

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

APRIL 2013

March 11 – 16 was “Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Awareness Week”.

If there is one thing I have to say about “Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week”, it’s “I wish more people could have been in attendance at the events to hear the speakers.” So much good information and insight shared and issues brought to light that require a public response if changes are going to be made. Amanda Johnson from CCS, did an excellent job of securing a dynamic line of speakers for the week.

Jassy Bindra, the RCMP in charge of the Human Trafficking portfolio was the first presenter. She shared the laws which determine “human trafficking” and the elements which must be present in order for a perpetrator to be charged. Merlyn Horton’s presentation had a turnout of about 100 people, which was the largest turnout of the week. Unfortunately I missed her presentation but heard it was very informative. Cherry Smiley shared some statistics on the violence and the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal woman and what her organization is doing to create awareness. The Aboriginal Women’s Action Network is advocating to have prostitution decriminalized . Trisha Bapti, shared her very moving story of how she became involved in prostitution. A tough home life caused her to be a very angry young lady and when she discovered that at the young age of 11 she could get drugs and money by giving her body, she thought she was “pretty cool”. Like a number of the stories we heard throughout the week, Trisha and many of the young women who are being sexually exploited don’t even recognize it as such, and many believe that their pimp is their “boyfriend”. Trisha explained to the audience that when you are embraced in the gangster, drug, prostitution lifestyle, that lifestyle becomes your “normal”. When someone tried to step in and offer her a way out, she actually became angry. It was the desire to have a better life for her children that led to her making the steps necessary to walk away from prostitution. During the question and discussion period that followed, Cherry and Trisha explained the “Nordic Model” which was adapted in Sweden as a way of eliminating prostitution. In this model, sex trade workers are viewed as victims in need of intervention, while those purchasing sex are charged as criminals. It has had much success and the model has been adopted by other countries. At this time BC is reviewing the laws around prostitution and efforts are being made to have the government adopt a similar law. Dianne Snowden from “Children of the Street Society” reiterated with her statistics and examples much of what had been said throughout the week. Drug addiction and sexual exploitation are directly linked. Many young girls are lured into prostitution by accepting “free”

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drugs from a so-called admirer. In the case of Dianne's daughter, the pot was laced with heroin and at 13 she quickly became addicted. Once addicted these girls are told they have a "drug debt" and they need to pay up fast. The way to make money fast of course is by selling their bodies and so the cycle begins.

For me the saddest thing to hear was story after story of how the young girls being exploited did not recognize that they were being used and abused. Because of the laws, if a perpetrator is to be charged, the victim must be willing to testify in court. Many victims are either too afraid or too ashamed to testify, and so the abuse continues.

We did have a group of students attend a couple of the events. I wish that more high school students would have been in attendance and next year I want to push for "Law", "Social Justice" etc. classes to attend. Young people need to be aware of how vulnerable they are to the predators looking to make an easy dollar. It was most disturbing that the week after 'Stop the Sexual Exploitation Week', I saw the trailer for the new movie "Spring Breakers".

Here is some of the write up on this new movie....

Four pretty girls in swimsuits doing wrong in an orgy of lust and violence: it's an all-American movie fantasy to cheer any Hollywood executive.

*In the hands of [Harmony Korine](#), the rebellious auteur behind the ground-breaking *Kids*, and featuring Disney starlets Selena Gomez, Vanessa Hudgens and Ashley Benson as well as James Franco, *Spring Breakers* promises to be one of the most unusual, challenging mainstream films of the season.*

Suggestive "slo-mo" shots of young women enjoying the eroticised rituals of one of America's student rites of passage – the riotous spring vacation – may suggest Korine is straying dangerously close to a teen exploitation movie. But then again, Korine's observation of spring break and its staples of sun, drinking, drugs and teenage hormones, could be one of the most daring films to make it into theatres in years.....

*But what of *Spring Breakers*? It is by most standards Korine's most mainstream work to date. The film, he says, was never meant to be an essay or an exposé. "It's an impressionistic reinterpretation of events. A pop poem. It's more interesting to me when they start flirting with the gangster culture – the beach noir – the drugs, the violence, with its rotting yachts in the backyard and the palm trees. "It's that culture of surfaces and the pathology that's the residue of it. The menace that's out there is really what I wanted to get into.*

Selena Gomez gets to go home and sleep in her own bed. So many young people in our own community are being trapped into a lifestyle they believe will bring independence and



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popularity. We need to continue to create awareness and promote self-respect and self-worth among our youth.

While Sexual Exploitation at first seems a “youth at risk” issue, it is also an “early years issue”. An addicted teen prostitute becomes the mom of an addicted baby and suddenly we have a new area of vulnerability. Many of the young people involved in prostitution have had some measure of trauma in their early childhood years.

As part of the preparation for the Annual Consultation I am a participant in all the working groups. This has been so helpful for me in gaining knowledge and information.

I have been asked by the Chilliwack Learning Community Society to prepare a training presentation on Early Year Vulnerability. I have also been asked by the Provincial Strong Start to prepare a presentation regarding barriers to those accessing Early Years Services for a workshop in May.

As the Child and Youth Coordinator I am becoming more aware of the fact that vulnerability finds its origins in trauma or vulnerability in the early years.