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Meeting the Needs of Sexually Exploited Youth

Building on the Work of the
Sexually Exploited Youth
Community Coalition

By Jenna Drabble

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**Meeting the Needs of Sexually Exploited Youth:
Building on the Work of the Sexually Exploited
Youth Community Coalition**

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About the Author

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The Report in Brief

The Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition (SEYCC) is a grassroots, cross-sector community group that is dedicated to finding solutions to the issue of sexual exploitation of youth in Winnipeg. For more than a decade, the group has advocated for and informed the development of supports and services for vulnerable youth in the city — especially Indigenous girls, who are among the most vulnerable to experiencing sexual exploitation.

In order to document the history of the Coalition, its successes and challenges, perspectives on best practices in working with youth and the vision for the future of the SEYCC, interviews were conducted with 24 Coalition members and individuals with lived experience of sexual exploitation.

Through these interviews, it became clear that the Coalition has had many accomplishments: the establishment of Hands of Mother Earth (a rural healing lodge for sexually exploited female and transgender youth); the involvement of individuals with lived experience of sexual exploitation in the Coalition, especially by means of the Experiential Advisory Committee; the Coalition's work in organizing the annual All Children Matter conference; and the Winnipeg Outreach Network (W.O.N.), which

enabled a coordinated response to meeting the needs of sexually exploited youth. The diversity of stakeholders at the table and their ability to participate in collaborative decision-making, particularly in earlier days of the SEYCC, were also highlighted as strengths of the Coalition by many participants.

Also evident from speaking with participants, however, was that the SEYCC has experienced challenges that stem largely from a breakdown in the Coalition's relationship with the government over how it developed the StreetReach program, as well as internal conflicts within the SEYCC membership over the use of secure care for sexually exploited youth. There was a general recognition among many participants that these challenges have in some ways derailed the work of the Coalition and led to a loss of overall vision, particularly due to the fact that many members have left the Coalition or stopped regularly attending meetings.

When asked about best practices for working with sexually exploited youth, participants highlighted several strong themes: using an Indigenous lens in program development and delivery; supporting youth where they are at through relationship building and a strength-based ap-

proach; placing youth in care in supportive environments that will not exacerbate vulnerability; and ensuring that a full continuum of care, including prevention services, is well-resourced and supported.

Moving forward, the widespread agreement about best practices among participants indicates that there are areas where members of the Coalition can find common ground and enable them to continue to work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders. Many participants expressed an interest in seeing the SEYCC repair relationships that have been damaged and several steps have already been taken to do so, including: ensuring a climate of respect at SEYCC meetings; reconvening the Winnipeg Outreach Network; and developing several initiatives designed to strengthen the partnership between the SEYCC and government.

Participants also highlighted specific issues they would like the SEYCC to focus its efforts

on, including strengthening the mechanisms to identify and charge offenders and building a wider range of preventative resources. Some participants also emphasized the importance of continuing to listen to the voices of experiential people and, particularly, find ways to give experiential youth more opportunities to have their voices heard.

Despite the work that has been accomplished in Manitoba, people working on the frontlines in the community report that youth sexual exploitation continues to be a pressing issue. Many participants cited the importance of collaborative and cross-sector approaches in addressing this issue. The SEYCC is uniquely positioned to serve as a forum where this collaboration can happen. This report is intended to offer a hopeful vision for the future, wherein the voice of the grassroots community grows stronger and more united in its efforts to ensure that the lives of all youth are respected, valued and cherished.

Introduction

Increasing recognition has been given to the issue of the sexual exploitation of youth in Canada. In particular, studies have identified Indigenous girls to be among the most vulnerable to exploitation due to a combination of factors associated with the harmful impacts of colonialism, including: the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous communities; the intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system; and the breakdown of families and traditional roles of Indigenous women (Franssen & O'Brien 2014; Kingsley & Mark 2000; Native Women's Association of Canada 2008; Office of the Children's Advocate Manitoba 2016; Sikka 2010).

In Manitoba, recognition of the sexual exploitation of youth has prompted concerted efforts to respond to the issue. In Winnipeg, the Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition (SEYCC), a large and diverse grouping of community-based agencies and government representatives, has been working for more than a decade to address the issue. The Coalition is a cross-sector and Indigenous-led network that advocates for a harm-reduction, anti-oppressive and relational approach to supporting youth who are victims of sexual exploitation. The Coalition meets on a monthly basis to share information between

stakeholders, discuss emerging issues related to sexual exploitation and plan advocacy and awareness initiatives. The membership of the Coalition has included roughly 50 community-based agencies and organizations (see Appendix). Government and Winnipeg Police Service representatives serve as ex-officio members, acting as advisors, supporters and information sharers (SEYCC Terms of Reference 2013). In addition, a number of subcommittees — one of which is the Experiential Advisory Committee — meet regularly and report back to the larger group.

The Study

In early 2017, a meeting was held between researchers from the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) and members of the SEYCC to begin to map out a research project that would encompass the social history of how the SEYCC was formed and the work that it has been involved in over the last decade. It was agreed that current and former members of the SEYCC and people with lived experience of sexual exploitation needed to be interviewed to learn about the Coalition's work (both its successes and challenges), and their perspectives on the factors contributing

to the exploitation of youth and best practices working with sexually exploited youth in order to identify some possible pathways for the Coalition to move forward in its work.

In order to recruit participants, an email was sent to all members of the SEYCC network list (including past and current members) and a presentation about the study was made at two of the monthly SEYCC meetings. To ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of sexual exploitation were included, a recruitment flyer with information about the project was provided to workers and posted at Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, an organization that is a member of the SEYCC and, among its other activities, works with individuals who were victims of sexual exploitation as youth. Subsequently, confidential, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 24 participants. All participants were over the age of 18. Fifteen participants had lived experience of sexual exploitation. Nineteen participants had experience working as social service providers; 16 had experience working for community-based organizations (representing 8 different organizations) and 5 had experience working in government positions. Twenty-two participants identified as either past or current members of the SEYCC and/or the Experiential Advisory Committee.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed (with the exception of one interview where the researcher took notes). Participants were asked a standard set of open-ended questions focused on the history, accomplishments, challenges and present situation of the SEYCC as well as their perspectives on government policy responses to youth sexual exploitation. Those who responded to the recruitment flyer for experiential participants or who identified themselves as being experiential when recruited for an interview were asked an additional set of questions about their lived experience in order to gain insight into some of the needs and perspectives of people who have experienced sexual exploitation as youth. The average interview length was 43

minutes. Interviews were coded using NVivo which allowed for the themes of the report to emerge. Quotes were selected to represent the themes as well as highlight the different voices and perspectives of all participants. Interviews took place between July and October 2017. In addition to the information gleaned from the interviews, the researcher attended monthly SEYCC meetings during the 10 months that the project was underway.

The findings of this project help to tell some of the story of the SEYCC from the perspectives of people who have been involved in the Coalition. The accounts of participants reveal that the SEYCC has played an influential role in the development of sexual exploitation strategies in Manitoba over the last decade and, importantly, show that the movement to address the sexual exploitation of youth has been largely driven by grassroots community organizations and experiential individuals. The study highlights the successful outcomes that can be achieved when there is a close and supportive relationship between grassroots community groups and government. However, it also illustrates the challenges of such partnerships, particularly when community-born efforts become integrated into government-run programs. As the literature reveals, the issue of sexual exploitation is complex and requires a multi-sector response, making it critical for government agencies to work collaboratively and share resources with grassroots community groups working on the frontlines. Sharing perspectives from the community, including the voices of those with lived experiences, can help to illuminate potential pathways forward in the fight against the sexual exploitation of youth.

Definitions of Terms

Language is an important consideration in discussions involving sexually exploited youth. Language has played a role in how the issue of exploitation is understood by the wider public

and responded to from a policy perspective. Care has been taken throughout this report to use language that is congruent with how exploitation is understood and discussed within the SEYCC, out of respect for the advocacy work that has been done by community members to make the discourse reflect the inherent exploitation of youth who are involved in the sex industry.

In the context of this project, the terms “sexual exploitation” and “trafficking” were mostly used interchangeably by interview participants and other stakeholders, with sexual exploitation being the most commonly used term. **Sexual exploitation** is therefore the term used throughout this report, and is defined 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 or drugs, or in exchange for food, protection, or other necessities” (Government of Manitoba n.d.).

- **Experiential youth/adults** refers to youth or adults who have survived or are currently experiencing sexual exploitation (Hunt 2006).
- **The Sex Industry** is used instead of “sex trade” and “sex work” as it better reflects the multitude of people who profit from exploitation and avoids representing the involvement of youth in the sex industry as a freely chosen occupation (Christmas 2017).

Background Literature

The specific reasons for youth becoming victimized through sexual exploitation are complex (Sikka 2010). Studies have found that the average age that youth are recruited into sexual exploitation is 14 and that these youth have often already experienced some form of sexual, physical or emotional abuse (Kingsley & Mark 2000). While female youth tend to receive the most attention in research and media, boys are also victims of sexual exploitation and tend to be vulnerable due to similar risk factors (McIntyre 2005; Saewyc et al. 2013). LGBTQ2S youth face particular vulnerabilities to exploitation due to the marginalization and discrimination that can create barriers to employment and housing as well as feelings of isolation and low self-esteem (Seshia 2005).

Though it is difficult to collect accurate statistics on sexually exploited youth, an evaluation of *TERF*, a Winnipeg program that supports youth and adults in exiting the sex industry, revealed that an overwhelming majority of their participants were Indigenous and involved in the child welfare system (Ursel et al. 2007). Almost 90 percent of the 10,714 children and youth in government care in Manitoba are Indigenous (Government of Manitoba 2017). For many of these

youth, the experience of being moved between dozens of placements has a destabilizing effect on their lives and makes it difficult for them to establish trust in others or feel a sense of security or safety, making them vulnerable to exploitation (Coy 2009).

Moreover, many sexually exploited youth have run away from home or a care placement, often trying to escape abuse or instability, and find themselves with few viable options to create a means for survival due to low educational attainment and employment skills. Running away from or committing an offence within a care facility also increases the vulnerability of youth to exploitation, as they will end up either on the streets or in a detention facility where they might meet and be influenced by youth who are experiencing sexual exploitation (Sikka 2010).

Kingsley and Mark (2000) found that many of the youth they spoke to in their cross-Canada study started out in the sex industry by exchanging sex for basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Sikka's (2010) research in the prairie provinces of Canada found that Indigenous girls tend to enter the sex industry at a young age, having been lured by older "boyfriends" while potentially not realizing that they are being ex-

ploited. Sikka (2010) also found that young girls might be drawn to gangs to find a sense of belonging or acceptance, which can lead to pressures to become exploited in the sex industry as well as to recruit peers. As well, predators may introduce youth to drugs with the intention of asserting control and furthering exploitation as youth become addicted to substances.

Governmental Responses to Youth Sexual Exploitation

Youth once referred to as “child prostitutes” came to be seen in the mid-1980s as “victims” and the attendant policy responses became more focused on the protection, rather than punishment, of youth involved in the sex industry (Bittle 2013). Non-voluntary confinement, also called “secure care,” is one response that has emerged in Canada as the discourse around sexually exploited youth has shifted toward understanding these youth as victims of abuse.

Alberta was the first province in Canada to introduce legislation around the use of secure care, giving provincial authorities the ability to apprehend and detain youth in “protective confinement” for up to five days, after which child welfare authorities can appeal to a judge to extend the confinement (Barrett & Shaw 2013). Busby (2003) explains that this strategy, which has been adopted by provinces in different ways across the country, is to be used in situations where sexually exploited youth are deemed to be in extreme or imminent danger; it gives authorities the ability to apprehend youth without the need for judicial pre-approval.

Some commentators have welcomed the addition of secure care as a strategy for responding to sexually exploited youth. Other commentators have been cautiously supportive of secure care, emphasizing the importance of having a continuum of services for sexually exploited youth, with the use of protective confinement reserved as a last resort (Busby 2003). Still other

commentators have raised concerns about the use of secure care, including: that youth may become alienated from social services and less likely to access voluntary services that are available to them due to a fear of being apprehended, thereby putting them at a greater risk of violence (Busby 2003; Bittle 2013); that secure care violates the civil liberties of youth and limits their self-determination (Bittle 2002); and that framing sexually exploited youth as “victims” in need of protection can have the effect of individualizing the issue of exploitation, rather than situating it within the broader context of the social and material conditions youth are experiencing that make their involvement in the sex industry seem a viable option (Bittle 2013; Sikka 2010).

The Manitoba Response

In 2002, the Manitoba government launched the *Manitoba Sexually Exploited Youth Strategy*, with the goal of strengthening initiatives around prevention, intervention, legislation, coordination and research/evaluation in the province. This effort, identified as phase one of a three-part strategy, was informed by stakeholders across government departments and community organizations who were working with sexually exploited youth. The strategy focused on the areas of prevention, intervention, coordination, justice & legislation and research & evaluation and included a range of new initiatives such as the creation of new learning materials to be used in schools, the establishment of Honoring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters, a six-bed safe transition home for sexually exploited youth and transition and mentorship programs at TERF. The strategy also initiated the development of Regional Teams — multi-sector coalitions or committees that were designed to assist with the coordination of services across the province. The overall strategy was guided and overseen by a Multijurisdictional Implementation Team made up of government and community representatives.

In 2008, the government published *Front Line Voices: Manitobans Working Together to End Child Sexual Exploitation* (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2008), presenting phase two of the strategy, which was based on a two-day summit with a wide range of stakeholders representing front-line community organizations, justice and policing, education, Indigenous groups and government agencies.

The strategy was named Tracia's Trust in honour of Tracia Owen, a young Indigenous girl who grew up in and out of the care of Child and Family Services and experienced sexual exploitation. Tracia took her own life when she was 14 years old, prompting an inquest that resulted in recommendations for broad changes to the child welfare system and efforts to prevent sexual exploitation among youth. Tracia's Trust was intended to dovetail with the summit's recommendations and included a comprehensive plan based on four themes: Legislation and Law Enforcement; Continuum of Services; Breaking the Silence; and Child, Youth, Family and Community Empowerment (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2008).

Many initiatives were created and supported through Tracia's Trust, with the goal of creating a broad, well-resourced and multi-sector response to sexual exploitation. Tracia's Trust promised more stable funding for youth-serving agencies and increased frontline services, particularly for community-based outreach workers. The strategy responded to calls from the community for the creation of a rural healing lodge and made a commitment to supporting com-

munities in northern Manitoba to develop services and supports for sexually exploited youth. Additionally, the province created StreetReach, a response team intended to help youth escape sexual exploitation as well as serve a role in prevention by building relationships and engaging with the continuum of services available within the province. StreetReach was also conceived of as a way to collect information about predators and work collaboratively with police and Child and Family Services (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2008).

Front Line Voices also details how the Manitoba government was beginning to look at legislation introduced in Alberta that allowed the use of non-voluntary confinement for sexually exploited youth determined to be high risk. The report, however, cautioned that if the Alberta model was to be pursued, "it should be with 'extreme caution' and encompass detailed guidelines and a skilled assessment" as well as "take into account the need for both voluntary and involuntary options" (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2008: 5).

The literature on sexually exploited youth and the attendant policy responses highlight the range of perspectives that exist on best practices for working with youth and the controversial nature of approaches that have been adopted in other jurisdictions. This underscores the importance of continually evaluating programs and services to ensure that sexually exploited youth are receiving the support they need in a manner that will lead to long-term, positive outcomes (Gorkoff & Waters 2003).

The Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition

Although the SEYCC came together formally in 2007, its roots in the community extend back to several years prior to the Coalition's formal inception. Interview participants who were involved in these early days described how the Coalition began as a group of women in the community meeting informally over coffee to discuss concerns related to the number of youth they were working with who appeared to be street entrenched or at risk of exploitation. These community members were concerned about youth, predominantly Indigenous girls, who were going missing and seemingly falling through cracks in social services. At the time there were few services available to youth experiencing sexual exploitation and outreach workers who worked primarily with adults did not have protocols in place for dealing with the youth they were meeting while doing outreach.

One of the founding Coalition members described how she was doing outreach work at this time and identified the need to bring together people working in the community to address this service gap:

Quickly we rounded up a bunch of these youth serving organizations and had a conversation

with all of their outreach workers to say how can we report the kids? What happened actually is that one of the youth that I ran into was a kid that I had worked with in care, and I was like, "Hey, somebody's looking for this kid, so what's our process for reporting this?" And we didn't have any at [my organization] so we called a meeting and then we came up with some plans on how to better work together with the youth serving organizations to identify youth and to return them home or to their placement settings, wherever the heck they were supposed to be.

These meetings helped to establish a network of service providers and experiential adults who found that there was value in building relationships and collaborating to find solutions to what appeared to be a growing problem. Interview participants explained that it was during these years of informal meetings that the Winnipeg Outreach Network (W.O.N.) also began to take shape. Outreach workers from community-based organizations found that it was beneficial to meet regularly to share information and debrief with each other about what they were seeing through their work.

One of the focuses of the Coalition during this time was on the need for specialized services and supports for youth victims of sexual exploitation. Youth who have experienced sexual exploitation have been exposed to a level of trauma that existing services were unable to adequately address at the time. As one founding member explained:

We needed specialized services for [sexually exploited youth] because the trauma that they experience is so unique that they need unique services, and they can't go into a typical shelter because they are judged and teased and then the [staff] are not qualified to deal with that level of trauma. Because already we were hearing stories from 13, 14-year-old girls that they were forced to be sexually abused by adult men ten times a day, every single day, and so we recognized the uniqueness of that trauma.

For a number of years, community members continued to meet regularly at Sage House — a health, outreach and resource centre providing services to street-involved cisgender and transgender women — to share information, build networks and work on addressing the prevalence of exploitation in the youth population, which included lobbying the government to improve the services and supports available for youth.

Several interview participants pointed to a turning point for the Coalition: the murder of a 17-year-old Indigenous girl who had spent her life in and out of the care of Child and Family Services and was known by outreach workers to have been a victim of sexual exploitation. When her body was found on the outskirts of Winnipeg in the summer of 2007, the informal community network reconvened and officially became the Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition. Participants also referred to the murders of two other young Indigenous women in 2009 as catalyzing and fuelling the momentum of the Coalition's work in the first few

years after its formal inception. As one Coalition member explained:

It was really, you know, I believe through the impetus of all these missing and murdered young girls and women, most Aboriginal, that really fuelled the organization of the Coalition.

As the SEYCC grew, the meetings moved from Sage House to Rossbrook House, an inner-city drop-in centre that could accommodate the larger number of attendees. Many participants reflected on these meetings in the early years of the SEYCC as being very large, attracting representatives from dozens of organizations and agencies in the city. Several interview participants stressed the importance of noting that the SEYCC was a grassroots response to an issue identified by community members, recognizing that there is a long history of people in the community self-organizing and developing strategies to address the sexual exploitation of youth. One participant stated that the Coalition was created to address a lack of resources in the community:

[The SEYCC] was a community coming together to learn how to support sexually exploited youth because there was no resources when this Coalition developed.

The SEYCC envisioned itself as a coordinated community network that could help to identify the systemic gaps that were causing youth to become vulnerable to exploitation and develop community-led responses to address these gaps. Members of the Coalition recognized that youth who were not in the care of CFS were particularly vulnerable as they typically were not on the radar of social services, so there was an explicit intention to ensure these youth were a focus in the work of the Coalition. The SEYCC brought together a range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Winnipeg Police Service and Child and Family Services, as cross-sector collaboration was seen as being critical to devel-

oping the supportive services that were needed by sexually exploited youth.

Founding members of the Coalition felt strongly that the work of the SEYCC should be led by the voices of youth and adults with lived experience of sexual exploitation. From the beginning

it was important to have experiential people sitting around the table and having input into the decisions made by the Coalition. The SEYCC also advocated strongly to have experiential people involved in any government decision-making that concerned sexually exploited youth.

Strengths and Accomplishments of the SEYCC

Following the murder of the 17-year-old Indigenous girl, the SEYCC mobilized quickly and became instrumental in working with the provincial government to develop a comprehensive sexual exploitation strategy. The SEYCC submitted a proposal to the government that included several initiatives that became incorporated into Tracia's Trust. Many participants highlighted the important role the SEYCC played in influencing the development of Tracia's Trust and how the Coalition worked to ensure that grassroots and Indigenous perspectives were incorporated into the continuum of services that were included in the strategy.

As one of the only provinces in Canada with a comprehensive strategy to combat the sexual exploitation of youth, Manitoba has been recognized as a leader in addressing this issue (Franssen & O'Brien 2014). Several participants pointed out that it is important to acknowledge the work of the SEYCC in the areas of advocacy and program development. As one participant noted:

When we're told that Manitoba is the leader in combatting exploitation of children and youth I feel like that really started with the Coalition.... [W]e had some real big powerhouse community

members that really created that foundation. So I think when you look at Manitoba being a leader, it started from the SEY Coalition.

Participants described the SEYCC as being a proactive and prominent group when it comes to the issue of youth being victimized by sexual exploitation and trafficking. Participants cited the work that has been done around challenging the incarceration and criminalization of sexually exploited youth, the way that the Coalition has created a diverse network of important stakeholders and the values-based, Indigenous lens that the Coalition brings to all aspects of its work as being key strengths of the SEYCC. One participant stated:

I think incredibly strong partnerships have come out of [the SEYCC]. I think the Coalition is pretty cutting edge in the sense that they have the Experiential Advisory Committee and they self-organize and self-govern and they really value experiential voices and leadership, which is a more anti-oppressive approach to what you would usually see in social services, which is very top down, right?

Participants also described how the SEYCC has created space for dialogue, collaboration and

learning between individuals and organizations with different mandates and perspectives on working with youth, particularly during the period of time that Tracia's Trust was being developed. One participant explained that having a common goal of creating a continuum of services for sexually exploited youth helped the Coalition work together effectively:

[In the earlier days of SEYCC] we had, you know, a whole slew of organizations that had very different value sets, that had very different approaches to working with youth, but we all had a common goal and we all had — you know, our compassion lay with the children and the desire to create this huge safety net of various approaches for our youth.

The Coalition started off with a strong partnership with the provincial government. Many participants described how there was regular representation at SEYCC meetings from the Department of Family Services (now called the Department of Families) and members felt that they were being listened to in processes of government decision-making. The government taskforce leading Tracia's Trust brought together senior bureaucrats from different departments, including Education, Health and Justice, as well as the chair of the SEYCC. Participants characterized the collaboration and communication between stakeholders at the grassroots, community level and government as strong during the time when Tracia's Trust was developed and in the years following the introduction of the second phase of the strategy. As one participant stated:

It worked really well. It really was a partnership between the government with the agencies and the community organizations that really worked together.

Participants pointed to another strength of the SEYCC as being the way that it has maintained itself as a grassroots and community-driven group throughout the work that it has done. While the

SEYCC has been able to access funding through Tracia's Trust for some of its initiatives, including Hands of Mother Earth and the All Children Matter Conference, the Coalition has resisted the designation of being a Regional Team under the government's purview and has been explicit about continuing to be a grassroots group with its own governance structure and terms of reference. As one participant explained,

If we were a Regional Team we then had to follow the Child Protection Branch. They had a code of conduct for their regional teams on the things they were and were not allowed to do.

Another participant reflected that this decision has helped the Coalition maintain its autonomy and ability to advocate for youth:

I think that was another really good thing about the Coalition, [that] even though we worked very cross-sectorally and with lots of stakeholders at the table, we were able to maintain that critical independence and to be, you know, better advocates, more authentic advocates, if you will.

In addition to these influences on a broader scale, participants also pointed to a number of tangible accomplishments brought about through the work of the Coalition.

1. Hands of Mother Earth

Most interview participants listed one or more of the initiatives that were created through Tracia's Trust as being the biggest accomplishments of the SEYCC, with many highlighting the creation of Hands of Mother Earth (H.O.M.E.), a rural healing lodge for sexually exploited female and transgender youth. One participant explained how H.O.M.E. was conceptualized:

We said we'll do "secure care by location." Let's take them out of town. You don't have to lock them up, you just have to return the children to the land, like our Elders said.

H.O.M.E. is celebrated as a unique and important project, being the only lodge of its kind in Canada. The facility uses the seven sacred teachings and follows a code of honour. As one participant elaborated:

It's relationship-based, not rule-based, in the sense that the individuals make their own plans and are part of that whole planning process. The rules aren't set and given to them... They [also] make sure that at H.O.M.E. it's like a home.

If they're hungry they eat, the food's available to them. Of course, there's safety precautions that every licensed facility has to have. But they ensured that everything was to create an environment for them where they can just be safe.

All of the organizations involved in the SEYCC collectively decided that Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Ma Mawi) was the best organization to house H.O.M.E. At the time Ma Mawi was operating another residential care facility in Winnipeg called Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters, which was created as part of the first phase of Manitoba's Sexual Exploitation Strategy. Several participants referred to this decision as one example of the way that the SEYCC has taken a collaborative approach between different organizations and agencies to develop programs and strategies that prioritize the needs and interests of youth.

2. Experiential Advisory Committee

Many participants noted that another accomplishment of the SEYCC was the way that it has worked to centre the voices of survivors and ensure that people with lived experience are sitting at the SEYCC table. One important outcome of this focus was the creation of the Experiential Advisory Committee (EAC), a sub-committee of the SEYCC made up of survivors of sexual exploitation that meets on a monthly basis. The role of the EAC is to inform and guide all of the activities of the Coalition. EAC members sit on different sub-committees of the SEYCC as well as attend the monthly Coalition meetings and pro-

vide a report on their activities. This committee has had an active role in informing or shaping all of the initiatives undertaken by the SEYCC.

Participants described the EAC as a space for survivors to find their voice and share their expertise, as well as being a mechanism through which the SEYCC can ensure that people with lived experience are guiding the work of the Coalition. One participant described the experience of attending EAC meetings:

So many different people come gather around this table. It's amazing, the experience, because you get to see like all the old school people, right. Like, from back in the day, like, way before my days even started ... Some of them are survivors, some of them are still involved in the problem. And it's crazy, it's like, wow, okay, this old person can do it, shit, I can do it, you know... Like, they can live it, they survived it and they're doing good with themselves. And it's like, wow, you know.

One participant, a member of the EAC, explained that having the opportunity to share her experience and perspectives has helped her build confidence:

It does kind of put me on the spot but it also, you know, empowers me to think, "Oh they care about my opinion, they want my opinion." A lot of people that are experiential — you know, being in the sex trade, in the sex industry for so long — we lose our self-esteem, self-empowerment. We're not confident. So coming to these meetings, it can help you with that self-esteem. Again, you are important; what you have to say does matter. And, you know, people need to listen to the experiential people and that has been happening.

Another EAC member brought up the role that her involvement in the Coalition has played in helping her move her life in a positive direction:

SEYCC has been a big part of my life... One of the biggest things that it gave me was the opportunity to — like, it's opened up doors for opportunities, for employment opportunities,

for healing, most importantly healing. Because when we have these opportunities [to speak in public] we go and we share our story and each time we bite a chunk off of that, you know.

The EAC embodies one of the core values of the SEYCC: the importance of hearing the voices of survivors and ensuring that their voices are included in any decision-making that concerns people experiencing sexual exploitation. The SEYCC has also advocated strongly for this value to be reflected in government decision-making and was successful in creating a policy within the provincial sexual exploitation strategy that experiential people must be brought to the table and consulted when decisions are made related to the strategy.

3. All Children Matter

Participants frequently mentioned the *All Children Matter* conference as another success of the SEYCC. This conference, funded by Tracia's Trust, ran annually from 2010 to 2016 and was led and organized by members of the EAC and other members of the SEYCC on a volunteer basis. The high attendance at the conference, the degree of organization and the role it played in educating people on issues of child sexual exploitation were cited as reasons why the conference was considered to be so successful.

One participant spoke about how the conference had helped to elevate awareness and shift discourses about exploitation by bringing a cross-section of stakeholders in the city together:

I think the conferences were a part of that success [of SEYCC] because it brought the community together to focus our discussions on the issues of sexual exploitation and trying to understand it through an anti-oppressive lens, which is also critically needed in the community.

The SEYCC planned to continue organizing the conference. However, as of 2017 the funding that was previously available through Tracia's Trust was held back and conference organizers were

uncertain about the future of the event. This is of concern to the SEYCC not only because the conference is seen as one of their key accomplishments, but also because the revenue made from conference registrations has been used to fund the work of the EAC throughout the year. This includes paying EAC members for their work as well as for the other necessities that make it possible for them to participate, such as the provision of a safe place to meet, food at the meetings and bus tickets.

4. Winnipeg Outreach Network

Another accomplishment of the Coalition identified by participants is the Winnipeg Outreach Network (W.O.N.), which emerged in the early days of the Coalition before it became a formal network. Outreach workers from different organizations around the city recognized the need to become more coordinated for the purposes of sharing information about youth as well as scheduling so that outreach workers could have a 24-hour presence in the community. W.O.N. was focused on building relationships with youth in the community and establishing a protocol for reporting youth so they could be returned to their home or foster care placement.

W.O.N. served as the template in the development StreetReach. Tracia's Trust proposed hiring a community-based coordinator to work closely with outreach workers and police with the mandate "to help youth escape exploitation by working to establish supportive relationships, employ motivational techniques and access the full range of available interventions including community supports and protective options such as the drug stabilization unit, crisis stabilization units, CFS Act and a new rural healing lodge [H.O.M.E.]" (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2008).

As evidenced by the above discussion, the SEYCC has realized a number of successes and accomplishments since its implementation. The Coalition, however, has not been without its challenges, especially in more recent years.

Challenges Encountered by the SEYCC

Throughout the interviews with former and current members of the SEYCC, as well as from observations at monthly meetings, it became clear that despite the many strengths and accomplishments of the Coalition, it has more recently been experiencing challenges. As previously noted, most participants emphasized that the Coalition has worked effectively for many years to bring key stakeholders from a cross section of community agencies and government departments to the table, while at the same time centring the experiential voice and maintaining a grassroots, community-driven model. Some interview participants expressed concerns that over the last few years this important work has been sidelined by a deteriorating relationship with the provincial government as well as conflicts between members of the SEYCC.

Changing Relationship with Government

Participants involved in the earlier years of the SEYCC characterized the relationship between the Coalition and the government during this time as a very positive and productive partnership. The Coalition worked closely with the Child and Family Services division (CFS) within the

Department of Family Services to develop Tracia's Trust, and members of the Coalition felt their ideas and perspectives were heard and valued by the government. This partnership lasted several years and played an important role in many of the accomplishments made by the SEYCC. In recent years, however, that relationship has broken down. As one participant explained,

We are disconnected from the Strategy and that's not our doing. The province has pushed out the Coalition from the Strategy. So they stopped coming to meetings, they stopped consulting with us.... They're not consulting the grassroots voice as they're working on the Strategy.

The members who were regularly attending SEYCC meetings could feel this shifting dynamic at the table. As one participant explained, it had an overall negative effect on the work of the Coalition because the feelings of tension and hostility that were emerging during the meetings caused some members to stop attending regularly:

When you would go to a Coalition meeting when the relationship [with government] was good and when we worked together, when

they saw us and valued us as a community coalition and when we saw and valued them as a government, you could see how those meetings felt. And it was almost like you could feel the difference when that conflict started happening. Some people withdrew from the table, which I also feel is, you know, not a good thing. When all that started happening you kind of started seeing some people not coming.

StreetReach

One of the main areas of conflict that emerged, and where some members of the SEYCC felt that they were no longer being listened to by government, was in the creation and expansion of StreetReach. When Tracia's Trust was being developed, the SEYCC advocated to support the growth of the Winnipeg Outreach Network (W.O.N.) through the strategy, which was proving to be an effective community-based mechanism for building relationships with youth and sharing information between organizations. The government addressed this recommendation in the creation of StreetReach, but rather than basing the program out of community organizations, StreetReach was housed within the Child Protection Branch.

They decided at the [Child Protection] Branch level to rather than have that coordinator position put into the community to be able to help blend everybody they decided to have it coming from the Branch ... And what we saw as an outreach to be able to help bridge kids to safety and provide opportunities for them and those kinds of things became very, became the StreetReach, and it became very punitive. And the idea was to go out and rescue these kids from the streets and lock them up.... And so what we suggested was all of a sudden turned around on its head.

StreetReach workers are directed to look for youth who are reported missing from their home or

foster care placements and are considered to be at a high risk of sexual exploitation. The workers assess youth and either return them to their placement or bring them to a locked Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) for sexually exploited girls called "Strong Hearted Buffalo Women."

One participant saw an advantage to having StreetReach housed within the Child Protection Branch:

They have found kids in big, some of our kids, in those big Tupperware containers where people have hid, trying to hide kids. They have found kids OD'ing on a basement floor and people have seen the kid OD so they all scattered. And that's because they have the ability, because it's with the Child Protection Centre they have the ability then to go in 'cause they have the mandate to go in and search. And if it's a high-risk house, 'cause a lot of people, you can't go into these high-risk gang homes where these kids are unless you either have the police or you have a mandate through Child Welfare.

The decision to take the program in this direction and the way that it has unfolded have been disconcerting to other members of the SEYCC who had advocated for a model that had outreach workers based in the community. Some participants described a sense of betrayal over the fact that W.O.N. had been taken from the community and turned into something that does not align with the values and goals that the SEYCC envisioned when it advocated for the program. One participant explained:

When the idea of StreetReach was first thought of, it was community doing outreach, so it was the experiential women, the people who have those relationships with the community members. And it was relationship-based, whereas it kind of became some bounty hunting, wearing bulletproof vests, kind of being police in some aspects. Where that's not what the vision really was.

The concern about a “bounty hunting” approach was raised by some participants, referring to a perception that StreetReach workers are using unnecessary force with youth and are focused more on tracking youth down than on building relationships and trying to work with them.

I call them bounty hunters. The kids are scared of them, you know. They’re manhandling young girls until the police can arrive and these girls do not need to be manhandled by men that are four times their size.... They use the non-violence crisis intervention. Yeah, they’ll lay on top of her on the ground until the police arrive. That has happened in the past with one of the girls I work with. StreetReach, a 300-pound man, had her on the ground and was on top of her until the police arrived, half an hour on the sidewalk with this man on top of her. No. That’s frickin’ inappropriate.

Participants explained that once StreetReach was established and Strong Heart opened, the trust that community outreach workers had worked hard to build with youth began to deteriorate. Youth were avoiding and running away from community outreach workers due to fears that they would be locked up in Strong Heart.

[StreetReach] impacted all of our outreach activities because the youth thought we were all with StreetReach. And so, yeah, it had some quite astronomical effects in the community as far as providing outreach services to youth and it absolutely was not a best practice whatsoever.... What we know is that things were trucking along pretty darn good there and then StreetReach went on a completely different mandate and then access to youth out on the streets decreased like crazy. So all of the outreach workers reported not being able to build relationships with youth anymore.

One participant, an outreach worker who had been part of W.O.N. and then began to work with StreetReach, described how their affiliation with

StreetReach and their inability to engage with youth as they once did led to the loss of trust that they had worked to build with youth and ultimately made their job more difficult:

The kids stopped trusting us, they stopped calling us. There was a time when any of the kids would go missing, they would be calling me in the morning and saying, “Can you come get me?” Or they’d call me at night and say, “Can you come pick me up? I’m not feeling safe” ... And like, they would call me, they would reach out to me, I built that relationship with them. It became so horrific that the kids stopped calling me and they would run away out of town. So we were actually doing more damage to these kids because the one person that they could trust that would get them out of that unsafe place, I was no longer that safe person anymore and they despised me.

This participant explained that they struggled to work within a program that did not prioritize building relationships and trust with youth. They described how the parameters of the program had made it challenging for them to get to know the youth who they were looking for:

So I started my day off, I would drive to the [CRS] branch — I wouldn’t drive to my office [in the community]. I would drive to the branch and that’s where we met every morning and then that’s where we were partnered up and sent out on the streets to look for all of these missing kids... [After I left StreetReach] I was able to go back to how it was before and spend my time getting to know the girls, letting them get to know me, you know, we would go out for breakfast or I would drive them to school... I had the ability once again to build that relationship with them and that trust that is so, so very important. Like, that’s number one for any of our girls, is the relationship and the trust.

Some participants raised concerns that the approach being used by StreetReach does harm to

youth in the name of protecting them through the use of physical force and involuntary confinement. These concerns stem from the fact that youth experiencing sexual exploitation have likely been exposed to a high degree of trauma. One participant suggested that this re-victimizes youth who have been exploited:

What gives people, StreetReach, the authority to even touch ... somebody else's child? That's against the law. And I don't understand how society is allowing that because that's wrong. No, you're not going to sit on a child, you're going to do more damage to the child. The child's going to be re-victimized over and over and over. You know, we're telling people that they can't touch a child, they can't sexually exploit a child, they can't do this. But that's a form of exploiting a child too is by putting their hands on them and hogtying them and holding them and locking them up. Well, you know what? That does harm.

Another participant emphasized that these criticisms of StreetReach are not meant to condemn all StreetReach employees but rather to highlight the fact that there needs to be more of a focus on building trust and relationships with youth and the wider community in order to be able to have any real impact on the situations that youth are facing:

Not all StreetReach workers are like that, they do have a couple of good workers that have some rapport and know we have to build relationships with these girls and boys or they're not going to trust us, they're not going to come to us when they're really in their time of need.

Some participants also recognized that while there are concerns within the community about how StreetReach is operating, the program can be useful for collecting the intelligence that is needed in order to press charges against offenders, something that many participants agreed is needed.

Secure Care

Similar to the debate about secure care in the literature, secure care has come up as a controversial and divisive issue around the SEYCC table. Participants in this study held a range of opinions on the use of secure care. Many brought up the way that conflicts over secure care have not only damaged the relationship between the SEYCC and government but have also led to some community stakeholders choosing to stop attending SEYCC meetings.

One participant saw merit in the use of secure care, noting that it serves a purpose for a small number of at-risk youth:

[T]here's just a handful that need sometimes to have a break. They've been using meth for 10 days in a row. How are they going to keep themselves safe? So this is why the secure unit, the HRV unit was setup, to give kids a break. Now kids will go knock on the door and say, "Let me in I need a place to be for a while." So that tells me that that's working. But it's not the only thing you need, you know. That's just, as I talked about that service continuum right, we have those extreme kids who need, they need a break and if they ask for it you give it to them. If they can't make that decision 'cause they're not in a space, you have to protect them 'cause they'll end up dead. So they need to be confined for a little while, right, until they get some food in them, some sleep. And then they go on their way.... They'll just end up dead if you cannot build in some kind of way to just keep them confined for a little bit.

Other participants, however, took issue with secure care, arguing that it is a fundamentally a punitive approach that can do more harm than good.

Secure custody, that's something that I know is not effective because I was there. I'm like no, no, you come out madder than a bull. When you're out you're back to square one, you know. It's just like this revolving door and that doesn't work.

I don't believe in locking kids up. Like, I just don't believe in that, you know, especially for Indigenous kids because it only makes them rebel even more, you know, and to run even longer. So, you know, if you lock a kid up for ten days, they're going to hold a lot of anger towards that individual or that agency. And by locking them up they're only going to go underground even more.

I think that's wrong in every aspect because they're already in the system. They're going, now you're putting them in a locked-up facility, you're just adding more chips, more fuel to the fire. And that's not the answer to anything.

I think that whoever is working with these youth better have a really good understanding of what's at risk here. If you put somebody in a cage just like an animal the anger will show itself, a sadness will show itself and a non-acceptance. And my firm belief is that once those kids get out they'll be right back out there because they won't have any skills to work with.

I think that's not the answer is to take these youth and lock them up in a room, you know. Like, it's, they need connection; they need interaction. And secluding them and putting them in these rooms is kind of taking away their personal freedoms as well.

Several participants questioned the message that is being sent to girls when they are confined involuntarily after experiencing sexual violence. As one participant reflected:

What are we saying to her? That doesn't reflect a society that is victim-centred, it's not. These girls are locked up in [Strong Heart], which is worse than jail... It's a rubber room essentially, there is nothing in the room, there's a bed. It's a jail.

Other participants also raised concerns that there are not enough resources available to girls once they arrive at Strong Heart, or that there

is often a long delay before someone such as a social worker checks in with them. Participants emphasized the importance of having supports immediately available to youth, such as addictions and cultural supports, a children's advocate and experiential mentors to help girls feel loved and cared for rather than punished for their own exploitation.

Another concern expressed by some participants is that the experience of being locked up does not prepare youth well for the rest of their lives, and can potentially lead to a lifetime of institutionalization. As one participant stated:

At some point we need to teach [youth] how to cope and regulate on the outside world, and I think by continuously locking them up we're not giving them those skills. When they're 18 they're going to be out there anyway. What are they going to do? They're going to be turning to jails because they don't know how — the only way that they know how to keep themselves safe or to function in a healthy manner is being locked up. That's not realistic, that's not life.

Participants who opposed the use of secure care pointed to alternatives that they saw as being more supportive and respectful of the rights of youth, with many offering Hands of Mother Earth as an example of a voluntary placement that provides cultural supports and employs experiential women to work with youth. Culturally safe placements were important to many participants, given that the majority of youth experiencing sexual exploitation are Indigenous. Several participants made a connection between the colonial legacy of Canada and the disproportionate impact of sexual exploitation on Indigenous youth. A participant stressed the importance of listening to and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into the approaches used in working with youth victims:

What does the evidence say about locked facilities? The evidence says that they do not

actually work at all, but rather voluntary, highly supportive, culturally safe spaces is what works for adolescents. Voluntary, culturally safe spaces with high supports, like well-trained staff and huge capacity, the staff has a big capacity around that kind of stuff... [T]here may be a little bit of evidence around [the benefit of secure care] in particular populations, but definitely not in a youth population on a whole.... And then, of course, the settler way is to isolate and lock people up and the Indigenous way is to not do that at all, rather to support people where they're at. And so following Indigenous ways of knowing, we know there's evidence that says that's actually the way to go. It is trauma informed, it is harm reduction, it is inclusive in all of the ways.

Those in favour of secure care point to the fact that some youth have sought out StreetReach and asked to come to the CSU because they need a break from being on the street and want to be in a place where they feel safe. A participant referred to this argument and questioned whether this is truly a measure of success, or an indictment of the fact that youth have been put in situations where they have so few safe places to go. She compared the situation with adults who commit offences and go to jail in order to have reliable shelter, suggesting that it demonstrates a failing by society:

And then [people] say that, "Well, we've got a lot of girls that self-refer [to Strong Heart] and it's a great thing, it says a lot about the program." But you know what? That's really sad. When you look at institutionalization and how people commit a crime just to get into jail because they feel safer in jail than they do on the street, that's sad.... Like, what are we doing wrong?

While some participants were strongly against the use of secure care under most circumstances, others suggested that there was a need for a more nuanced conversation on the topic, and

that secure care should represent one approach on a continuum of services for youth. As one participant stated:

I think that when it comes to children who are sexually exploited, there needs to a full continuum of care and I think at the very end of that continuum exists secure care and I think sometimes it's needed.

Most participants who were generally opposed to secure care did acknowledge that there were specific circumstances in which secure care could be seen as a last resort, particularly when youth are suicidal and pose a serious risk to their own safety.

Another participant stressed the need for a multitude of approaches and perspectives in dealing with the issue of sexual exploitation among youth. She suggested that the debate over secure care has caused people to become stuck in their positions on the issue, which has exacerbated the conflict. She emphasized that it is important to look at the individual needs of youth and remember that they will require different supports and interventions on their healing journey:

In my own healing there were programs that I went to that were absolutely amazing when I started and it was like, this is exactly what I need. And then a year later it felt oppressive because I grew and I needed something different, right? I used to pray to go to jail because I needed three days of sobriety and a regular meal and not having to look over my shoulder or worry about someone walking into a house and punching me out. You know what I mean? I just needed safety, you know. I just needed to feel okay and just be able to breathe and the only way I could get that is to get locked up, right. But, you know, fast forward two or three years that would be the last thing I would ever want because how dare you take my freedom, how dare you take my choice, I can do this on my own. But I had the skills at that

time to be able to do that and the desire and the motivation, right?

One participant suggested that the intensity of the debate over secure care has likely been fuelled more by how it was implemented by government, rather than the use of secure care itself. She emphasized the importance of proper community consultation and dialogue, highlighting the need to rebuild relationships in order to move forward effectively:

I don't think it's so much the issue of secure care in Manitoba as the issue of how we arrived at secure care. If there would have been a full consultation and ongoing dialogue occurring between government and stakeholders, I don't think we would be in the position that we're in now. I think government took it upon themselves without consultation and implemented secure care and that got some of the stakeholders pretty irate. And I can't say I blame them. So am I opposed to secure care? No, I'm not opposed to it, I think it's needed. But I think everything, any other possible intervention or solution, needs to be implemented first. And as a very last resort I think it's important to have access to [secure care]. But in the meantime that whole relationship between government and the stakeholders needs to be re-established and, if it's not, the issue of secure care is probably not going to get resolved.

The Impact of Conflict on the Work of the SEYCC

The StreetReach program and the use of secure care for sexually exploited youth have become divisive issues among stakeholders who have been involved in the SEYCC. Some participants from community-based organizations stated that the conflict over secure care began to dominate SEYCC meetings and contributed to their decision to stop attending meetings. Particularly, participants who saw some merit in the use of

secure care felt that if they shared their opinion they were shut down, shunned and made to feel unwelcome at meetings. Several participants acknowledged that the membership of the Coalition has declined in recent years, and some attributed this to what they believe was hostility, lateral violence and personal attacks against members who did not share the same views about secure care.

Several participants suggested that the decision made by government to reallocate the funding previously provided for the All Children Matter conference to a group not affiliated with the SEYCC for a different event was a direct result of this conflict. Some participants took this decision personally due to the time and energy they had invested in organizing the conference in previous years, and the short notice they received that the conference would not be funded in 2017. The issue of the conference has come up regularly at SEYCC meetings over the last year and the sense of frustration felt by members has been palpable.

The challenges that the SEYCC has encountered in recent years stem from conflicts that have developed over time and, as a result, it will likely take time to rebuild the relationships that have been damaged in the process. The participants in this project fell on different sides of the debate around secure care, had differing mandates in their work and, in some cases, had divergent perspectives on the sex industry and exploitation. However, all participants agreed that the issue of youth sexual exploitation has become worse and more complex over the last decade, and that a wide range of stakeholders must come to the table in order to have any success in solving this problem.

Going forward, the SEYCC will need to find a way to engage members in finding common ground and setting goals to work toward. The following section outlines participant's views on best practices for working with sexually exploited youth and suggests that there are many areas where people with different mandates and perspectives may find common ground and shared goals.

Best Practices in Working with Sexually Exploited Youth

There was consensus among participants that Indigenous youth are the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to the intergenerational impacts of colonization, including the residential school system. Participants identified systemic racism, poverty, trauma, involvement with child welfare and the loss of connection with culture as being responsible for many Indigenous youth not having their basic needs met and lacking a sense of identity and belonging. Some participants emphasized that youth moving to the city from reserve communities can be particularly vulnerable. Participants also raised the issue of addictions being a contributing factor in the exploitation of youth, suggesting that this is only becoming worse with the epidemic of crystal meth use in Winnipeg (Hobson 2018). One participant explained how all of these factors collide to create vulnerability among youth:

So most of the times it's for food, shelter, feeling loved, they become addicted so then it's a drug issue, a money issue. You know, they're trafficked, pimped out, they're forced to, you know — it could be [for something] as simple as a pack of cigarettes or a couple of Tylenol 3's or a hit of meth, right? It's all the above, I mean,

it's so hard to — it's so many things. I see it as shelter, clothing, food... And then it's, you know, when they're away from their family it's like feeling a part of something, right? So a lot of the kids that are removed from their reserves come to the city, placed in a group home, they have nothing. And they come with the clothes they're wearing which are not like the kids in the city wear, because they don't have access to that up there, right, so they don't have any name brand clothing. So then they want to fit in ... and then they're huge targets. They go to Portage Place [Mall] — Portage Place is like the number one place for kids to go, but they're targets there, guys know, right?

Experiential participants spoke about the various factors that made them vulnerable to exploitation as youth, and there were several common themes within their stories. Many of these participants had experiences of sexual abuse in their early childhood, and most had an unstable home life, either growing up in foster care or experiencing dysfunctional family dynamics. Most participants were 12 to 14 years old when they were groomed for sexual exploitation and several were introduced to the sex industry by

an older boyfriend or other youth. One participant shared that she learned about and became exploited through the sex industry as a result of meeting other youth in the Manitoba Youth Centre, but that a history of childhood abuse had somewhat normalized exploitation for her:

I ended up in the Youth Centre and that was the first time I saw a “working girl” in person. And, you know, they would come in, they always had nice clothes and money and talked with such independence and, you know, doing whatever they wanted. So it seemed intriguing to somebody that’s young and [has] been shuffled around in life, and abused, because it was always taken from me in one form or another.... Usually an offender will reward whoever they’re molesting or whatever with something ... like being allowed to stay up later, or gifts, things like that, you know, because they would feel guilty or not want to be told on. So I think that’s where [the exploitation] developed was at that stage.

Many participants pointed out that the rise of the Internet and social media as well as the prevalence of peer recruitment into sexual exploitation have made it more difficult for outreach workers and other service providers to intervene as exploitation is more hidden than it used to be.

In consideration of these factors, participants outlined their perspectives on best practices for working with sexually exploited youth and preventing exploitation. There were several common themes within these responses, which have been organized into six areas: Indigenous Led, Person-Centred, Relationship Based, Youth/Survivor Led, Appropriate Placements and Supporting a Continuum of Services.

Indigenous Led

Participants acknowledged that the issue of youth sexual exploitation, connected as it is to colonization, disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities. Participants highlighted

the importance of having Indigenous communities and organizations inform and lead strategies to address exploitation, emphasizing that Indigenous people have the experience, wisdom and resilience needed to solve problems brought about by colonization.

Some participants stressed that it is imperative for non-Indigenous people to not only listen to Indigenous people when it comes to the issue of exploitation, but to always look for ways to redistribute power over decision-making and program delivery so that Indigenous communities have a position of leadership. One participant explained:

I think for non-Indigenous people there’s a responsibility to really become aware of the Indigenous worldview and try to do what you can to build capacity within the Indigenous community to deal with the issue of child and youth sexual exploitation. Since you’re looking at 70, 80 percent of children, youth and adults that are exploited are Indigenous. So then that issue needs to be placed into the hands of the Indigenous community to deal with, in a way that makes sense to them.

Participants offered a number of examples of how an Indigenous worldview is applied to program delivery and why this represents a best practice for working with all youth experiencing exploitation, and Indigenous youth in particular. Participants recognized that as a result of colonization — residential schools, intergenerational trauma and ongoing systemic racism and violence — many Indigenous youth are not connected with their culture or feel a sense of shame about their identity. For this reason, many participants highlighted the importance of finding ways to support all youth in learning about their culture and the history of Indigenous oppression and resilience in Canada. Participants felt strongly that this helps many youth who are victims of exploitation find a sense of belonging to a community and find meaning and value in their lives.

Some experiential participants identified learning about their culture as being an important part of healing from their trauma and finding direction in life. As one participant stated:

One of the things for [youth] to better themselves and know who they are as young Indigenous people is to reclaim their culture and identity. And when I talk about identity it's, you know, getting their spirit names, their clans and their colours. You know, for me personally as someone who was a victim at one point, those are some of the things that really guided me, those were sort of my guiding principles to bettering my life because now I knew that I belonged somewhere. Because there's this [need for a] sense of belonging with Indigenous kids. They need to belong to something or somewhere.

Participants talked about the need for a paradigm shift in terms of how services and programs for youth are designed and implemented. Some participants referred to the use of a values-based approach when working with youth, meaning that people working with youth should place less of an emphasis on enforcing rules that youth are expected to abide by and instead involve youth in determining realistic expectations and outcomes for themselves. A participant who works directly with sexually exploited teenaged girls explained:

I think [you need to be] treating them like they're your own kids, while recognizing that they weren't raised by you. So providing consequences and a set of rules for them to abide by is unrealistic because they don't have that structure and they never have. So for them to be able to understand that is very hard.

Many participants, particularly those doing front-line work, described the importance of understanding the work that they do not as a "9 to 5" job but as an investment in the lives of youth who they consider to be their family. Practically speaking, this means that they will work overnight, search

the city for youth when they go missing, sit with youth as long as they need when they are going through a crisis and go out of their way to make sure youth feel loved and cared for.

One participant described Indigenous ways of caring for youth as building a "system of connection" that draws upon the strengths and experience of everyone in the community, such as Elders, aunts and uncles, to build a strong and supportive safety net for youth. This was contrasted with Western systems that tend to rely on professionals and institutions that too often allow vulnerable youth to slip through the cracks. Another participant similarly expressed:

Just over the years of me being involved I've seen lots of people come in, you know, and they just don't have that heart. Our kids need love and ... those relationships with the kids are number one for any success. And if you don't have that and can't do it, it just won't work. And some of the folks that are higher up in those positions, just through my experience, don't have that and don't see that as a priority, however they're in charge so they have to dictate to us. I honestly feel that right now in the year of 2017 we are basically — what's happening is it's residential school. However, it's not like in an institution. It's more of folks that are dictating to us on how we provide care and safety for our children [and it] is a European way of thinking. Whereas when you're Aboriginal that's not our way of thinking. Our way of thinking is family and love and trust and relationships, right?

Participants also expressed that the existing model of child protection does not support an Indigenous worldview. Several participants strongly asserted that it is time to change child welfare so that whole families are supported and alternatives to child apprehension are more thoroughly examined and resourced. These participants advocate for a strength-based approach that prioritizes family reunification and understands that keeping children with their families will produce

better outcomes for youth. One participant who had a career in child welfare said:

I think sometimes if kids are at risk and they're out [on the street], but they still have family that will welcome them back, then let's celebrate that and work with the families rather than take them out of the home. I think we can do better 'cause we don't as agencies. I think there's way too many kids in care, which shouldn't be.... Agencies, what they'll do is say, "You can't go home. You can't go visit your family." So kids run away and they go visit home. And then [social workers] tell the parents, "Well you can't let them in." Well, you know, that's not very good, you know what I mean. So you want to nurture and bridge those kids back to the families that they have, not the families that you wish they had.

Participants were clear that applying an Indigenous lens to the issue of sexual exploitation of youth and supporting Indigenous leadership does not exclude non-Indigenous youth who are experiencing sexual exploitation or suggest that there is not a role for non-Indigenous people and organizations. However, given that an overwhelming majority of youth experiencing sexual exploitation are Indigenous, they believed that it is imperative that Indigenous communities and organizations are leading the strategies and programs intended to address this issue. This best practice is supported by the Office of the Children's Advocate Manitoba (2016), who suggests that while Indigenous organizations are the best positioned to serve Indigenous communities and often tend to go the extra mile in supporting Indigenous youth, non-Indigenous organizations also have a role to play in learning and taking guidance from Indigenous leaders.

Relationship Based

As discussed throughout this report, participants continually emphasized the critical im-

portance of building relationships with youth who are sexually exploited. Many participants stated that these youth have an absence of love and belonging in their lives and few people who they trust. Participants saw building relationships rooted in trust and respect as being prerequisite to doing any kind of work with youth.

One participant described the goal of relationship building as getting youth to develop self-worth and a sense of hope for their future:

I think that when you work from a relationship perspective, when you look at what really is helpful and what helps kids exit, it's relationship — meaningful, valuable, lasting, loving, caring relationships that give children hope that they can be whatever they want to be and see that they carry enough within themselves.

Other participants made the point that by the time a teenager has become street-entrenched, they have likely been let down and had their trust broken countless times by adults and systems that were supposed to provide care and support. This makes it especially important to invest in earning the trust and respect of youth, and recognize that the time required to do so is significant.

One participant explained that the tendency of service providers to immediately focus on "protection" at the cost of establishing relationships could have the effect of pushing youth further away:

We also have youth who are very savvy. Like, we have 14, 15-year-olds who can survive much better than I could ever survive on the streets. And part of their game is survival, right. So they know what to do and how to survive on the streets, which means us as grownups with our protection lenses are not helpful to provide services in that context. 'Cause instead we just want to save all the kids and the kids are like, "Where were you when I was five getting sexually abused? You weren't there to save me

then, how the heck do I ever trust you to save me now?"

Participants described different ways to work on building trusting relationships with youth. Several identified the need to respect the privacy of youth as much as possible, pointing out that youth who have grown up involved with systems often do not have the privilege of keeping the details of their lives private. Service providers must work to find a way to only disclose the necessary information they receive from youth to others and seek permission from youth when possible.

Another tool for relationship building that was pointed out by several participants was taking youth out for a meal. Not only does this help to meet one of their basic needs, but it also provides youth with an informal setting in which they can start to become comfortable in talking to an adult who is offering support. Grassroots outreach workers in the community understand the importance of building relationships and those interviewed for this project generally described the work they do as getting to know the youth who they see on the street and creating a positive presence so that youth know who they can turn to if they are looking for help. One participant explained:

[I try] to get that relationship going with them, so they know they don't have to be scared of me, that I'm here as a helper. I'm here not to judge you, I'm here to help you. I've got stuff for you, if you need a safe somewhere let's give you a safe ride, let's get you out of here. So to build that relationship with them, that relationship's so important because that's where the kid is going to [get] help if they need help. Well, they do need help but they're not going to ask for it right away, you know.

Person-Centred

Related to the relationship focus, many participants also discussed the importance of providing

person-centred care to youth. For participants, this meant using a strength-based, non-judgmental approach to working with youth and giving youth an active role in their own case planning rather than making decisions on their behalf. Participants noted that it is necessary to meet youth where they are at and remember that each youth is an individual who will take their own unique path toward healing and recovery. As one participant put it:

It's their life, right.... [Y]ou help support them along the way and you're kind of walking the path with them.

Many participants identified harm reduction as a best practice, which is tied to this idea of accepting where youth are at in their lives and working to minimize the harm that they might cause to themselves. In the context of drug use or sexual activity, an example of a harm reduction approach would be the provision of education and supplies that youth can use to protect themselves from harms such as disease transmission or drug overdose. Many participants advocated for this approach when working with sexually exploited youth and identified it as one of the core values held by the SEYCC.

The principle and practice of simply listening to and accepting youth for who they are was of paramount importance to most participants. As one participant explained, many youth have spent their lives feeling as though no one is listening to them:

What I do believe is that when we're working with women and children who have been sexually exploited we really need to come from a place where we are allowing them their voice. Whatever their story is, however they want to look at it, they want to talk about it, we need to be open to listening to them because I believe that for so many years they've been invisible. You know, prior to being groomed, you know, you're susceptible to that grooming oftentimes because

somebody's listening to you, you have a place to belong. And so that's what we need to create and there needs to be acceptance, no judgment.

Participants also talked about what it means to work with youth from a strength-based perspective, taking into account that youth are too often defined by others based on their challenges or flaws. Youth who are street-entrenched have many strengths and skills, but these can be overshadowed when service providers focus too much on "fixing" problems, and this deficiency lens does not help youth realize that they already have the strength within themselves to overcome the challenges that they face. One participant pointed out that she tends to see youth portrayed negatively in their case files, which can influence the kind of care that they receive from service providers:

You know, each of these kids ... if you look into their file history and their history of being in care, nothing is positive in their files, nothing. Maybe there's a blurb of something positive, and when you work with these young kids, especially [sexually exploited] kids, you know, they have a lot of gifts, they have a lot of strengths. And in their files those aren't captured whatsoever, they're not. And that's one of the heartbreaking things because people tend to read their files and see these kids as a file rather than a human. So now they're already casting that judgment on that child before even meeting that child and where that child's coming from.

Person-centred care for sexually exploited youth means first accepting that youth are the experts of their own lives, and then using a strength-based lens to involve them in planning the steps they want to take toward healing, recognizing that this will be different for everyone.

Youth/Survivor Led

Centring the voices of sexually exploited youth and survivors of exploitation in decision-making

on program and policy development was another best practice identified by participants. It was frequently pointed out throughout the interviews that experiential people should be guiding any process or strategy intended to address exploitation because they will have the most useful insights into whether or not an approach is effective.

One participant pointed to the fact that survivors need to be given a platform where their voices will be heard and meaningfully included in decision-making:

I've worked with girls who were 13 at the time and now are 23, 24 years old, who have told me — who still tell me — what worked and what didn't work. And what I did that made them feel good and what I did that it wasn't okay to do. I learned from all of them. We need to listen to the kids as well.

Related to this, some participants highlighted the effectiveness of having youth involved in programming and creating opportunities for them to teach and learn from each other. A peer-run model can give youth more confidence as they take on a leadership role as well as provide information to youth that they are more likely to listen to as it comes from their peers. One participant noted:

[We should be] having them do their own programming, like peer run programming, giving them volunteer opportunities, give them school, actually engage them. I think peer programming is so important and especially when it's like peers educating peers as opposed to me the social worker educating you about [what you should do]. They're not going to listen to me, right?

Participants also frequently spoke about the value of employing experiential people to work with sexually exploited youth, claiming that people who have been through and survived the experience of exploitation are better able to identify

with and relate to the situations that youth are facing without needing youth to explain everything that they are experiencing. Participants also suggested that youth are more comfortable with experiential workers who understand what they are dealing with more than a professional who does not have that lived experience. Franssen and O'Brien (2014) have made a similar recommendation about the importance of employing experiential workers and ensuring that vulnerable youth always have access to this support.

Participants advocated for investing in more experiential workers through the provision of training and decent wages. One participant, an experiential person who works as an outreach worker, explained the value of having experiential people on staff:

All of my outreach team, we're all experiential and we're hiring full-time workers and telling them we want another experiential person.... [W]hen those ladies out there see someone that they know or that they used to know and they're clean and they have a job, that's like inspiration and then they're really happy for that person and then inside they know, "Holy shit, man, she used to be the worst junkie I ever knew. I never thought she'd do anything with her life." And to see her working, having a full-time job and doing something that she loves, it's very inspirational for the entrenched person and they can see there is something for us out there besides simply existing in this entrenchment, 'cause it's not living, it's just simply existing.

Participants also cautioned that when experiential voices are brought to the table, or when experiential people are employed within an organization, it is very important to ensure that care is taken to prevent any further exploitation from happening to these individuals. This means that experiential people should not feel pressured to share their stories and if they choose to do so they should be properly compensated for the time and energy it takes to speak about

their experiences. It also means that when experiential people are consulted and asked for input into program development, their ideas are meaningfully incorporated and the process by which this is done is transparent for all involved. Further, it is important to publicly recognize and acknowledge when experiential people have contributed to a project. Finally, organizations that employ experiential people need to provide fair wages and understand how to work from a trauma-informed perspective.

Appropriate Placements

Another best practice that was identified by many participants was ensuring that youth in care are put in appropriate placements. Multiple participants spoke about the dangers of putting a vulnerable youth in a placement alongside youth who are street-entrenched and how this can expose them to influences that put them further at risk, particularly with the prevalence of peer-recruitment into exploitation. Similarly, some participants suggested that youth who are deeply street-entrenched need particular placements with only a few other youth in similar situations. One participant explained:

A best practice is really good assessment.... [S]o for social workers or anybody in the system, if you can't really assess where the young person's at, if they're maybe just transitioning in or if they're really entrenched, because you don't want to put kids who are at risk or transitioning in, you don't want to throw them in with entrenched kids. Because then they'll get entrenched with those other entrenched kids. That has happened too often.

A couple of participants mentioned a new process for placing youth that brings a variety of stakeholders together to make placement decisions. Prior to the introduction of this process, the placement desk would often be responsible for making these decisions based on information

provided by social workers. As some participants pointed out, the caseloads for social workers are often so large that they are unable to build enough of a relationship with youth to know everything that is happening in their lives. The new placement process brings together staff from different placements and involves people who have relationships with the youth being assigned to a placement. This can help avoid the issue of a youth being labelled a certain way without a full understanding of their current situation, which leads to more appropriate and safer placements. A participant explained this process, stating that it has had good results so far:

All resources sit at the table. We bring up a kid's name, we all talk about who, like, what kind of a relationship we've had, the history and then we try to fit that kid in.... So we just started that within the last two months and it's been extremely successful. Because then it's all the resources, we know their history, 'cause social history doesn't usually give us a lot of what this kid's currently dealing with or anything really relating to sexual exploitation. [And] they start labelling... [I]f a kid is connected to another kid then they'll start to be labelled as [sexually exploited] or if their family was involved. Like, it's just assumption after assumption.

Some participants strongly believed that a "secure by location" placement such as H.O.M.E. is the best placement option for sexually exploited youth, rather than in a locked facility. A secure by location placement may give staff at the facility more opportunity to work on relationship building, and youth will have less exposure to influences from youth who are street entrenched. This also has the benefit of giving staff more time to do an assessment of where youth are at and work with them to determine their next steps. One participant explained:

Obviously I do see that the benefit of securing by location would be different than [secure

care] because then you can also develop that relationship and they're not, you know, developing new friendships, not meeting different people in those other facilities. It's also like determining where they are in the sense of if they're entrenched, if they're at risk, if they are exploiting other youth, you know, determining all that stuff.

Participants emphasized that it is important to explore a variety of placement options to determine what will be the best for a youth, including the option of independent living for some. Most agreed that as much as possible placements should be culturally safe and provide youth with a sense of home and stability and that the existing practice of moving children and youth between dozens of placements throughout their lives has an overall detrimental impact on outcomes for youth.

Supporting a Continuum of Services

A final best practice identified by participants for supporting sexually exploited youth is to develop and support a continuum of services and supports for youth, which was essentially the goal of Tracia's Trust when it was created. Participants noted that all of the factors that make youth vulnerable to exploitation must be taken into account to ensure that the services, programs and legislation designed to end the exploitation of youth are addressing the root causes.

The goal of a continuum of services is to be able to meet the emergency crisis needs of sexually exploited youth as well as provide the longer-term, tailored supports that are needed for exiting and healing from exploitation (Justice Institute of British Columbia 2002). One participant explained that given the complexity of the issue, the continuum of services to support youth must involve multiple sectors and strong partnerships between stakeholders:

You need to look at the underlying factors when you're addressing the issue of sexual

exploitation. So you need to look at racism and colonization and sexism because it's affecting primarily females. And the issues, like health issues around addictions and the role of addictions, the role of mental health and things like [Fetal Alcohol Effects], learning disabilities because there's such high concentrations of those that are sexually exploited with all of these various kinds of health issues. So the best practice needs to be a multi-sectoral response because it's not just a social service issue or it's not just a criminal matter or a health matter or a Child and Family Service matter or an Aboriginal matter. Like, it's all of those things. The best practice is that there needs to be recognition of the underlying factors and a partnership, a multi-sectoral partnership to deal with the issues.

While Manitoba has worked through Tracia's Trust to establish this continuum of services — and many participants noted that Manitoba is a leader in this area among all of the provinces and territories in Canada — participants identified some areas that could be strengthened.

Several participants highlighted the need for more 24-hour safe spaces for youth to go, and particularly spaces for female-identified youth. One participant pointed to the need for more spaces where youth can simply go to find safety and have their basic needs met, and for youth to be able to inform what these spaces look like:

[We should have] safe spaces, right, where youth are being exploited for them to attend to, have access to resources so that they can quickly get themselves out of situations and somebody can come and help them when they are in danger. Letting youth drive whatever that programming looks like, [so they can say] “This is actually what I need and this is the time sensitive factors that I need it in.”

Prevention is another area where many participants advocated for more resources, which they

claimed does not receive nearly enough attention or funding when compared to the services set up to address the downstream consequences of sexual exploitation. Several participants suggested that more needs to be done around prevention within school systems, where educators and parents could receive information about identifying risk factors and warning signs to look out for. Participants also advocated for more Indigenous-focused curricula and resources in schools designed to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth, such as the Miikiwaap Butterfly Tipi Lodge Teachings designed by Myra Laramée.

Participants also spoke extensively about the need for more funding toward prevention measures within child welfare. This includes introducing more anti-poverty initiatives to address one of the driving factors that makes families vulnerable to CFS involvement as well as providing more support toward preventing the apprehension of children. One participant spoke about the need to intervene and work with families before they reach a crisis point:

They need to look at doing child welfare where they're helping families before families reach a crisis where their kids are going to be brought into care. They need to have workers that are trained and educated in how to work with the population of people that they're working with, whether it's Indigenous or other cultural groups. Now we have lots of different people that are coming to this country and so we need to be sensitive to their needs as well, right? So doing child welfare from a more prevention as opposed to crisis-oriented [lens] 'cause that's the way it is now.... [Y]ou don't see money flowing into communities for prevention.

One participant shared an anecdote about a child she encountered while working as part of an outreach team who the team identified as being sexually exploited. They were able to eventually get to know her through their relationship with

another youth and worked with Safer Neighbourhoods to conduct surveillance on her home and make a report to child welfare. Child and Family Services knew the child's mother, also exploited from a young age, and a decision was made to apprehend the family together, rather than separating the children from their mother. This decision and the treatment plan that was put in place for the mother and her children has led to the family ultimately being able to stay together to the present day. The participant explained that having community outreach workers and strong partnerships between different agencies was critical to finding a successful outcome for the family:

So when we think of doing things outside the box we actually have some really good [outcomes]. And each piece of that puzzle was integral to getting that outcome for that family. 'Cause if we didn't first build a relationship with that kid, nobody would have [known about her]... 'Cause

we were the only outreach team out there that didn't have an actual mandate to our outreach, so we were able to talk to everybody.... Like, we were literally just combing the streets and whoever was there we made relationships with. But then Safer Neighbourhoods had to be a part of it, Child Protection, like, every single one of us had to be a part of having such a huge success story, and also supporting mom in order to stay with her children.

This anecdote helps to illustrate the positive outcomes that can be achieved when there are strong partnerships between community and government programs as well as a well-resourced continuum of services that includes a focus on prevention. It is helpful to consider all of the factors that produce successful outcomes for children and families when conceptualizing the role of a diverse community coalition such as the SEYCC in the continuum of services for sexually exploited youth.

Moving Forward

The SEYCC has spent over a decade working to find solutions to sexual exploitation and has done so under the guidance and leadership of experiential people and frontline community workers. This issue is complex and there are many different, often polarized, perspectives on appropriate interventions to use when working with these vulnerable youth. It is therefore natural that the SEYCC has at times found itself caught up in the competing discourses and perspectives that surround the sex industry, exploitation and trafficking. However, the Coalition has also proven that it is a politically powerful group that has the collective experience and leadership required to identify risk factors and create programs, services and supports that make a difference in the lives of youth. It has also been shown that the Coalition works most effectively and has the greatest success when there are strong partnerships and respectful relationships between members working at the grassroots level and representatives from government agencies.

Going forward, it is necessary to recognize and celebrate the work of community members who have contributed their time to the work of the Coalition as well as other initiatives, largely on a volunteer basis. This is especially important because many of the people who have sat at the

SEYCC table are experiential, or have been otherwise affected in some way by the issue of sexual exploitation. One participant commented on the importance of giving recognition to those with lived experience of sexual exploitation:

Even though we've come so far in our journeys there's still traumas that we're dealing with that surface every once in a while. And one of those traumas that I see constantly with experiential or trafficked people is that, whatever that piece is, to hear a "thank you" or a "good job" at the smallest simplest things, it gives us that self-worth piece that builds that little flame inside of us to keep us going.

Many members of the SEYCC confront the realities and consequences of exploitation in both their professional and personal lives. It is perhaps for this reason that some participants understood and described the work they do less as a "job" and more as an act of love and commitment to their community. Consequently, it can be discouraging for community members when they feel as though the work they do is unrecognized, co-opted or undervalued.

Many participants are invested in the future of the Coalition and want the group to focus on

rebuilding the relationships that have become strained over the last few years. Several participants expressed that the hostility and conflict that emerged around the table has come to overshadow the good work the SEYCC is doing, and there is a need for the Coalition to re-focus on its vision and goals. One participant stated:

We have shown that we can work really well together and we've done some really great things as a Coalition, but we have not been there in a little while and so people are falling off to say, "If we're not working towards something in common, why am I attending these meetings?" And then, of course, decision-makers have to be at those tables again to push things forward.

Participants also noted that Coalition members must be able to work through differences of opinion in way that is productive and keeps the focus on common goals. One participant highlighted the importance of maintaining respect among members so that the necessary collaborative work can take place:

If nothing else I want to emphasize that respect is extremely important for this Coalition, the respect of each other and people's different points of view is really important because we can learn, we can all learn from each other. No one organization or individual has an answer, but as a collective we might be able to find an answer to help to address this overwhelming issue in our community of exploited kids.

In that regard, efforts have been made to repair the conflicts within the SEYCC membership. One of the Coalition chairs explained that she has begun opening the meetings by asking for members to be respectful toward each other and accept that there will be different perspectives around the table:

I basically just said, you know what, people have walked away and when you have people that walk away it's like, what's the purpose of

what we're doing? And we should, you know, be mindful that half the time when someone's coming they're a messenger, there's people way above them sending that information and then to sit there and attack somebody because of that, like, it's very disheartening. It's disrespectful. And to walk away from any kind of meeting where you're being attacked or you're being challenged in a really disrespectful way [and that] isn't okay with me and I'm going to call it as I see it, but I asked for [members'] support.

In January 2018, the co-chairs of the SEYCC reached out to current and former members, asking for as many people as possible to come to a meeting and participate in establishing a renewed and more positive direction for the Coalition. The meeting was very well attended and demonstrated that there is an interest and need for the work of the Coalition to continue.

Other initiatives have been taken to move the work of the Coalition forward. In response to concerns that the vision for a coordinated, grassroots outreach team had not been properly executed by Tracia's Trust, SEYCC members reconvened the Winnipeg Outreach Network. One member of W.O.N. described how the network has been able to re-establish itself:

We have formed a very strong presence, a positive presence in the community. We have police coming to our bi-weekly meetings, lots of folks that, you know, that need to be involved in the day-to-day frontline work of all of us. It's really good, it's really good.

The relationship between the Coalition and the government has also shown signs of improvement. In 2017 Child and Family Services Division began sending a new representative who has been attending Coalition meetings regularly and attempting to re-establish communication between the SEYCC and the province.

As well, Executive Directors of several community-based organizations have formed a subgroup

of the SEYCC with the intention of addressing some of the concerns around the Tracia's Trust Strategy. As one example, when the government made an announcement that StreetReach was going to be expanded by hiring 11 more workers, the subgroup met with the Minister to express their concerns. One result was an agreement to conduct an independent review of StreetReach. As one participant explained:

There were some relationships when the government changed that were already in place and we're like, "Hey, let's talk because this is quite harmful." And so I think we were able to, you know, in a roundabout way, force an evaluation.

In addition to an evaluation of StreetReach, plans are underway to conduct an evaluation of H.O.M.E. and its role as a secure by location resource for sexually exploited youth. The province also agreed to provide funding to the Experiential Advisory Committee so that it can continue to have a strong voice at the SEYCC table.

There is also ongoing discussion of a number of initiatives that would strengthen the partnerships between the SEYCC and government, including: drawing in more stakeholders from government departments outside of Family Services — Education, Justice, Health, Status of Women and Employment/Training — to fill the gaps in responding to sexually exploited youth; re-establishing the Tracia's Trust Task Force or an equivalent formal body where the Co-Chairs of the SEYCC can bring the community expertise to the table and these strategies back to the community through the SEYCC; and reinstating the Community Advisory Committee to StreetReach. Since the conclusion of this project, the Manitoba Child and Family Services Division released a report on Tracia's Trust which highlights work that has occurred under the strategy since 2002 and recommendations to inform the strategy going forward. This report similarly calls for the need for collaboration and cooperation

between diverse stakeholders and the inclusion of many different voices and perspectives in order to do this work effectively (Manitoba Child and Family Services, 2019).

In addition to these developments, several participants pointed to the need for a paid coordinator for the SEYCC, suggesting that having a coordinator who was dedicated to communicating with different stakeholders and leading the work of the Coalition would have been helpful in navigating some of the challenges the Coalition has faced over the last few years. As one participant explained, staff at community organizations already have their hands full and their work with the Coalition is done in addition to the other responsibilities of their jobs:

The other challenge was that we had always asked for a coordinator, we did all the stuff at the side, off the side of our desk.... I mean, we do so much, we might be funded to do ten things, but we do 50 things. So at the Coalition people really rolled their sleeves up and did the work, did it in addition to the work that they were doing. So part of our strategy was that the Coalition would have a coordinator to better coordinate our resources and we've never been able to get a coordinator.

Participants also highlighted some different areas of work that they would like to see the Coalition focus on in the future, with many raising the need to look at strengthening the mechanisms already in place to identify and charge offenders. Many participants felt that the social acceptance of violence against women — and Indigenous women in particular — as well as the weak enforcement of laws against the exploitation of children, have created a situation in which men essentially have been given permission to sexually exploit Indigenous youth with no repercussions. Participants see this as an unacceptable situation, and one that the SEYCC could play a role in changing. One participant stated:

There's a big gap around addressing the perpetrators. That is in my mind a huge gap that still exists. But the good thing is that the Coalition is established and is setup to continually look at these gaps.

Another participant also pointed out the need to take a prevention lens and find ways to educate young boys about valuing and respecting girls and women:

I would like for us to really target the demand. We've been so focused on the other part of it, but what about the men? And I say men because the majority of [offenders] are men.... And when you look at what our boys are exposed to, there's so much pressure. But how do we address our boys, our little boys, to stand up for women and women's rights and not be a part of the exploiting piece of it?

Strengthening the enforcement of child sexual exploitation laws is one area where the SEYCC could be well positioned to take a leadership role, particularly because the Coalition brings together representatives from different agencies and cross-sector communication and partnerships are needed to properly address this issue.

Another task that several participants identified as an important focus for the SEYCC is creating a larger platform for experiential voices, and particularly the voices of youth currently entrenched in exploitation. Honouring and centring the voices of experiential people has always been a goal of the Coalition; however, some participants did note that it has been a challenge to include the voices of youth who are currently experiencing sexual exploitation despite this

being seen as critically important to the work of the Coalition and the development of youth-serving programs. As one of the founding members explained, this has been a challenge from the beginning:

[An important priority] was making sure we had a youth voice, and not youth who were not being exploited but rather youth who were still engaged in that. And that we failed, we never ever had an actual youth voice at our table, which meant that sometimes we were going kind of stage left, not necessarily in the right direction, because the youth were not guiding that process all the time.

Many participants praised the SEYCC for the work that it has done to elevate the voices of experiential people and wanted to see this continue. In doing so, the Coalition could also look for ways to increase the representation of youth voices around the table.

There are indications that there is the necessary momentum, political will and commitment from SEYCC members to rebuild relationships and find common ground. Though there will continue to be divisive issues and controversial perspectives within the Coalition, this project has helped to illustrate that there are many points of agreement on best practices and a general consensus among members that everyone is needed at the table in order to affect change. This report is intended to offer a hopeful vision for the future, wherein the voice of the grassroots community grows stronger and more united in its efforts to ensure that the lives of all youth are respected, valued and cherished.

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Appendix

SEYCC Membership List

A.P.A.	Marymount
Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet (AICC)	Metis CFS
AMC	MHRN
ANCR	Micah House
B & L Resources for Children	Mount Carmel
Beyond Borders	Project Neechiwan
Canadian Red Cross CEO	Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.
Canadian Centre for Child Protection	New Directions
City of Winnipeg	North Point Douglas Women Centre
Connex	Northern Authority
DMSMCA	Public Health
Elizabeth Fry Society	RAY
FSCA	Rossbrook House
Family Services & Housing	Sage House
Gang Awareness for Parents	SERC
HLYS-HCMO	Social Justice Inter-Community Group
Justice	Southeast Family
Ka Ni Kanichihk	Southern Network
Klinic Community Health	Spence Neighbourhood Assoc.
Laurel Centre	StreetReach
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata	West Broadway
Macdonald Youth Services	West Central Women's Resource Centre
Manitoba Children's Advocate	West End Women
Manitoba Government	Winnipeg Police Service
Manitoba Coalition of Experiential Women	
Manitoba Status of Women	

**SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.SEYCOALITION.ORG/](http://www.seycoalition.org/membership.html)
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CCPA

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