of unsolved murders over the last twenty years.¹³¹ Lowman's 1995 analysis of assaults on and murders of sexually exploited adults and youth revealed "First Nations women, who constitute somewhere between one and two percent of Canada's population, comprised twenty-seven percent of the victim population (probably greater than their proportion in the general population of street-involved women). Known offenders are overwhelmingly Caucasian."¹³² Kingsley and Mark point out that British Columbian community consultations revealed "that Aboriginal women are disproportionately the targets of assault. Racism appears to

motivate these attacks; patterns of assault in some suggest that victims are selected on the basis of race alone."¹³³ In late 2004 Amnesty International released a report titled *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*. This report brings to the fore the alarming number of missing and unsolved murder cases of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada and the lack of police investigations into these murders. They make a number of recommendations to all levels of government in Canada.¹³⁴

We believe that there is a distinct pattern of violence being perpetrated against sexually exploited youth and adults. This pattern reflects sexist, and often racist, attitudes. The cases described are strikingly similar to the disposing of Aboriginal women that occurred over a century ago. We believe violence against Aboriginal women is evidence of deeply ingrained attitudes in the mindset of the mainstream dominant society.

The issue of missing and unsolved murder cases should be a concern for all of society. We are suggesting that there is a gap not only in the manner in which cases are investigated, but also in the general public's concern. If we accept Lowman's assertion that, "[a]s to the extent to which violence against prostitutes is a matter of violence against women in general rather than 'prostitutes' in particular, too much analytic separation should be resisted" then all societies in Canada should be concerned.

131 Terence Moore. "Missing Women," *Winnipeg Free Press* 25 March 2004: A14.

132 Lowman, 1995, Section 3, p.4.

133 Kingsley and Mark, p.24.

134 Amnesty International.

*Educating Mainstream Society
About the Realities of Sexual
Exploitation*

In conclusion, we recommend increasing mainstream society's awareness of the issues surrounding sexual exploitation and street life in general. Negative stereotypes and misperceptions about sexually exploited youth and adults are abundant.

Negative perceptions and discourse regarding sexually exploited youth and adults are causing harm and putting them further at risk. Lowman has documented the rise in murders and assaults against

street sexually exploited youth and adults. Since the 1980s he has noted a steep increase in violence. Lowman also looks at the "discourse of disposal", which he defines as "demands to 'get rid' of" sexually exploited people.¹³⁵ He convincingly argues that this discourse has "created a social milieu in which violence against prostitutes could flourish."¹³⁶ We believe negative perceptions and stereotypes are justifying violence being perpetrated against sexually exploited youth and adults and enable offenders to rationalize their actions.

135 Lowman, 2000, p.18.

136 Lowman, 2000, p.18.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to find answers to the following questions: what factors increase a person's vulnerability to street sexual exploitation?; what types of resources do experiential participants themselves feel are needed in order for them to make a successful transition, when willing and ready, out of the sex trade?; and how and by whom, in their opinion, are these resources best delivered? It was also our intent to give a voice to people who are ignored by mainstream society.

This research has found that a number of factors can increase a person's vulnerability to street sexual exploitation. We believe that the majority of participants greatly appreciate and benefit from the supports that are currently being offered. Community organizations who support sexually exploited youth and adults are working extremely hard and are progressive in the sense that they all incorporate survivors into their programming.

Experiential participants expressed the desire to have transitional housing; a safe house; an all women's and transgendered addictions centre that is specifically for sexually exploited youth and adults; more supports for Two-Spirited people; and more resources in general. The most outstanding finding is that respondents felt that they can relate to and more readily trust survivors of sexual exploitation, addictions, rape, and/or racism. We have concluded that experiential people should be involved in the design of programs and should be able to affect the structures of

programs and community organizations. In addition, at a minimum, sexually exploited youth and adults should be given the option to access experiential support staff if they so choose.

The issues surrounding sexual exploitation are complex. In addition to listening to the experiential voices in this paper and acting on their recommendations, we recommend questioning the stereotypes that mainstream society perpetuates. Negative perceptions are contributing to a justification of violence against sexually exploited youth and adults. We close with a quote from a woman who, over the course of this research, has taught us a lot and whom we have come to respect. Her words are evidence that experiential people have experienced much trauma. More importantly, however, her words demonstrate that sexually exploited people have feelings and hearts. She said:

Seen all these ladies getting killed, jacked up, beaten up on the streets there, it makes you think, you know. The girls I knew that, that used to hang around ... finding them getting murdered and that, it hurts deep down inside you know, it's like losing your friend or whatever. It hurts seeing them going down. I'm still amazed to this day that I'm not like one of them to get killed, whatever. But I was talking to the Elder and they called me a Survivor. I still can't, I can't understand it to this day, he said I'm a Survivor and I survived. Yeah I survived all right, but sometimes when people get killed I wish it wasn't them, I wish it was me instead.

Appendix One

Winnipeg-Based Community Organizations, Programs, and Resources That Offer Supports to Sexually Exploited Youth and Adults

Circle of Life Thunderbird House Outreach Program

The outreach program at Thunderbird House employs survivors of sexual exploitation. It offers outreach services; counseling; advocacy; referrals to other agencies; cultural programming; and life skills programming.

Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers

Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers are two programs offered by Clinic Community Health Centre. Dream Catchers and Dream Keepers are weekly sobriety and support groups that are specifically tailored for sexually exploited youth and adults. These two programs employ survivors and provide experiential peer support. Dream Catchers also offers a Peer Mentorship program. Transitioning participants are trained to provide peer support and mentoring to sexually exploited youth and adults.

Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters (HSLs)

Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters, part of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, is a twenty-four hour seven-day-a-week, six-bed safe house in Winnipeg. HSLs is voluntary, value based, follows a harm reduction philosophy, and employs survivors. Programming offered at the house includes family and group decision-making, cultural opportunities, education, employment, training, mentoring, life skills and volunteerism.

This house was a direct recommendation from the Manitoba Strategy on Sexually

Exploited Children and Youth. When designing HSLs an experiential Advisory Council consisting of five women was formed. Through this Council the women were able to affect how the house would be designed and run.

Media Awareness Initiative about Sexually Exploited Youth (MAISEY)

MAISEY is a Winnipeg-based coalition that is made up of various agencies, community organizations, and individuals who work with and/or are concerned about sexually exploited adults and youth. MAISEY focuses on language (especially language used in the mainstream media) and the impact language has on sexually exploited youth and adults. MAISEY's goal is to alter language that is used to describe children, youth, and adults who have experienced sexual exploitation.

Resources and Assistance for Youth, Inc. (RAY)

Resources and Assistance for Youth (formally known as Operation Go Home) works with street involved youth and adults. RAY employs a harm reduction philosophy and offers emergency services (such as food and/or clothing); drop-in programming; prevention workshops; street outreach; and helps youth and adults find clean, safe and affordable housing.

Sage House

Sage House, a program of Mount Carmel Clinic, is a health, outreach and resource service for street involved women and

transgendered people. The goal of this community organization is to improve the health and safety of street involved women and transgendered people. It is harm reduction based and employs staff with a variety of life experiences. Sage House provides: nursing services; street outreach; kitchen, laundry, and bath facilities; condoms; counseling and support services; referrals and advocacy to other services and organizations; and a Sobriety Support Group.

Street Connections

Street Connections is a harm reduction-based community organization that provides supports to sexually exploited people. They offer nursing services; street outreach; needle retrieval; and condoms. Street Connections also publishes *The Weekly Rag*, a newsletter that informs sexually exploited people about dangerous dates and other important street news.

Transition, Education, and Resources for Females (TERF)

Transition, Education, and Resources for Females is a program offered through New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults and Families. TERF works with sexually exploited youth and adults who are attempting to transition out of the sex trade. It strives to provide education, life skills, and support to people accessing their services. Currently TERF offers three types of programming: a transition youth program for youth ages thirteen to seventeen; transition adult programming; and a mentoring program. The mentoring program provides experiential one-on-one mentoring to sexually exploited youth who are on a waiting list to get into TERF or other programs. It also offers mentoring to children ages eight to thirteen who have been identified as being vulnerable to being sexually exploited.

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