

**We Can Do Better:  
Helping Prostituted Women and Girls in Grand Rapids  
Make Healthy Choices**

**A Prostitution Round Table Report to the Community**



**The Nokomis Foundation  
New Voices Initiative  
March 2002**

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## The Nokomis Foundation

The Nokomis Foundation is a private foundation established in 1991. The mission of the foundation is to create a stronger voice for women and girls. The foundation carries out this mission by providing:

- Advocacy for the needs of women and girls
- Funding, expertise and resources for organizations serving women and girls
- Opportunities to convene groups around gender-based issues.

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*We Can Do Better*  
is dedicated to

*The memory of prostituted women and girls  
who have died at the hands of their exploiters.*

*The courage of the survivors —  
those who are still seeking a path out of exploitation  
and those who inspire us by the example  
of their hard-won triumphs  
against seemingly insurmountable challenges.*

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## Foreword: The New Voices Initiative and the Prostitution Round Table

Two years ago the Nokomis Foundation embarked on a new venture, the New Voices Initiative. New Voices is an effort to gain a better understanding of women and girls who are marginalized in our community — whose voices are usually unsolicited, unheard or ignored. Women and girls rendered invisible in our society today include those who are recent immigrants, prostituted, imprisoned, homeless, and/or struggling with poverty — to name just a few examples.

We believe it is important to understand what is happening in the lives of women and girls who have been relegated to the margins of our community. What are their strengths? What are their needs? What agencies and systems impact their lives — positively and negatively? What supports do they need to enable them to make positive choices for their lives?

By creating a stronger voice for marginalized women and girls, the New Voices initiative aims to achieve two interconnecting goals:

- To support the development of stronger organizational links, increased financial support, and a more effective community support system for women and girls, by sharing knowledge and information gained through the initiative with service providers, funders and other organizations in the community.
- To strengthen the Nokomis Foundation's grantmaking and program development by enhancing our knowledge of local women's issues and the agencies and programs serving women and girls.

The first project of the New Voices Initiative is the Prostitution Round Table, which aims to help women and girls involved in street prostitution in Grand Rapids make positive choices for their lives. Prostituted women and girls comprise a population which is nearly invisible in our community. We hear about them primarily through news coverage — when a prostituted woman is murdered, for example, or when police stings are carried out in response to neighborhood concerns.

We have few opportunities to see prostituted women as mothers, daughters, partners, friends — real people whose life circumstances have created vulnerability to exploitation. And we have few venues for examining whether and how our community could more effectively support their health and well-being.

Nokomis' work on this project has focused on facilitating a learning process designed to enable community organizations to more effectively address both the needs of prostituted women and girls and the issues surrounding prostitution. This process has involved a broad spectrum of community members in a collective learning process, with participants providing information and expertise, offering feedback, engaging in consensus-building, and instigating community change.

Although the Prostitution Round Table is a work in process, the project has already exceeded our expectations in several ways. We are heartened by the recognition that prostitution is a significant issue in our community, as evidenced by the fact that more than 35 community organizations are involved in the project. We have also been gratified by the level of commitment participating members have made to the issue.

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In addition to attending monthly meetings, PRT participants have read volumes of background materials, shared their insights and learning with others, and initiated the idea of going beyond the original commitment to a nine-month project. The most exciting impacts of the project are the changes in perspectives reported by PRT members, their willingness to apply this learning in their work, and the organizational/programmatic changes that are taking place throughout the community as a result.

### Sharing What We've Learned

*We Can Do Better* documents our learning. The report includes five sections:

- 1 **Reframing the Issue** presents a compelling case for moving from unexamined views of prostitution as “the world’s oldest profession” to a human rights perspective.
- 2 **What We've Done: The Learning Process** describes the Prostitution Round Table process — from formulating guiding principles to implementing the community learning venture.



- 3 **What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues** examines the scope of prostitution in Grand Rapids and the factors that contribute to vulnerability to exploitation through prostitution: poverty and homelessness, violence and its after-effects, and addictions. This section also provides insights into the roles that customers and pimps play in perpetuating the exploitation of prostituted women and girls, and explores the hidden costs of prostitution.
- 4 **Putting Learning to Work: Building a System of Support** offers ideas about solutions and future directions, including:
  - A model of a holistic system of support for women and girls who are being exploited through prostitution, as well as those who are at risk of such exploitation and prostitution survivors.
  - Critical success factors for programming addressing prostitution issues
  - Resources which are currently available locally and from other communities
  - Progress to date and priorities for the continuing work of the Prostitution Round Table.
- 5 **Afterword: The Convening Role** offers insights on approaches, challenges and strategies for those considering playing a convening role in addressing the needs and concerns of marginalized women and girls.

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## Foreword: The New Voices Initiative and the Prostitution Round Table

We also provide additional resources for those who may wish to learn more. [Recommendations for Reporting on Prostitution](#) offers pointers to help reporters produce more accurate and insightful coverage of prostitution issues. [Screening for Prostitution Experience](#) presents the key findings of an agency survey conducted by Grand Valley State University social work students. Finally, the [Resources](#) section lists articles, books, organizations and programs, reports, videos and web sites on prostitution – a sampling of resources that were helpful to the PRT or that have come to our attention in the course of the project.

The Prostitution Round Table has indeed been a learning venture — for the Nokomis Foundation and for dozens of individuals and organizations in Grand Rapids. The aim of *We Can Do Better* is to enable others to benefit from our experience:

- We hope it will help individuals move from unexamined and sometimes judgmental perspectives on prostituted women and girls to an awareness that prostitution is synonymous with exploitation — that the central issue is a human rights issue.
- We hope it will provide a tool for organizations and communities to address prostitution issues, both through increased understanding and by outlining directions, resources and promising programs and approaches.

Finally, we hope that our work helps bring women who have been marginalized into our community's circle of caring — and in doing so offers them a bright beacon of hope.

### [A Note about Sources](#)

Sources of information are indicated in parentheses in the text. For additional details about sources, see the alphabetical listing in the Sources Consulted section, pages 64–65.

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## Reframing the Issue

*“I’m the local standup comedian.  
I make it seem as if the f—— tricks  
don’t get to me.  
Like, me and the other girls  
are better than they are....*

*Sometimes I don’t feel like it,  
but it’s like I have a contract to  
be the local joker....  
I know it makes the other girls feel better  
to have a few good laughs about the tricks....*

*For me, it doesn’t work any more.  
I’m hurt but nobody knows because I’m always  
laughing and shit. Inside, I am crying.  
I am dying. I have no emotions left other than my  
smiling face mask.”*

*— Ava, a prostitution survivor  
(Sterk, p. 127)*



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## Reframing the Issue

As members of the Prostitution Round Table have explored the issue of prostitution, our responses to the subject have evolved. We began by examining the images and stereotypes that surround prostitution — the “glamour” depicted in Hollywood movies such as *Pretty Woman*; the prostitute depicted as a predator, a criminal, a vector of moral and physical disease; the prostitute as “loose woman,” fair game for slurs, snide comments, and all manner of jokes in polite society. Rarely is the subject of prostitution raised without someone proclaiming it “the world’s oldest profession.” As recently as July of this year, a *Grand Rapids Press* article about a local “sting” operation concluded, “police say they can’t eliminate ‘the world’s oldest profession.’” (“Day of ‘Fear’ Strikes Sex Trade,” p. A4).

In a presentation to the Prostitution Round Table, Claudine O’Leary, founder of the Young Women’s Empowerment Project in Chicago, urged us to consider the underlying message in that seemingly light-hearted cliché. When we call prostitution “the world’s oldest profession,” we are reinforcing a cultural message that goes something like this: *Boys will be boys. And there will always be loose women willing to service men’s sexual needs for pay. Prostitution has always been with us and, human nature being what it is, always will be. There’s little to be done about it.*

Questioning the inevitability of prostitution — and the notion that it is a harmless, “victimless crime” — has been central to our exploration of this issue. “Prostitution is not the world’s oldest profession... although it is probably one of the world’s oldest forms of men’s violence against women and girls,” according to Donna Hughes, former education and research coordinator of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Prostitution commodifies women and girls and markets their bodies...” (Hughes, p.2).

## The Harsh Realities of Prostitution

In fact, referring to prostitution as a “profession” — a career choice like any other — serves to normalize some of the most brutal violence against women in today’s world. As we’ve talked with survivors of prostitution, reviewed the research, and learned from people with expertise in prostitution-related issues, we have come to believe that, in light of the realities of prostitution, the ideas of “victimless crime” and of “choice” bear scrutiny.

For example, we have learned that the average age of entry into prostitution is between the ages of 14 and 18 and that among prostituted people:

- 95 to 99 percent have substance abuse addictions
- 90 percent are survivors of sexual violence such as incest and sexual assault — and typically this violence has been endured repeatedly
- 84 percent report current or past homelessness
- 66 percent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, “Since 50 to 90 percent of the women in homeless shelters are fleeing domestic violence, and 75 percent of homeless youth are fleeing physical abuse at home, many have few alternatives and are at risk of being entrapped in prostitution.” In such circumstances, individual choices are clearly severely limited (Schoot and Goswami, p. 1).

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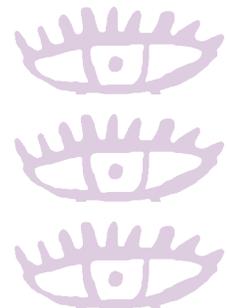
Regardless of the circumstances that lead girls and women into prostitution, the experience of being prostituted continues to narrow the options, severely limiting the individual's ability to make healthy choices. Melissa Farley, a leading researcher on prostitution issues and founder of Prostitution Research and Education in San Francisco, suggests that domestic violence serves as a useful paradigm for understanding prostitution.

Both groups of women may experience battering, isolation, abandonment, and/or emotional degradation — a cycle of violence through which women become so beaten down that breaking out is nearly impossible. Like the woman subjected to domestic violence, a prostituted woman may bond emotionally with the oppressor (e.g., her boyfriend/pimp), a psychological survival strategy similar to the Stockholm syndrome. In both cases, it is not unusual for a woman to be convinced that her situation is not all that bad — simply in order to endure her life.

Despite the barriers, if a prostituted woman should seek to make healthy choices in her life, what does she face? "Women in prostitution are further burdened with a stigmatized identity that is impossible to escape, unless their pasts are kept a secret," says Donna Hughes (Hughes, p.3). The prostituted woman typically has no resources, few employable skills, a criminal record, low self-esteem — and the deep disdain of her neighbors. A Grand Rapids woman who runs a transitional housing program for women recovering from addictions, many of whom are prostitution survivors, describes her clients:

*"Many of these young women have been given drugs and alcohol as children, as young women, to lure them into prostitution. They're angry, silent, feel they can't be forgiven — they can't forgive themselves. They don't call the rape crisis line or the domestic violence shelter — they don't think they'll be believed. They think those services aren't for them. They don't even call what has been done to them "rape" or "domestic violence." It's just the reality of their lives (Martin, 2000)."*

For these reasons, the Prostitution Round Table has come to see prostituted women and girls as victims and survivors. "I was called a predator and a criminal," Norma Hotaling says of her eight years in prostitution. "But nobody ever called me what I was — a victim" (Relin, p. 15). Now the executive director of Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), an award-winning San Francisco organization that provides comprehensive services to prostituted women and girls, Hotaling describes prostituted women and girls as among society's "untreated victims."



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# Reframing the Issue

## A Human Rights Issue

Rather than framing prostitution as a criminal, health or moral threat to our community, the Prostitution Round Table has come to conceive of it as a human rights issue. We see prostitution as a system that consistently violates universally recognized human rights. As Donna Hughes puts it, “If women and girls are to live in this world with dignity and equality, their bodies and emotions must belong to them alone. They cannot be commodities to be bought and sold” (Hughes, p. 7).

Learning the realities of prostitution has influenced how we talk about it. For example, we choose to refer to women and girls as “prostituted” by their customers and pimps. Calling the women “prostitutes” fails to hold the customers/pimps accountable while at the same time tends to label the victims, defining them in terms of just one aspect of their lives. “Don’t call me a prostitute!” cried one Grand Rapids woman who asked to speak to the Prostitution Round Table after her friend, Julene Walker, was found murdered on a city street. “I’m a daughter, a mother, and a friend.” At Walker’s memorial service at Heartside Ministry in Grand Rapids, her family members and friends expressed their pain and anger at hearing the meaning of their loved one’s life reduced to one word in the local media: “prostitute”.

In light of what we have come to know, we also hesitate to describe the path out of prostitution as a “recovery” of one’s life, for, as Hotaling points out, many “untreated victims” of prostitution have never had the opportunity to shape healthy lives in the first place.

At times, these painful realities have seemed overwhelming to members of the PRT, as the notes from our meetings will attest. In the last two years, we have progressed from the views commonly held about prostitution to a sobering vision of its realities. And, in the end, we have been inspired by the strength and courage of the prostitution survivors that we have met and the innovative approaches to providing alternatives that many of them have developed in communities throughout the world.

We have explored ways to open windows of opportunity to prostituted women and girls; to reduce demand by addressing “customer” issues and holding people who profit from prostitution accountable; and to address root causes that lead to the prostitution of women and girls in our community. We are encouraged by the quality of resources and expertise in issues surrounding prostitution that exist — in other communities and in Grand Rapids. We have much to do, and much on which to build.

We believe that understanding prostitution as a human rights issue is an essential first step to responding effectively. It establishes a consistent and humane framework for effective action, based on a belief in the innate dignity of every human being and the right of every individual to the full expression of her life, gifts and dreams. And it places prostituted women and girls — and the people and organizations who serve them — in the context of human rights movements throughout the world... out of the margins and into the center of some of the most vital work being done today.



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## What We've Done: The Learning Process

### Setting the Direction

The initial work on the Prostitution Round Table project involved a scan of the current situation. The scan included a review of background literature; preliminary research on local, state and national programs, initiatives and studies; and interviews with local sources including women with experience in prostitution and representatives from social service agencies, neighborhood associations, and the Grand Rapids Police Department.

The scan yielded critical insights, helping to define the scope, strategy, goals and principles for the project. We learned that prostitution is a complex issue — in terms of causes and contributing factors, the nature of the forces that thwart prostituted women from making healthy choices and seeking alternatives, and prostitution's effects on the women involved and the surrounding community. Further complicating matters is the wide variety of venues for prostitution, ranging from the street corner to bars and strip clubs, escort services and brothels, and exclusive hotels.

We learned also that in Grand Rapids there is limited awareness, knowledge or understanding of the realities of life for women and girls working in prostitution. Stereotypes about prostituted women are widespread and deeply entrenched. These factors contribute to a general discomfort that is sometimes manifested in insensitive jokes, avoidance of discussing the topic of prostitution, and/or a sense of hopelessness about the potential for positive change in the lives of people impacted by prostitution.

We decided early on to focus our work on street prostitution. Street prostitution is the most visible form in our community, the first venue many people think of when asked about the issue. In addition, most women working in street prostitution have experienced multiple rapes and violence by their customers, pimps/boyfriends and strangers. They are constantly exposed to the elements, and often homeless. Clearly, all prostitution is high-risk, but women and girls in street prostitution face some of the greatest danger.

Our early insights also suggested a strategy: focus on raising awareness of the issues surrounding prostitution through a community learning process. The project would provide a forum for a broad spectrum of community members to meet regularly, learn about and discuss the issues surrounding prostitution, and explore ways of addressing them. The idea was that these individuals would serve as a leadership group on the issue, sharing what they learned with their co-workers and others throughout the community.



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## What We've Done: The Learning Process

Finally, the initial findings provided the basis for defining the project goal: to help women and girls in street prostitution make healthy choices in their lives. Three underlying principles were identified:

### Focus on the needs and concerns of prostituted women and girls.

- Include the voices of current and former prostitutes, respecting their knowledge, experience, and choices.
- Explore a range of responses, including public education, harm reduction, and alternatives/exit support.
- Listen, learn, and take action in a non-judgmental way.

### Adopt a holistic, asset-based mindset.

- Focus on strengths and opportunities.
- View women and girls working in prostitution holistically.
- Take a systems perspective.

### Use a community learning approach.

- Avoid unexamined assumptions and stereotyping.
- Build on existing research and knowledge.
- Generate new knowledge, forge a shared sense of the issue, and build consensus through collective learning and the exchange of divergent views.
- Use experimentation and learning from experience to direct action.

## Convening the Prostitution Round Table

In the spring of 2000, we began recruiting members of the community to be involved in a nine-month community learning venture. The recruitment efforts yielded surprising and encouraging results: an overwhelmingly positive response to the opportunity to participate in the project. Nearly everyone who was contacted immediately agreed to be involved. Some indicated that while prostitution was not a topic to which they had previously given much thought, they felt the project offered considerable potential. Others expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to address an issue which had been of longstanding concern to them but which they lacked resources to address.

During an 18-month period beginning in June 2000, the Prostitution Round Table group met 13 times. As the project progressed, additional participants joined the group. More than 70 people, representing more than 35 local organizations, have participated in PRT meetings, with a core of 20 to 30 present at most meetings. (See Acknowledgements, pages 4–5, for a list of participants.)



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PRT meetings have focused on increasing participants' awareness and understanding of:

- The realities of the lives of prostituted women and girls
- Participants' own perceptions and stereotypes about prostitution
- Prostitution in Grand Rapids, including the roles of the criminal justice system, the legal system, and service providers
- Connections between prostitution and childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse, domestic violence, and post traumatic stress disorder
- Men who buy sex and profit from prostitution and approaches to reducing the demand for prostitution
- Approaches to providing support for prostituted women and girls, locally and in other communities
- Adolescent prostitution
- Ways to influence public perceptions about prostitution.

As the project proceeded, we were encouraged to find that, although there are few Grand Rapids organizations focusing specifically on prostitution, there is considerable local expertise on prostitution-related issues, ranging from the impact of childhood trauma to addictions. For 12 of the 13 meetings, all presenters were from local organizations, such as the police department, court probation units, and substance abuse recovery, domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, and transitional housing programs.

In the spring of 2001, the Prostitution Round Table hosted a presentation by Claudine O'Leary, founder of the Young Women's Empowerment Project, a Chicago organization that provides prevention education and outreach services for young women involved in prostitution or at risk of being exploited through prostitution. Claudine presented an overview of international and national trends in the prostitution industry, challenges to those attempting to address prostitution issues, and key themes in prostitution prevention and alternatives programming. She also shared powerful insights into working with young women at risk for exploitation, based on her experience as a survivor of adolescent prostitution and her work with adolescent girls in Chicago.

In addition to the meeting presentations and discussions, the PRT participants were provided with extensive reading materials gleaned from Internet sites, books, professional journals and other sources. Detailed documentation of each meeting helped to reinforce learnings from the various presentations and provided information for those unable to attend.

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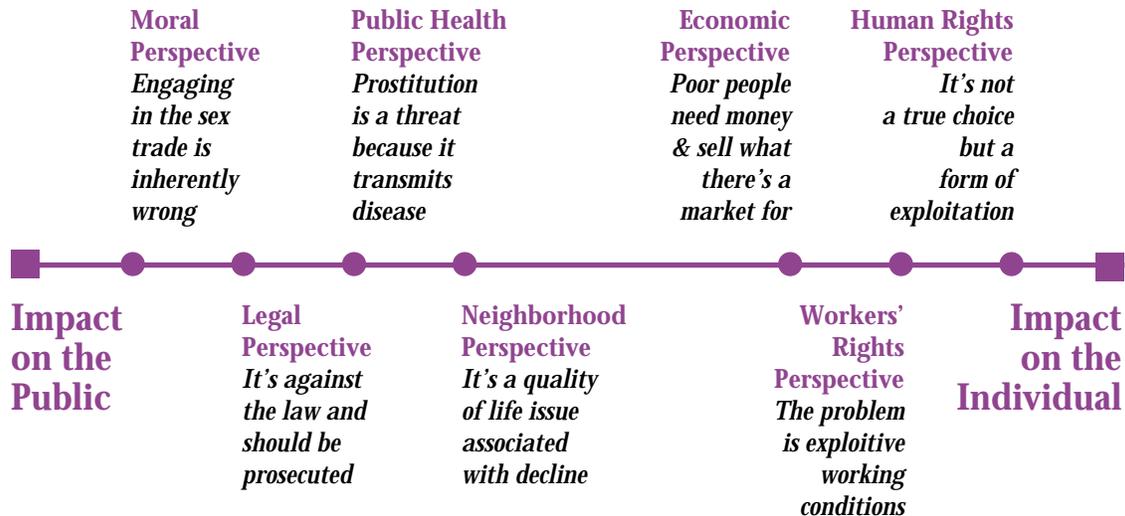
# What We've Done: The Learning Process

## Recognizing Varying Approaches to and Perspectives on Prostitution

Our initial scan of prostitution resources also yielded a very helpful tool for sorting through the sometimes confusing array of approaches to and perspectives on prostitution that are commonly expressed. In 2000, the city of Jacksonville, FL commissioned a study of prostitution in their community and published its findings in the *Sex Trade Report* (Jacksonville Community Council, Inc., 2000).

The *Sex Trade Report* identifies two approaches to understanding prostitution: one tends to focus on the impact of prostitution on the public; the other emphasizes the effects on the individual. Varying perspectives on the issue tend to fall along a continuum from the impact-on-the-public approach to the impact-on-the-individual approach. Each approach and perspective leads to different expectations about what problems need to be solved and the types of solutions needed.

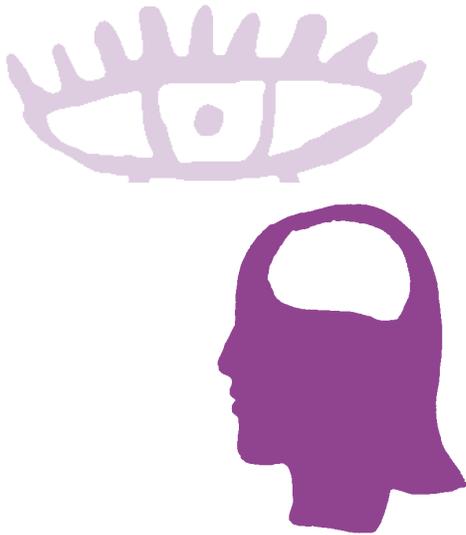
## Understanding the Sex Trade: Approaches and Perspectives



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The **impact-on-the-public** approach focuses on the impact prostitution-related activities have on community morals, public order, and the health and well-being of the overall society. Responses to the public impacts of prostitution may include laws, regulations, and punishments for those who do not comply.

The **impact-on-the-individual** approach focuses on the prostituted women, men and children and those around them. Strategies to address prostitution as an individual issue may include outreach and counseling, alternatives, vocational assistance, as well as programs aimed at addressing root causes.



For the most part, community dialogue about the prostitution industry takes an **impact-on-the-public** approach:

- From a **moral perspective**, communities tend to discuss prostituted women as “fallen women” whose behavior is deviant and corrupting, tempting youth and men from the “right path”.
- From a **legal perspective**, communities focus on the importance of the rule of law: whether or not prostitution is immoral, it’s against the law and therefore violators should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
- From a **public health perspective**, communities traditionally concern themselves with the role of prostitution in transmitting communicable disease. However, as communities have begun to identify violence as a key public health issue, the public health perspective has started to shift to an **impact-on-the-individual** approach — focusing on the prevalence of violence in the prostitution industry and its impact on those prostituted.
- From a **neighborhood perspective**, communities identify the impact the prostitution industry has on the quality of life in areas where it is prevalent. The presence of pimps, customers and prostituted women in an area, according to this perspective, tends to attract other crime and violence, negatively impact businesses, and create an unsafe and unhealthy environment for children and families.

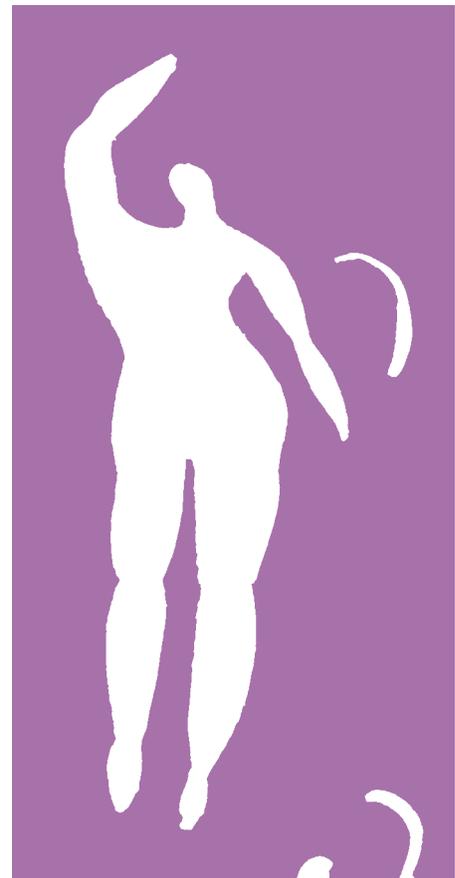
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## What We've Done: The Learning Process

The **impact-on-the-individual** approach is also sometimes included in the public dialogue about the prostitution industry:

- From an **economic perspective**, prostitution is seen to operate much like any other business. There's a market for sexual services: the demand from customers is met through a prostitution supply system involving pimps and prostitutes. This perspective sometimes leads to describing the prostitution industry as the "sex trade" and prostituted women as "sex workers." The problem with prostitution, from an economic perspective, is that people engaging in prostitution are typically poor, with few opportunities for other forms of employment.
- The **workers' rights perspective** also sees prostitution as an economic endeavor, but views participation in the sex trade as a free-will choice that should be respected by the rest of society. From this perspective, the problem is not sex work *per se* but the unsafe, unsanitary, unhealthful working conditions that many sex workers are forced to endure. Solutions may include sex trade legalization and regulation, as well as the right of sex workers to bargain collectively with employers.
- The victimization perspective — what we've chosen to call a **human rights perspective** — looks at the complex social issues related to prostitution that limit an individual's ability to make free-will choices. In the face of homelessness and poverty, violence and abuse, substance abuse, and other health and psycho-social issues surrounding prostitution, prostituted women and girls are denied basic human rights. This perspective calls for long-term responses ranging from working to change unjust systems to strengthening outreach, treatment, and prevention services that provide alternatives for prostituted women and girls.

The impact-on-the-public/individual continuum has helped the Prostitution Round Table sort through the widely varying perspectives we have encountered as we seek to understand better the issues of women and girls engaged in street prostitution in Grand Rapids. Often, several of these perspectives are represented in an article, research report, or local response; the approaches and perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive.



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For example, in Operation FEDUP (Focused Enforcement Directed at Uprooting Prostitution), a collaborative initiative begun in 1999 to reduce the prevalence of street prostitution along South Division Avenue in Grand Rapids:

- Neighborhood associations and business alliances called for increased law enforcement because of the negative impact prostitution activity was perceived to be having on their quality of life. Parents reported that their daughters had been solicited by customers seeking sexual services and businesses complained that the visible presence of street prostitutes in the area discouraged their customers from coming into their stores, all reflecting a combination of moral, legal and neighborhood perspectives of the impact-on-the-public approach.
  - Neighborhood activists also indicated the need to target the “demand side” — customers — as well as prostituted people, reflecting the economic perspective of the impact-on-the-individual approach.
  - Local outreach workers and service providers advocated for strategies that address root causes of street prostitution, ranging from more aggressive law enforcement directed toward customers and pimps to more community-based support for prostituted men, women, and children, reflecting the human rights perspective of the impact-on-the-individual approach.
- Partially as a result of the broad-based dialogue that occurred during Operation FEDUP planning:
    - The Grand Rapids Police Department’s response — several “sting” operations and long-term increased enforcement of prostitution laws along Division Avenue — targeted customers far more frequently than in past enforcement. In fact, as of July 2001, of the 692 arrests made under Operation FEDUP, 222 — nearly 33 percent — were customers (“Day of ‘Fear’ Strikes Sex Trade”). This is a marked contrast to the national statistics showing that an average of 10 percent of prostitution arrests are of customers (Alexander, p.205).
    - Acknowledging the complexity of issues surrounding prostitution, police and neighborhood activists have formed closer ties with outreach workers and service providers in seeking long-term ways to address the root causes of prostitution and offer alternatives.

From its inception, the Prostitution Round Table has taken an impact-on-the-individual approach: the defining vision of the group is “to help women and girls working in street prostitution in Grand Rapids make positive choices for their lives.” As a part of the Nokomis Foundation’s New Voices Initiative, the Prostitution Round Table recognizes that prostituted women and girls are among the most marginalized and silenced in our community; their perspective and their voices are rarely heard in the community’s dialogue about prostitution issues.

As we point out in “Reframing the Issue,” learning more about the issues surrounding prostitution led the Prostitution Round Table to adopt a human rights perspective. We recognize the validity of other perspectives — for example, who can argue with parents wanting to protect their children from being solicited on the way home from school? Yet, for the Prostitution Round Table, the most compelling concern remains the denial of basic human rights of the people exploited through prostitution.



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# What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

## Prostitution in Grand Rapids

### Scope

While no one knows for sure the exact scope of street prostitution in Grand Rapids, we can say with some certainty that hundreds of women are involved. In Grand Rapids, as in most communities, the kinds of research, statistics and record keeping required to provide a complete and accurate assessment of the scope of prostitution are not yet available.

For example, a preliminary survey of 50 local organizations that provide prostitution-related services (e.g., substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, sexual assault services, etc.) revealed that very few screen for prostitution experience in their client assessments, nor does the issue of prostitution typically arise in the provision of treatment and services (For a summary of the survey, see “Screening for Prostitution Experience: Key Findings of GVSU Agency Survey,” p. 69).

Law enforcement information offers what little data is available, providing a limited perspective on the scope of street prostitution activities. Outreach workers, service providers, and women with experience in prostitution can provide additional information. And recent research on the prevalence of prostitution in Chicago suggests another promising approach for gaining a more realistic picture.



### Law Enforcement Information

Law enforcement information — prostitution arrests, convictions, numbers on probation, etc. — simply represents the people who get caught. Prostitution arrests tend to be costly and time-consuming; consequently, enforcement of prostitution laws often concentrates on areas of highest visibility, usually in response to community complaints. Some researchers suggest law enforcement data therefore reflect primarily the most desperate or the most exposed prostituted women, many of whom cycle through the system repeatedly.

Law enforcement officials and researchers caution that law enforcement data significantly under-represents the actual number of women involved in prostitution and the scope of the activity in a community. In addition to counting only the segment of prostituted women who are most vulnerable to arrest, the data do not take into account the significant numbers of women who may be arrested on other charges — typically retail fraud, loitering or drug-related charges — that are often used when prostitution is suspected but sufficient evidence is lacking to bring prostitution charges.

According to local law enforcement information:

- In the last two years, the Grand Rapids Police Department's Operation FEDUP (Focused Enforcement Directed at Uprooting Prostitution) has resulted in 470 arrests of women for involvement in street prostitution (“Day of ‘Fear’ Strikes Sex Trade”). These figures may include multiple arrests of the same women.
- GRPD community police officers and vice officers report that they are aware of approximately 70 females (both minors and adults) who regularly engage in street prostitution in Grand Rapids (City of Grand Rapids, MI).
- At any given time, there are typically 40 to 50 women on probation for prostitution convictions in the Grand Rapids area (Sikkema, 2000).

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

### Information from Community Organizations

Grand Rapids outreach workers, service providers, and other community organizations provide additional insights into the scope — and invisibility — of prostitution-related activities in Grand Rapids. For example:

- A health educator working with women in detention and treatment programs reported that the women did not usually volunteer information about their experience in prostitution. Yet, when she started asking specifically about prostitution — just as she raises questions about sexual abuse and rape history — many women acknowledged such experience.
- When representatives of the PRT asked women randomly in local substance abuse treatment programs if any of them with prostitution experience would be willing to discuss their experience with us, some women always came forward. In informal conversations, these women often indicated surprise that anyone would be interested in hearing about their prostitution experience and confirmed that, typically, few service providers ask about such experience.
- In 1999, Rose Haven, a local organization providing outreach and residential services to women in prostitution, reported serving 403 women.
- The Garfield Park Neighborhood Association tracked prostitution-related activities in the Burton Heights area beginning in February 1999. In the first sixteen months, they identified approximately 270 women who were engaged in prostitution in that area, based on records of police field interrogations and arrests.

### Drugs and Prostitution

A recent study of the prevalence of prostitution in Chicago suggests that another indicator of the number of women and girls involved in prostitution is participation in substance abuse treatment programs. A survey of publicly-funded treatment providers there revealed that 60 to 100 percent of female clients self-disclose having regularly exchanged sex for drugs or money. Based on these findings, the study found that an estimated 16,000 women and girls are involved in prostitution activities in the Chicago metropolitan area during any given year — *more than four times the estimate based on detailed reports from law enforcement officials, service providers and community groups*. The researchers pointed out that even the 16,000 figure is a very conservative estimate, since only a small percentage of women and girls with drug addictions are able to access treatment programs (O'Leary and Howard, pp. 1–2, 30–31).

Anecdotal information gained by the Prostitution Round Table tends to corroborate this approach. Law enforcement officials and outreach workers here confirm that, since the influx of crack cocaine in the Grand Rapids area in the 1980s, there's been a significant increase in trading sex for drugs. In informal conversations with groups of women in treatment facilities, a number of them confirmed that they had traded sex for drugs or otherwise been involved in prostitution and that substance abuse and exchanging sex for money or drugs often go hand in hand.

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## Characteristics of Street Prostitution in Grand Rapids

The street prostitution scene in Grand Rapids — as in other communities throughout the United States — has changed dramatically with the influx of crack cocaine in the 1980s, according to local law enforcement officials, outreach workers, and women with street prostitution experience. Fifteen years ago, the population of women involved was fairly stable; in fact, vice officers report that they used to be able to develop long-term informant relationships with prostituted women, helping police to build drug or other cases. Although periodically prostitution rings from Ohio, Detroit and Chicago would move into town, they generally moved on when local enforcement was increased.

With crack cocaine came a more disorganized scene. Police report a more transient population of women involved — more prostituted women are arrested once or twice, then disappear. Women are less likely to be associated with pimps, tend to be more desperate, and appear to have more health issues. Drug houses near areas of high concentration of street prostitution play a far more important role in the prostitution business as women with crack cocaine addictions increasingly trade sex for drugs. In fact, both police and prostituted women often say that “crack is the pimp.”



The most highly visible concentration of street prostitution in Grand Rapids is on Division Avenue from Fulton to 28th Street. Typically, the more desperate women — including those with crack cocaine and heroin addictions — concentrate closer to downtown, while out-of-town women and those able to demand higher rates tend to cluster south of Burton Street. With two years of increased enforcement against both prostituted women and customers along Division, police and neighborhood groups have noticed an increase in street prostitution in nearby areas: along Grandville and Madison Avenues, and in the Alger/Eastern and Wealthy/Jefferson areas in Grand Rapids; along Division south of 28th Street as well as in 28th Street motels near Division in the city of Wyoming.

Much of the prostitution activity occurs in cars along side streets, vacant lots and parking lots within a block or two of the main corridor. Some also occurs in nearby houses or hotels. Customers cruise the area, typically circling the block several times before making contact with a woman. Out-of-town customers can obtain detailed information about the South Division scene — including tips about which cab company to use and reports on police activity — through Internet web sites.

Women with experience in street prostitution in Grand Rapids, as well as local outreach workers and service providers, corroborate national research that indicates extremely high correlations between street prostitution and substance abuse, a history of child sexual abuse and domestic violence, and many other forms of violence, including repeated rape, kidnapping, and physical and emotional abuse. As one local outreach worker says, “Street prostitution is a life of exploitation, a retelling of the story of abuse over and over again.”

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*“Too often, society blames victims of domestic violence for not leaving, rather than holding the abusers responsible. The reality is that financial dependency, concern for the children and the fear of being pursued or even killed can make the idea of escape seem impossible.”*

— Public service ad for  
the National Domestic  
Violence Hotline

### Underlying Issues

Why do women become involved in prostitution? And why don't they leave prostitution? These are questions that are often asked in discussions about prostituted women. They are similar to questions frequently asked in conversations about domestic violence, such as “Why do women remain in abusive relationships?” With increasing awareness of the issues underlying domestic violence, we've learned that there are more helpful questions — including those that address the importance of holding abusers responsible.

Similarly, through the work of the Prostitution Round Table, we've learned the importance of reframing the issues surrounding prostitution, to hold those who exploit women and girls responsible and to ask a critical question: What makes women and girls vulnerable to exploitation through prostitution?

Three broad categories of issues contribute to this vulnerability to exploitation:

- Poverty and homelessness
- Violence and its after-effects
- Addictions/substance abuse

As we examine these forces we need to keep in mind two important things:

- These forces contribute to women and girls' vulnerability to being prostituted *and* complicate their efforts to make healthy choices, serving as barriers to escaping systems of prostitution.
- There is rarely one cause or one issue that is determinative. Women's lives involve a complex interplay of these issues with the prostitution experience.

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*“I was a welfare mom with three kids. I have a seventh grade education. I had no job skills. It felt like a giant ax was going to come crashing down on my life with all the talk about welfare reform. There was no way I could pull together the skills I needed to support my kids in five years. Phone sex isn’t really all that bad and I make a lot more money doing this than I ever made on welfare.”*

— Maggie, a prostitution survivor (Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, p.1).

## **Poverty and Homelessness**

Poverty greatly increases vulnerability to exploitation through prostitution. In fact, prostitution is sometimes referred to as “survival sex” — a means to survival for women and girls who have limited education, few employment skills, and other barriers to the kinds of employment needed to meet basic needs. For women and girls in desperate situations, trading sex for something — money, food, shelter, drugs — often appears to be their only recourse.

With poverty often comes homelessness, and even more vulnerability. For example, a Grand Rapids street outreach worker reports seeing women out on Division Avenue, on cold winter nights, asking men to take them home with them. At bus stations here and around the country, teenage girls can be seen being “befriended” by older men. In interviews with 21 prostituted women in England, researcher Joanna Phoenix found that the women’s housing difficulties were “profound.” “It would be difficult to overstate the extent to which housing problems had contributed to the circumscription of future opportunities and options for the women,” she concludes, “or to overemphasize the connections between housing difficulties and the women’s engagement in prostitution” (Phoenix, p. 89).

Advocates and service providers are becoming increasingly aware of the connection between homelessness and prostitution, according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. During the winter and spring of 2001, the coalition published a policy paper and sponsored a conference, both entitled, “Prostitution: A Violent Reality of Homelessness.”

As the Coalition points out, if we define homelessness as lacking a safe, affordable place of one’s own, almost all prostituted people are homeless. Shelter provided by an abusive partner, pimp or customer is clearly not a true home — a safe place of one’s own. The Coalition believes that nearly all of the 50,000 people who are prostituted in the city of Chicago at any given time are homeless (Schoot and Goswami, p.1). This contention is borne out by a San Francisco study reporting that 84 per cent of those prostituted report current or past homelessness (Farley and Barkan, p. 40).

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*"I came home from school one day. My mom and her boyfriend had moved. They didn't even leave me a note telling me where to meet them or anything. I slept in the garage for two weeks and then my girlfriend showed me how to make some money."*

— Kirsten, a prostitution survivor (Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, p.1).

The connection between homelessness and prostitution is perhaps most strongly evidenced with youth. Statistics from a variety of sources paint an alarming picture:

- Many youth are approached for sex within 36 to 48 hours of being on the street (Minnesota Attorney General's Office, Introduction, p. 7).
- Among teens on the street, one in three will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home (National Runaway Switchboard).
- Homelessness lasting longer than 30 days has been identified as the single most determinative factor in juvenile involvement in prostitution (Minnesota Attorney General's Office, Introduction, p. 7).
- Among prostituted women, the average age for the first act of prostitution is 14 to 19 years (Weisberg, p.86 and O'Leary, May 31, 2001). Recent studies indicate the age for entering into prostitution is dropping to 13 and younger (Klain, pp.v, 51-60).

Recent news coverage in Grand Rapids bears unfortunate witness to these statistics. Two sisters, 14 and 15 years old, ran away from home in Nebraska. Within days, they were taken in by adults who recruited them into prostitution and brought them to Grand Rapids. These same adults allegedly told law enforcement officials that they were "teaching" other youths to be prostitutes ("Woman Planned to 'Teach Us' to be Prostitutes, Teen Testifies," p. A1).

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*“In 1994, women in the sex industry were identified as one of three populations most in need of specialized services, primarily as a result of the violence inflicted upon them as a result of their work.”*

— Domestic Violence  
Community Advocacy  
Program Expansion  
(City of Seattle, WA)

## **Violence and Its After-Effects**

An unrelenting cycle of violence — physical, emotional, psychological, sexual — is typical in the lives of many prostituted women and girls. The impact of this violence should not be underestimated.

Prostituted women and girls report frequent experiences of assault, beatings, rape, and kidnapping. The role of violence in their lives has been documented in a variety of studies. For example, a 1994–95 study of 130 people working as prostitutes in San Francisco indicated that:

- 82% had been physically assaulted
- 83% had been threatened with a weapon
- 68% had been raped while working as a prostitute (Farley and Barkan, p.40).

Most prostituted women report repeated exposure to violence; for example, 48 percent of the people in the San Francisco study who reported being raped while working as a prostitute indicated they had been raped more than five times. Seventy-eight percent of the women who sought help from Portland, Oregon’s Council for Prostitution Alternatives in 1991 reported being raped an average of 16 times a year by pimps and 33 times a year by customers (Hunter, 1991).

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*"I turned my first date when I was fifteen years old. My father had been molesting me for years, threatening me. I wanted out. Hooking was very liberating. I had control over my life for the first time. It was great!"*

— Erica, a prostitution survivor (Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, p.1).

### **Childhood Abuse**

For many prostituted women and girls, the cycle of violence began during childhood. Numerous U.S. studies indicate that 46 to 65 percent of women engaged in prostitution were sexually abused by an adult during childhood (Westerlund, p.13). Other sources, including anecdotal reports and interviews with people working with prostituted women, indicate that as many as 80 to 85 percent of prostituted women may have experienced incest and childhood sexual assault (Farley and Kelly, p. 41). Local practitioners working with women in prostitution recovery report even higher figures, in the 90 percent range.

It's important to keep in mind that research has not indicated that incest leads to prostitution. No direct causal connection has been established and clearly, most incest survivors are not involved in prostitution. However, incest can increase vulnerability to exploitation through prostitution as a result of:

- Victims internalizing a message that their primary value is their ability to provide sexual services to others.
- Girls resorting to running away from home, which can lead to exploitation by older men.

Research on the impact of childhood sexual abuse sheds further light on vulnerability issues.

- If victims are not believed, the severity of the trauma may be heightened, with the child blaming herself, feeling responsible for the consequences, etc.
- Victims of such abuse may suffer from feelings of guilt, shame, and self-contempt. This can lead to self-destructive behavior ranging from suicide attempts to an inclination toward risk-taking and thrill-seeking, "living on the edge" — behavior which trauma researchers sometimes describe as "reenactments" of the abuse that provide temporary relief from pent-up anxiety, stress and depression.
- Feelings of powerlessness resulting from abuse can lead to attempts to regain a sense of control by initiating sexual encounters.

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*“I was married, had a little girl. My husband would always leave money on my pillow after we had sex. When his violence became too intolerable and I decided to leave, I had no job skills, no education, what was I supposed to do?”*

— Kathy, a prostitution survivor (Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, p. 1).

### **Domestic Violence**

Prostituted women and girls also find themselves caught in cycles of relationship violence. The correlation between domestic violence and vulnerability to prostitution manifests itself in several ways.

- For women with few resources and skills with which to meet family needs, leaving abusive situations can lead to homelessness. Indeed, the main causes of women’s homelessness in general are physical abuse and marital breakdown. For prostituted women and girls, the primary cause of their housing insecurity tends to be violence and abuse rather than relationship breakdowns (Phoenix, p. 89).
- Relationships with boyfriends/pimps often exhibit similar characteristics as those found in domestic violence situations: women are humiliated and abused; isolated from support systems; threatened with harm to themselves, their children, or other family members if they tell of the abuse or if they attempt to leave; denied access to money and resources. In both situations, women may minimize and/or deny their abuse as a survival strategy.

Recognizing the connections between domestic violence and prostitution, many prostitution recovery programs provide training for staff members on domestic violence issues, participate in domestic violence coalitions, and receive funding from domestic violence funding sources, such as grants available through the federal Violence Against Women Act.

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*“All people care about is the spread of HIV and STDs to the ‘nice’ people in town. Where do they think prostitutes get the diseases in the first place?”*

— Prostitution survivor  
in Grand Rapids, MI

### **Long-Term Health Effects**

Prostituted women and girls are certainly at risk for acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Intravenous drug use, exposure to sexual assault, multiple sexual partners, and the inability to control decisions about condom use with customers and pimps all contribute to their vulnerability. Yet, researchers and women such as the one quoted here point out that the popular portrayal of prostituted women as “public health risks” creates damaging misconceptions, stereotyping prostituted women as little more than vectors of disease.

“In spite of extensive documentation that HIV is overwhelmingly transmitted via male-to-female vaginal and anal intercourse, not vice versa, one of the misogynist myths about prostitution is that she is the vector of disease, that she is ultimately the source of contamination of the ‘good wife’ through the husband’s weak moment.” This is the conclusion of Melissa Farley and Vanessa Kelly based on a review of the treatment of prostitution issues in medical and social sciences journals in the 1980s and 1990s. The authors go on to point out that, in 1999, the World Health Organization noted that women’s primary risk factor for HIV is violence (Farley and Kelly, pp. 32–33).

With so much focus on the spread of HIV, little attention — in medical and social science research and in practice — has been given to prostituted women’s overall health issues and their lack of access to health care. In addition to the array of health problems associated with poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse, women in street prostitution endure the health effects of regular exposure to the elements — extremes of cold, snow, rain, and heat. And, they suffer acute effects of physical and sexual assaults.

The limited research that exists indicates that prostituted women have an increased risk of abnormal pap smears, cervical cancer, cervical dysplasia, and chronic hepatitis. In a survey of adolescent girls and boys in prostitution, the young people reported multiple health problems, including STDs, hepatitis, pregnancies, sore throats, flu, and repeated suicide attempts. In 1985, the Canadian Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution found that the death rate of those in prostitution was 40 times higher than that of the general population (Farley and Kelly, p. 48).

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*“Essentially, we need to view prostitution itself as a traumatic stressor.”*

— Melissa Farley  
(Zuger, p. 1)

The impact of violence on the lives of prostituted women and girls is affirmed by the results of a study directed by noted prostitution researcher Melissa Farley. The 1998 study found that post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) appears to be more common among prostituted women than among combat veterans.

Researchers who interviewed nearly 500 prostituted women around the world found that two-thirds suffer from post traumatic stress disorder — a condition found in 20 to 30 percent of Vietnam War veterans and in less than five percent of the general population. In addition, the prostituted women in the study averaged a more severe form of PTSD than Vietnam veterans seeking treatment for the condition.

The frequency of PTSD among prostituted women appeared to be unrelated to their nationality, gender, or whether they worked on the street or in expensive brothels. The study subjects ranged in age from 12 to 61; they worked in the street or in brothels in San Francisco and six large cities in Europe, Asia and Africa. The vast majority of the prostituted women in the study reported having sustained recurrent physical or sexual assaults while working.

The findings of Farley’s study echo other studies which have shown similarly high frequencies of PTSD among other disadvantaged groups of women, including pregnant drug users, and homeless and battered women (Zuger, pp. 1–2).

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*"I left my body. Very seldom was I ever there. I had a good technique for leaving. I knew where I was at, I mean I knew what they were doing, but it was like I have no feeling ... it was my survival. That was a way of knowing that they might have my body, but they're not going to get me."*

— An adolescent  
prostitution survivor  
(Giobbe, p.125)

Common symptoms of PTSD include:

- Feelings of vulnerability and helplessness.
- Intrusive recollections — flashbacks or nightmares.
- Psychic numbing and dissociative behavior. While most people occasionally use psychic numbing as an adaptive response (e.g., daydreaming), dissociation is an extreme response, sometimes manifesting itself as the emergence of multiple personalities. Dissociation is the mind's attempt to protect the psyche by blocking out trauma. Whereas most people who experience psychic numbing feel the associated emotion at a later time, in the extreme form of dissociative behavior, the feelings are never experienced.
- Avoidance of anything or any cues reminding the survivor of the traumatic experience.
- Increased physiological response, which can be compared to a car idling too fast. This response can take the form of hypervigilance, with the person constantly scanning the environment, anticipating the worst. It may also take the form of an exaggerated startle response, panic, rage, memory lapses, and continuous extreme tension.

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*Trauma isn't simply a more extreme version of everyday stress. You can't just snap out of it. Exposure to terrifying events can overwhelm and break down the body's natural system of self-defense. Traumatic memories continually bulldoze their way into the present.*

— “The Study of Trauma Graduates at Last”

Recent advances in trauma research help us understand how violence and trauma impact the physical, mental and emotional health of prostituted women and girls. Brain imaging and medical research have shown that trauma leaves scars on the brain and central nervous system and that it can alter the immune system, hinder learning and shorten life span.

For example:

- Researchers examining Vietnam veterans who had severe symptoms found that the hippocampus, a part of the brain associated with memory, had significantly shrunk in size.
- Another study found that women with histories of chronic sexual abuse had more immunological disorders than other women.
- Most recently a large study in California found that people who were exposed to traumatic events as children were much more likely to developed lung disease, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and drug and alcohol addictions (“The Study of Trauma Graduates at Last”).

It is not surprising, then, that about two-thirds of the prostituted women in Farley’s study complained of medical problems. And it is instructive to note that far more of these problems are related to stress than to sexually transmitted diseases.

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

*“Drugs got me into prostitution. I would turn dates for drugs. It became a vicious cycle.”*

— Kim, a prostitution survivor (Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, p.1).

### Addictions/Substance Abuse

No attempt to address prostitution-related issues would be complete without addressing the role of addictions. Numerous sources document the relationship between substance abuse and involvement in prostitution:

- In a local substance abuse treatment program, 35 of the 38 women enrolled in the program in October 2000 had experience in prostitution.
- Data from 60 Chicago area substance abuse treatment programs indicate that 60 to 100 percent of their female clients have regularly exchanged sex for drugs or money (O'Leary and Howard, p.2).
- Data from a Jacksonville, FL, provider of substance abuse treatment indicates that 79 percent of the 520 adult clients enrolled in a women's recovery program between 1995–1999 had either actively engaged in prostitution or had been arrested for prostitution before being admitted to the program (Jacksonville Community Council, Inc., p.12).
- Genesis House, a prostitution recovery program in Chicago, estimates that at least 95 percent of the women seeking services are dealing with addiction issues (“Prostitution Fact Sheet,” p. 1).

Many people assume — erroneously — that in the link between substance abuse and prostitution, substance abuse is the precursor. Indeed, some women become addicted, then resort to prostitution to support their habit. However, for many the addiction follows entry into prostitution: drugs and alcohol are used to self-medicate, to numb the trauma of prostitution.

In the struggle to leave prostitution, many women must cope not only with substance addiction but also with an addiction to prostitution itself — to “the life,” living on the edge, and the perception of glamour associated with fast money and risk-taking behavior. Prostitution survivors frequently indicate that their recovery process was hindered by the fact that treatment programs addressed substance addictions but not the addiction to prostitution itself.

Leaving prostitution is a formidable challenge compounded by the difficulty of recovering from addiction and the fact that in many communities the need for treatment far exceeds the capacity of recovery programs.

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*“The johns, they’re all kinds. From the worst social snobs to the decent working guys.”*

— A prostituted woman’s perspective of customers (Høigård and Finstad, p. 35)

## Customers

### Who Are the Customers?

What kind of men seek sexual services from prostitutes? And what motivates their actions? While there are relatively few sources of information about customers of prostitutes, the available research is consistent on at least one theme: there is little difference between the demographic characteristics of men who buy sex and men in general.

Studies in the United States, Canada and Norway all point to the same conclusion: Customers can be found in all age, socioeconomic, occupational, and racial/ethnic groups, and nearly half are married or in long-term relationships (Monto and Hotaling, pp. 279–280; Lowman, Atchison, and Fraser, p. 1 of 8). In fact, the most striking finding of Norwegian researchers comparing men with and without prostitution experiences was the similarity between the two groups (Høigård and Finstad, p.28).

The Norwegian study did find, however, that customers with the most prostitution involvement — a hard core of habitual customers who are single men — appear to be people “on the outside,” those with limited social networks and with difficulty holding jobs or managing their finances (Høigård and Finstad, pp. 37–38).

While no research has been conducted on customers in Grand Rapids, sources in the local criminal justice system say that, over the past 15 years, among men arrested locally for buying sex:

- Approximately 90 percent had no previous criminal record.
- A majority were employed.
- A majority were married or in long-term relationships.
- 10 to 20 percent exhibited signs of sexual addiction, such as habitual use of pornography (Sikkema, 2000).

The diversity of prostitution customers is reflected in recent media coverage of prostitution-related issues in Grand Rapids. For example, the 70 men arrested in a one-day sting operation in July 2001 ranged from 21 to 75 years old and included a number of recent immigrants. The involvement of affluent males as customers is also evident locally. For example, the customer convicted in connection with a teen prostitution and child sexual abuse case in August 2001 was a suburban attorney. In addition, a prominent community leader murdered in 1993 reportedly frequented prostitutes; last year, an alleged pimp was charged with the murder.

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

### How Many Customers Are There?

It is extremely difficult to determine the scope of the demand for sexual services from prostitutes. The limited research offers widely varying figures on the percent of men who have bought sex from prostitutes. A 1993 study, for example, concluded that 16 percent of men in the U.S. have been involved with a prostitute, with less than one percent being involved on a regular basis (Jacksonville Community Council, Inc., pp. 13–17). A Norwegian study cites a figure of 13 percent — one of every six or seven Norwegian men over age 15 — as having prostitution experience (Høigård and Finstad, p.27).

The Norwegian study raises interesting questions about the role of repeat customers. “The survey revealed that a relatively high proportion of Norwegian men had been customers once or just a handful of times during their lifetime. However, the tricks aren’t evenly distributed among the customers. A small group of habitual buyers is responsible for a considerable proportion of the total volume of prostitution” (Høigård and Finstad, pp. 37–38).

A study of the First Offender Prostitution Program in San Francisco also indicates that habitual buyers may account for a disproportionate share of the demand for prostitution. More than one-third of the program participants had five or more prostitute partners. More than 10 per cent had between four and 15 encounters with prostitutes within the previous year (Hallinan, p.4).

Arrest figures clearly illuminate only a small fraction of the customer population. For example, reports of men arrested on prostitution-related charges through the Grand Rapids Police Department’s Operation FEDUP totaled 222 in 2000–2001. However, the fact that 70 men were arrested in a one-day sting operation is undoubtedly a more accurate indicator of the number of men seeking to buy sex in a known prostitution area on any given day in Grand Rapids.

### What Do Customers Want from Prostitutes?

The limited research available on customer motivation suggests three key factors:

- The desire for sexual acts, most of which are relatively common but also including activities customers have seen in pornography and/or deviant sex acts.
- The desire for new women, which relates to conceptions of masculinity as reflected in experience with many women.
- Curiosity and the desire for a new experience, which may be a more prevalent motivation for those with few experiences with prostitutes (Høigård and Finstad, pp. 93–94).

Prostituted women also say that there are some customers who simply want someone to talk to, and may not even seek sexual acts.

Other factors that influence men’s decisions to buy sex from prostitutes include the opportunity to:

- Access immediate gratification — to quickly satisfy sexual desire.
- Engage in sexual activity without an emotional commitment; for married men, it is easier to hide interactions with prostitutes than an affair and there may be a sense that having sex with a prostitute is “less unfaithful” than being emotionally engaged in an affair.
- Participate in sexual activity which focuses on the pleasure of the customer, rather than on mutuality with the partner (Høigård and Finstad, pp. 95–96).

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## Customer Perspectives on Prostitution: A “Victimless Crime?”

The limited research on prostitution customers focuses primarily on demographics and motivations for buying sexual contact/intercourse from prostituted women. Very little information is available about how customers perceive prostitution. However, some insights can be gained from responses of participants in “johns’ schools” for men who have been charged with seeking to buy sexual services.

The purpose of johns’ schools is to reduce recidivism among prostitution customers — to reduce demand by making the harm associated with prostitution visible to customers. Typically the program curriculum includes information about topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, the negative impact of prostitution on neighborhoods, and the perspectives of prostituted women — the factors that contributed to their involvement in prostitution, their attitudes toward customers, and the hard realities of their lives.

Customers typically enter johns’ schools perceiving prostitution as a victimless crime, even seeing themselves as victims. Some express indignation, perceiving themselves as the hapless victims of a police sting. In their view, they were merely engaging in commonplace activity and/or responding — in a way any “real man” would — to women who approached them.

However, comments from some johns’ school participants indicate that the program has led to a changed perspective on the “harmlessness” of prostitution. As one participant in the San Francisco program reported, “To hear from the prostitutes what they perceive as happening was very valuable. I will never be able to think of engaging the services of a prostitute without being stopped by the memory of hearing the pain in the voices of the women who spoke” (Hallinan, p.3).

Another San Francisco participant commented in the anonymous evaluation, “The program was balanced between shaming us and raising our consciousness, the shaming from the ex-prostitutes and the neighborhood people; the brass tacks of what can happen legally and physically; the background of who we’re hurting, the resources, and ways to think about prostitution” (Hallinan, p.3).



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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

### Pimps

#### Ambiguity and Exploitation

By most definitions, a pimp is a person who benefits from the earnings of a prostituted woman or girl. While the stereotypical pimp is a flashy dresser who brutally exploits a “stable” of women, this definition also encompasses a boyfriend/lover who is supported in some degree by a prostituted woman or girl.



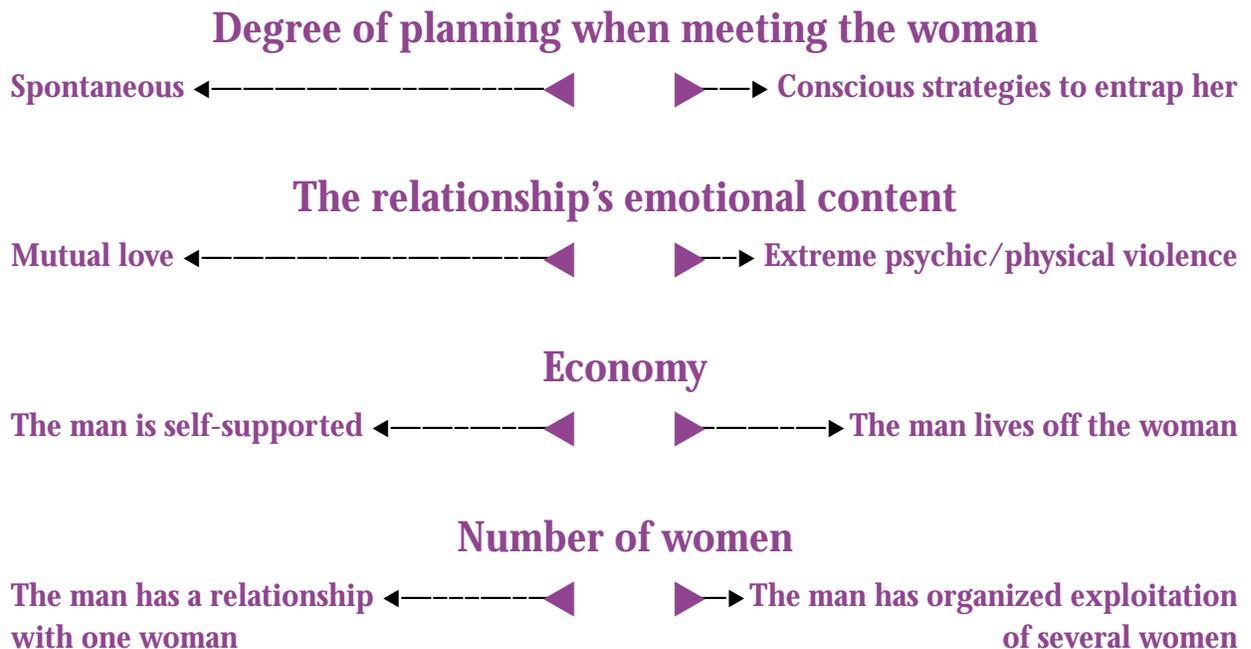
Stereotypical images of pimps fail to take into account the variety and complexity of relationships between prostituted women and girls and the men who benefit financially from their prostitution earnings.

Norwegian researchers Cecilie Høigård and Liv Finstad address this issue by describing five categories of pimps:

- Non-violent boyfriend-pimps in steady, love relationships in which the woman's involvement in prostitution is usually as a result of a joint decision. “She does it because they need the money and she loves him.” The boyfriend may offer protection by watching out for the woman when she is working.
- Violent boyfriend-pimps in steady relationships characterized by violent behavior. These relationships resemble the everyday lives of other abused women in many ways, such as cycles of violence and making up repeated over periods of many years, but differ in that the abuse is often linked to the man's dependence on the woman's earnings from prostitution. Violent boyfriend-pimps tend to be older than non-violent boyfriends and more likely to be unemployed and to have criminal records. The boyfriend's activity related to the woman's prostitution is focused more on control than assistance or protection.
- Sex pimps who have brief sexual relationships with the women or girls.
- Stable pimps who exert a controlling, often brutally violent, relationship over several prostituted women and/or girls simultaneously and may have romantic relationships with one or more of them.
- Sex club pimps involved in business relationships with several prostituted women and/or girls, with no emotional attachment between the parties. (Høigård and Finstad, pp. 140–155)

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The work of a Swedish researcher, Sven-Axel Månsson, also helps to illustrate the variety and complexity of pimp-prostitute relationships. Månsson identifies a spectrum associated with each of four dimensions of these relationships:



For each of these dimensions, relationships which are farther to the right are more consistent with pimp stereotypes. Since each dimension is independent of the others, a variety of pimp profiles exist (Høigård and Finstad, p. 168).

Based on their analysis of police and court records and their extensive interviews with prostituted women and with several pimp-boyfriends, Høigård and Finstad conclude that the characteristics of men charged with pimping are strikingly similar to those of other lawbreakers: they have little education, difficulty holding jobs, problems with substance abuse, and criminal records (Høigård and Finstad, p. 157).

A complete picture of the practice of pimping would also include the small percentage of women who, working independently or with men, exploit women and girls. This category includes women operating brothels, mothers prostituting daughters, and others. In a recent case which has received media coverage in Grand Rapids, a woman operating with a male associate allegedly brought two teenage sisters who had run away from home in Nebraska to Grand Rapids to train them to be prostitutes. The woman testified in court that she had experienced violence at the hands of her male associate and was operating under a threat of more violence from him.

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

### How Prostituted Women and Girls Perceive Pimps

In reality, just as many women and girls who are prostituted do not self-identify as prostitutes, so, too, many do not perceive those who benefit from their prostitution earnings as pimps, but rather as partners. For many women, entering into prostitution and/or giving part or all of one's earnings from prostitution to a man is perceived not as financial exploitation but as simply part of being in an intimate relationship — a “hidden cost” of “keeping a man.” Similarly, women in abusive relationships often see the abuse as a “hidden cost” of the relationship.

In addition, as Høigård and Finstad point out, “Denying that you have a pimp thus becomes a way of expressing that your own experience does not coincide with the stereotypical pimp-prostitute relationship. And the denial is the first interesting clue that the term ‘pimp’ is a stereotype, remote from nuances, emotions and everyday life” (Høigård and Finstad, p.135).



### The Role of Pimps in Systems of Prostitution

Given the complexity of pimp-prostitute relationships, the invisibility of pimps within communities (especially in comparison to the visibility of street prostitutes), and the rarity of pimp arrests and successful prosecutions, it is not surprising that it is difficult to assess the role of pimps in systems of prostitution. Among prostitution researchers, there are widely varying assessments of the significance of pimp involvement in the prostitution industry.

Some researchers assert that the vast majority of prostitution activity is pimp-controlled, whether the pimp is a boyfriend, a gang leader, or a brothel owner. Pointing out that younger women are more vulnerable to exploitation by pimps, some prostitution researchers maintain that most prostitution of juveniles is controlled by pimps.

Others assert that pimps play a relatively small role, particularly in recent years with the crack cocaine epidemic, since many addicted women exchange sex directly for rocks of cocaine or other drugs, with no intermediary or exchange of money.

The involvement of pimps in recent prostitution-related cases in Grand Rapids — one pimp as an alleged murderer, two others as alleged exploiters of teenagers — suggests that the existence of pimps should not be ignored, despite the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about their involvement.

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## The Impact of Pimping: Poverty, Isolation and Inability to Escape

Both conversations about prostitution and prostitution research tend to focus on the nature of the relationship between prostituted women and girls and their pimps. However, it is also important to examine the effect of the practice of pimping on women involved in prostitution.

“It would be difficult to overstate the connection between the practice of poncing [pimping] and engagement in prostitution,” according to British researcher Joanna Phoenix. “Poncing can fracture women’s lives in three interlinked ways: (1) by dramatically increasing their poverty; (2) by cutting them off from other social networks (both within prostitution and outside), thus isolating them from the support or practical help of friends and family; and (3) by crushing their belief in their ability to resist poncing” (Phoenix, p. 116).

The pimp relationship tends to increase prostituted women’s poverty because so much of their income is taken by their pimps, who allow them only a small “allowance” for daily necessities. To control women’s behavior and keep them isolated from support systems, pimps may use threats, intimidation and violence. Both prostitution studies and the chilling documentary, “American Pimp,” indicate that a large percentage of women in relationships with pimps endure regular and brutal violence.

These same techniques are also used to prevent women from leaving the relationship. The challenges of escaping the relationship — given the potential for suffering consequences ranging from having their involvement in prostitution revealed to family members to beatings and murder — often seem insurmountable.

## The Hidden Costs of Prostitution

Women and girls clearly pay a high price for their involvement in prostitution — in terms of their spiritual, intellectual, psychological, emotional and physical well-being. There is no overstating the human cost of prostitution — to the women and girls involved, to their extended families, and especially to the next generation of children of prostituted women and girls. In a recent study of 1,963 prostituted women, more than two-thirds had at least one child; 20 percent of these children lived with a mother working as a prostitute while another nine percent were in foster care (Weiner, 1996). These are clearly children at risk of similar exploitation, continuing the cycle of abuse from one generation to the next.

We have discussed other costs. For example, neighborhoods and businesses in high-prostitution areas pay a price in terms of their safety and security and their sense of well-being. There are also real dollars-and-cents costs: what’s the cost to homeowners in terms of diminishing property values? How much business is lost in commercial districts because customers feel uncomfortable in high-prostitution areas and take their business elsewhere?

There are more costs. How much does it cost each time an “untreated victim” of prostitution suffers a relapse or fails to thrive in a treatment/intervention program, partially because her issues related to prostitution remain beneath the surface, unrecognized and unaddressed? What are the costs to the health care system, the mental health system — and the criminal justice system?

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## What We've Learned: Understanding the Issues

Very little research has been done to document such hidden costs — the price we all pay for failing to address effectively the issues related to prostitution. But a cost/benefit analysis of prostitution control efforts in 16 U.S. cities has begun to quantify these costs, at least in the criminal justice system. According to “The Highest Paying Customers: America’s Cities and the Costs of Prostitution Control,” the true costs of the enforcement of prostitution laws must take into account both public expenditures (i.e., police, judicial, and corrections costs) and decreased protection from other crimes. For example, the study revealed:

- Each of the 16 cities studied spent an average of \$7.5 million in 1985 on prostitution control. Half of the cities studied spent more on prostitution control than on either education or public welfare (Pearl, p.772).
- Of the 15,000 violent crimes reported in Dallas in 1985, only 2,665 resulted in arrests. That same year, Dallas police made 7,280 prostitution arrests — a misdemeanor — costing local taxpayers over \$10 million. “The situation in Dallas is not unique,” the author contends (Pearl, p. 769).

Few people, including vice officers and judges, claim that arresting prostituted women and girls is the most effective way of addressing the issue of prostitution. We seem to be paying a high price with minimal results. This analysis suggests that taking a more proactive approach to prostitution, one that addresses root causes, is not only more humane but also makes economic sense. The next section of this report, “Putting Learning to Work: Building a System of Support,” offers some guidelines for making a more sound investment in reducing the harm from prostitution.

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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## A System of Prostitution-Related Services

There are no simple solutions to addressing the complexities of issues faced by prostituted women and girls or those who are vulnerable to exploitation. Enabling “untreated victims” and women and girls at risk to make healthy choices requires a system of support. As Joanna Phoenix suggests in her book, *Making Sense of Prostitution*, “If any social or political intervention into the lives of prostitute women is to be successful, it must be capable of containing and reflecting the contradictory experiences of prostitutes and the paradoxical ways in which they make sense of their involvement in prostitution” (p.189).

Researchers and practitioners in communities throughout the world have developed approaches, programs and services that are proving effective in addressing the complexity of issues surrounding prostitution. As we reviewed the lessons learned here in Grand Rapids as well as in other communities, the Prostitution Round Table has begun to develop a model of an ideal system of support for women and girls who are at risk of or are being exploited through prostitution, or who are survivors of prostitution.

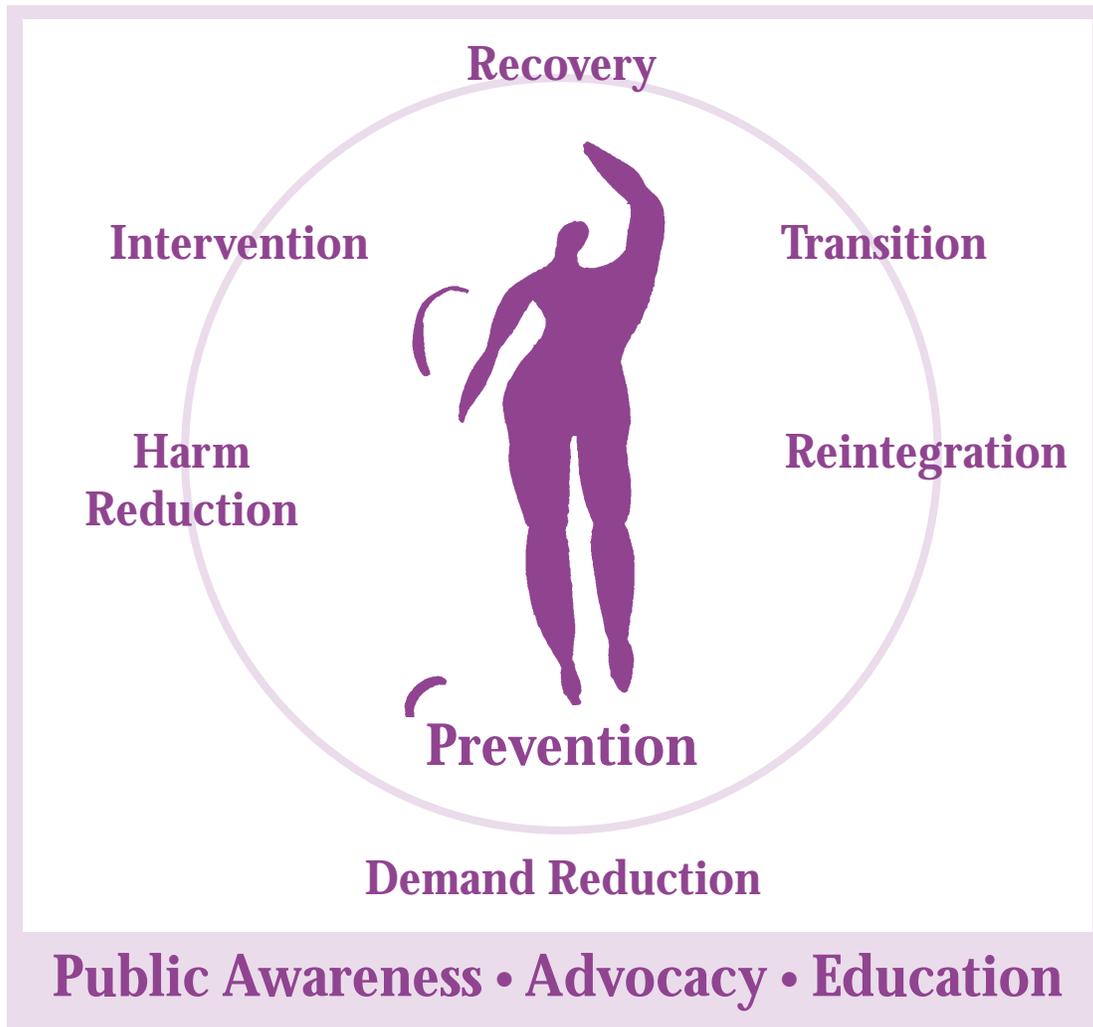
The broadest category in the system encompasses public awareness, advocacy and education on prostitution-related issues. It also includes demand reduction efforts, addressing the role men play in exploiting women and girls through prostitution. The heart of the system includes five categories of services for women and girls: prevention, harm reduction, intervention, recovery, and transition/reintegration. The system model on the following pages provides examples of services and activities in each of these categories.



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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## A System of Prostitution-Related Services



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### **Public Awareness, Advocacy and Education**

Activities which foster broad community support for women in prostitution by countering stereotypes and promoting accurate perceptions of the situations of women and girls engaged in prostitution. Target groups might include agencies, the media, schools, the faith community, funders, neighborhood-based groups, the legal and corrections systems, public policy systems, etc.

### **Demand Reduction**

Activities which reduce the likelihood of men exploiting women and girls through prostitution:

- Holding customers responsible through law enforcement practices
- Psycho-educational group programs for arrested customers
- Sexual compulsion recovery programs
- Men's groups which promote healthy gender relations.

### **Prevention**

Services which enhance life skills and enable women and girls to make healthy choices:

- Youth development programming
- Support for parents and families

### **Harm Reduction**

Activities which support women and girls working in prostitution in addressing health and safety issues:

- Needle exchange
- Condom distribution
- Access to health care

### **Intervention**

Activities which interrupt prostitution activity and provide opportunities for women to reflect and access services:

- Outreach
- Emergency services
- Hospitality services
- Law enforcement (e.g., detention, probation, alternative sentencing, etc.)

### **Recovery**

Treatment services which address key issues associated with women's involvement in prostitution:

- Substance abuse
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Domestic violence
- Prostitution addiction
- Post traumatic stress disorder

### **Transition/Reintegration**

Services which support women moving from dependence on prostitution to self-sufficiency:

- Transitional housing
- Education and training
- Employment and work progression
- Mentoring
- Support groups

In the next section, "Critical Success Factors," we use this system model and lessons learned from innovative work being done in other communities as the basis for identifying key elements that are critical to the success of systems addressing prostitution issues. In "A System of Support in West Michigan" (page 50), we employ the model to examine the resources presently available within our community and to identify areas in which services or initiatives are lacking.

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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## Critical Success Factors

There's much to be learned from the experience of others. In communities throughout the world, innovative and exciting work is being done to build effective systems of support for prostituted women and girls. Based on this work, two factors seem to be critical to the success of such a system: a multi-agency response combined with the development of specialized competencies in prostitution-focused issues.

### A Multi-Agency Response

Researchers, advocates and practitioners in the field are recognizing that, because of the multiple issues faced by prostituted women and girls, effective responses involve the expertise of a wide variety of agencies and organizations, ranging from alcohol/substance abuse recovery programs to housing and job training services. Prostitution recovery programs such as SAGE, Inc. in San Francisco and others have found it financially impractical to provide discrete residential treatment facilities for prostitution survivors. Instead, the programs focus their resources on providing effective prostitution-focused services on a day treatment basis while linking survivors to transitional housing, alcohol/drug treatment services, and other resources offered through existing programs in the community.

An effective multi-agency response requires service providers throughout the community to achieve a level of understanding of prostitution-related issues and to integrate that knowledge into their practices at all levels. For example, assessment tools are being developed to help providers identify prostitution issues at intake, just as they seek to recognize issues related to sexual abuse, abuse and neglect, domestic violence, etc. Youth development programs can integrate subjects such as dating older men into their curricula, learn to identify warning signs of girls' vulnerability to being sexually exploited, and develop their skills in promoting open dialogue about sexual exploitation. Medical providers can learn to recognize and treat the myriad of potential health issues that prostituted women patients may present. Such a community-wide learning enterprise requires leadership, expertise, and coordination of training resources.

In addition, an effective multi-agency approach requires strong networking, communication and coordination throughout the community to build a comprehensive system of support. Some communities have formed coalitions to enhance their efforts to address prostitution-related issues. For example, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless has recently spearheaded the formation of a Prostitution Alternatives Round Table, consisting of representatives from a wide variety of agencies, to collectively address service and advocacy needs of prostituted women, youth and men in their community. Locally, practitioners in the domestic violence, sexual assault, and violence prevention fields have formed effective coalitions that play a leadership role in their arenas.

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## Prostitution-Focused Expertise

While existing agencies can often address a host of prostitution-related issues, it's critical for some organizations in the community to develop expertise and competencies that focus specifically on the experience of prostitution. Promising work in a variety of communities suggests key principles for effective prostitution-focused programming.

**Take a harm reduction approach, embodying the philosophy of incremental change.** Because prostituted women often experience such severe damage to their self-image and self-concept, it's critical to value the individual's decisions, meeting her where she is, bolstering her self-confidence and supporting any movement toward positive change. In a shelter or recovery program, this may mean prostituted women are welcome to access services even if they have not committed to exiting the prostitution industry or being drug-free. In an HIV prevention program, it may mean acknowledging that, with some customers, insisting on condom use may place women at increased risk for violence.



### Involve prostitution survivors in program design and implementation.

Valuing the expertise, wisdom and leadership of women who have street experience is vital to women's empowerment and recovery and lends credibility among the clients in the program. Peer involvement appears to be a critical success factor in all components of a system of support. For example:

- Through Chicago's Young Women's Empowerment Project, prostitution survivors help young women at risk for being exploited by older men to recognize the lies commonly told to attract them to the life. By sharing their own experiences, survivors help girls understand the risks and potential consequences of such relationships.
- San Francisco's Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE) Project, Inc., founded by prostitution survivor Norma Hotaling, provides holistic outreach and recovery services. The majority of SAGE staff members are former clients who build on their life experience, through SAGE's Peer Educator Training Program, to provide outreach, mentoring and compassionate support to prostituted women and girls. SAGE has received widespread recognition for effective programming, including the 2000 Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation for its peer education program.
- At its residential treatment facility, Chicago's Genesis House offers drop-in hospitality services to prostituted women. Survivors in the recovery process greet visitors off the street and provide them with respite — a shower, a change of clothes, a meal, a safe place to sleep, a compassionate ear... and a vision of their own possibilities.

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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## Apply learning from related fields.

For example:

- Prostitution itself is increasingly viewed as addictive behavior. Programs such as Prostitutes Anonymous and others adapt strategies for addressing addictions in general to helping women recover from their prostitution experience.
- Relationships between prostituted women and girls and their pimps/boyfriends/customers often exhibit characteristics typically found in domestic/partner violence situations. Proven strategies for addressing the complex dynamics of these kinds of relationships can be adapted to help prostituted women and girls address this aspect of their experience.
- Lessons learned from work with survivors of political torture are being applied to addressing the trauma-related issues often found among prostitution survivors. Recent work with torture survivors underscores the importance of understanding the context for the violence and its implications for treatment: survivors are likely to exhibit a high level of fear for their physical safety and find it nearly impossible to trust another human being. As prostitution and trauma researcher Melissa Farley says, people attempting to help survivors of prostitution must understand that some prostituted women are “crazed with fear” (Farley, Keynote Address, 2001). Providers must be patient, strive to create a safe space for healing, taking a mind/body approach to deal with trauma, pain, and rage, Farley says.
- Work with survivors of sexual abuse and assault suggest similar approaches; in addition, it points to the potential of gender-specific programming. The gender-focused nature of the violence experienced by prostituted women and girls — as well as the understanding that women and girls tend to have very different treatment issues from men — suggests that early recovery work is likely to be more effective when offered in a same-gender atmosphere.
- Efforts to understand the cultural basis of experience and healing — in medicine, counseling, education, and other domains — suggest we tailor strategies and approaches to the background, culture and experience of the individual. For example, Breaking Free in St. Paul, MN helps prostituted African American women and girls explore the relationship between the legacy of slavery and the over-representation of African American women in prostitution. Native American groups in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Saskatchewan, Canada explore the relationships between oppression, poverty, substance abuse, and casino gambling and the over-representation of Native American women in prostitution.

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**Take a holistic approach.** Prostituted women are at risk of chronic health problems resulting from the trauma of repeated physical and emotional abuse, neglect, childhood sexual abuse, and other forms of violence. Effective responses offer an array of approaches to promote healing, wellness, and personal, spiritual and professional growth. For example, the SAGE Trauma and Recovery (STAR) Center offers or refers prostituted women to a variety of support services:

- Traditional medical prevention, screening and treatment services
- Alternative ways of healing, including acupuncture, massage, yoga, homeopathy and herbal remedies
- Mental health, vocational and career counseling and mentoring programs.

**Recognize the need for long-term support.**

Addressing the complex array of issues associated with prostitution — as well as the length and severity of the trauma endured — usually requires more than a 30- to 90-day intervention. Survivors attest to the importance of mentoring and support over a period of years, not days or months. In fact, women survivors of prostitution in Chicago recognized the need for support services for women in transition, survivors who had completed the first, more intensive stage of recovery. Recently, they established Exodus, a program for adult women in the second stage of recovery. Exodus offers mentoring, group support, financial planning, goal setting, referrals, HIV risk education, educational and child care resources, spiritual retreats, counseling and case management, career skills support, and public speaking on the issues of prostitution and substance abuse.



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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## A System of Support in West Michigan

It is heartening to recognize that many basic elements of our system model are already in place in our community, including:

- A rich network of youth development/prevention programming and innovative harm reduction initiatives, including needle exchange, condom distribution, and sexuality and reproductive health education outreach programs.
- Very successful peer-based education programs addressing issues ranging from violence prevention to sex education in addition to a wide range of mentoring programs (e.g., for women in transition).
- Strong programs addressing poverty issues, including emergency and transitional housing initiatives that provide comprehensive wrap-around services (e.g., economic literacy, home upkeep and repair, life skills, etc.) as well as training, employment and work progression support.
- High quality services dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and addictions — and the stress disorders that sometimes result. Some intervention and recovery programs offer gender-specific programming and services; they include both residential and non-residential services.
- A growing and active network of men seeking to address the root causes of male violence against women.

In addition, we have a few programs which provide prostitution-focused services, including:

- Rose Haven Ministry, a program of Catholic Human Development Outreach, which provides outreach, residential and non-residential treatment services to prostituted women.
- Psycho-educational programs (i.e., “john’s groups”) and sexual self-control groups for customers.

The challenge we face is to:

- Build the capacity of existing programs to more effectively serve prostituted women and girls and
- Strengthen programming that focuses specifically on prostitution and prostituted women and girls.

To begin with, programs need to acknowledge and recognize the impact of prostitution experience on the lives of women and girls. Currently, few health and social services programs include questions about prostitution experience in the intake or assessment process. And few agency staff members have training in prostitution-related issues. One prostitution survivor in Grand Rapids conveyed her experience in drug treatment: “I’ve been through the program 19 times and nobody ever asked me about prostitution.” Others reported being afraid to divulge their prostitution experience for fear of being denied services.

The invisibility of prostitution in support programs is a measure of how marginalized prostituted women and girls are. For example, domestic violence is often assumed to apply only to women in traditional marriage, dating or co-habiting relationships — not to prostituted women and girls and their boyfriend-pimp relationships. Similarly, the fact that prostituted women and girls are rape victims has only recently begun to be acknowledged. And we have not begun to tap the powerful knowledge, experience and resources of prostitution survivors in building effective systems of support.

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Throughout the PRT learning process, one system gap was identified over and over again by prostitution survivors, police officers, neighborhood association representatives and others: a place for prostituted women and girls to go, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, when they need or are ready to accept help. “There needs to be an ‘open window’ where women can go *immediately*, when they’re ready, when they’re in need,” according to one Grand Rapids survivor of prostitution. “Right now, we say, ‘We’re full, there’s not enough room... come back in two weeks.’” This perspective was corroborated by community police officers who shared their experiences of encouraging prostituted women to make a change, take a step toward a healthier life — only to have a woman come to them for help, after hours, and being unable to find a facility that would take her in.



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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## Progress to Date

How do we build on what we have learned to strengthen existing programs and services and create a more effective system of support? The Prostitution Round Table itself has been a good start at creating multi-agency cooperation, yielding significant outcomes:

**Several dozen community members who have participated in the PRT — and the organizations in which they work — now have an increased awareness and understanding of prostitution-related issues.** Participants have shared specific examples of how insights they have gained through the PRT have changed how they perform their work, how they deliver services, and how they perceive the needs of their clients.

- A street ministry worker described that insights gained in the PRT process changed how she perceives a scenario she often observes: homeless women asking men to take them home at night. As a result, she and her organization are looking into expanding their capacity to provide emergency shelter.
- A staff person for a housing organization said that, after the “Prostitution: A Violent Reality of Homelessness” conference, “no one can ever tell me prostitution is a choice.”
- A counseling professional who facilitates local “john’s” groups applied some of the approaches to addressing men’s responsibility that she heard about at a PRT meeting, with very productive results in terms of her clients’ willingness to accept responsibility for their behavior.
- A school of social work faculty member reported that she planned to review the curriculum to identify ways the program can better prepare students to address their clients’ prostitution-related issues — from assessment through treatment and follow-up.
- A person with many years of experience working with prostituted women and girls said, “I used to feel pretty alone with this issue. Now it’s different. I feel there’s a community of people who support these efforts.”
- A health educator working with women in the criminal justice system decided to raise the issue of prostitution in her group sessions, just as she does issues such as child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and rape. Many of the women reported experience in prostitution and expressed the desire to discuss their experiences with others.
- An administrator of a street outreach program said that she has been concerned about the well-being of the prostituted women and girls she encounters in her work, but didn’t know where to start to address the issue. She sees the PRT as a forum for building a community response.

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**A survey of nearly 80 health and social services agencies in Grand Rapids indicating current assessment and treatment practices related to prostitution issues and the need for training among local practitioners.** The survey, conducted by Grand Valley State University social work students, revealed:

- Although nearly 90 percent of the people interviewed indicated that some of their clients have experience in prostitution, few screen for prostitution issues as part of their assessment or treatment practices.
- More than 90 percent said that they see a need for prostitution-related services in Grand Rapids.
- More than 80 percent agree there is a current lack of training related to prostitution issues and almost 90 percent said they would be interested in receiving training.

For more detailed findings, see “Screening for Prostitution Experience: Key Findings of GVSU Agency Survey,” page 69.

**Agencies participating in the PRT have initiated new prostitution-related activities.**

These include:

- The Social Work and Police Partnership (SWAPP), involving the Grand Rapids Police Department and Grand Valley State University’s School of Social Work. The focus of the SWAPP efforts will be on prostituted women and girls on South Division Avenue. A social work/criminal justice student at GVSU is presently interning at the Grand Rapids Police Department. Her responsibilities include cataloging community resources for use by social workers and police once the partnership is launched. She is also conducting research on the needs of prostituted women and girls in Grand Rapids.
- A support and education group for prostituted women, a joint project of Planned Parenthood Centers of West Michigan and Heartside Ministry.



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# Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

## **The PRT learning has been shared with a variety of local groups.**

- Local media representatives through a press conference and two media background sessions
- Students in social work and women's studies classes at Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids Community College, and Grand Valley State University
- Members of the faith community through
  - The integration of prostitution-related issues into sexual assault/domestic violence training, in planning by the Kent County Violence Prevention Coalition
  - A three-session adult education class for members of Trinity United Methodist Church
- The Board of Directors of the YWCA of Grand Rapids through several updates and presentations at their monthly meetings
- Members of the Women Lawyers Association of West Michigan through a presentation at their February membership meeting
- Educators, social workers and health care workers through a workshop to be included in the "No Spin Zone: Reducing Risk in High-Risk Populations" conference in Grand Rapids in March 2002.

Responses to the presentations have been very positive. For example, a local judge said her perceptions of the women who came before her on prostitution charges changed from focusing on them as criminals to a more holistic view, based on a better understanding of the issues that contribute to their behavior.

## **Local organizations with competencies related to prostitution issues have established new connections and strengthened relationships.**

- The PRT has helped to link public and private sector counseling professionals and others who work with men's groups, ranging from "john's" and "batterers'" groups to programs for men with sexual compulsions. These individuals are sharing their experience, learning and resources.
- In response to the release of a major international study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children and media reports of such activities locally, the PRT sponsored two information-sharing sessions with representatives of the probate court's family division, the detention center, the sheriff's department, health department, the office of community corrections, and others. Background information about the PRT and current research on adolescent prostitution and resources were distributed.

## **Local agencies have established new connections with organizations from other communities to facilitate information-sharing.**

- Building on the round table model, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless has launched a Prostitution Alternatives Round Table there.
- Claudine O'Leary, founder of the Young Women's Empowerment Project in Chicago, has provided ongoing consultation to the PRT and made a presentation at the May 2001 PRT meeting.
- As they plan their prostitution-related programming, representatives of Planned Parenthood Centers of West Michigan and Rose Haven Ministry have drawn upon the expertise of Chicago-based organizations such as the Young Women's Empowerment Project and Genesis House.

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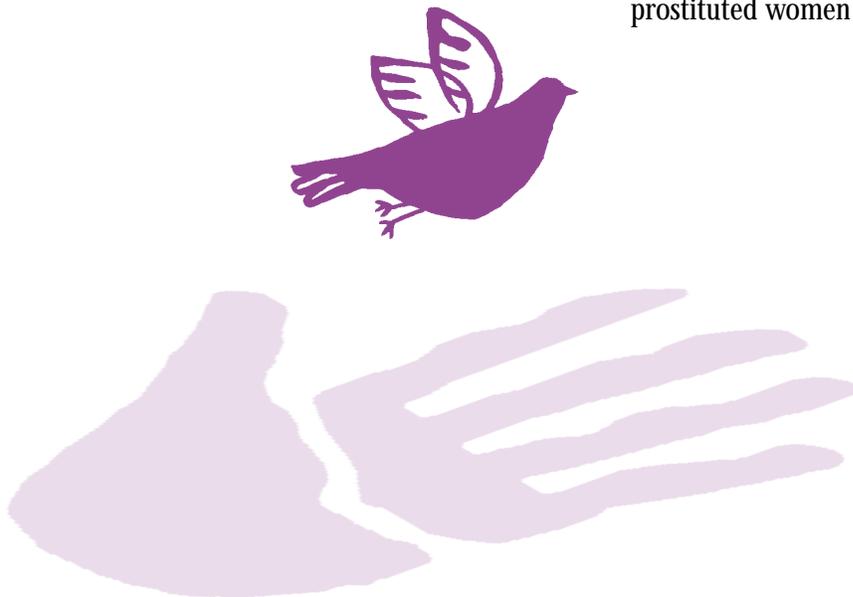
## Continuing the Work

Despite the successes achieved to date, it is clear that there is considerably more work to be done. During the coming months the work of the PRT will focus on:

- Increasing opportunities to learn from innovators in other communities and “cascade” what has been learned to date throughout the community in order to increase community support for and ownership of efforts to address prostitution-related issues. For example, the PRT is sponsoring a conference on prostitution in April 2002.
- Strengthening local agencies in their efforts to provide services which are appropriate and sensitive to the unique issues faced by prostituted women and girls.
- Developing sustainable leadership and support for continuing to build a system of prostitution-related services for women and girls in Grand Rapids.

Efforts to address prostitution issues — at all points in the system of support — tend to be few and far between, here in West Michigan and throughout North America. There has been no national network, sporadic national conferences, and few regional connections among communities and groups attempting to build systems of support for prostituted women and girls. Local initiatives, struggling for funding and support, often lack resources to support networking and shared learning from one community to the next. In our community, securing funding for prostitution-specific programming has been a constant challenge.

Yet, there’s much reason for hope. We have seen it in the overwhelmingly positive local response to the New Voices/Prostitution Round Table initiative. Not only have many more people participated than the most optimistic among us anticipated, but the thoughtfulness, self-reflection and level of commitment has been truly remarkable. Members have been candid about their own “a-ha’s”, ways in which they began to change how they interact with clients, what they ask and how they listen, the way they interpret behavior. Some have influenced their organizations, faith communities, and colleagues to refine their work in large and small ways, based on a deeper understanding and a heightened sense of the unmet needs of prostituted women and girls.



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## Putting the Learning to Work: Building a System of Support

We also see signs of increased attention nationally to the issue. Oprah Winfrey awarded her Angel Network Use Your Life Award — with its \$100,000 cash prize — to Norma Hotaling, a prostitution survivor and founder of SAGE, Inc. The University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work issued a major study of child commercial sexual exploitation, paid for largely by the U.S. Department of Justice. Subsequently, the U.S. Campaign Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was launched, consisting of more than two dozen non-profit groups. A special section on adolescent prostitution appeared in the November, 2001 issue of the *Journal of Philanthropy*, a leading news source for charity leaders, fund raisers, grant makers and others involved in philanthropy.

Ultimately, we see the hope for building better systems of support for prostituted women and girls in the broadening recognition that these are our sisters, our daughters, our mothers and our neighbors. And they are survivors — women and girls who have suffered deeply in isolation, but who often exhibit great strength and resiliency, finding the resources within to do the work of recovery. And then, often, they turn around to offer a hand to those left behind. These are women and girls who have been outside of our community's circle of hope and circle of caring for too long: we must do better.



**In a letter from jail to Edwina Gateley, founder of Chicago's Genesis House, Mezzie, a prostituted woman who survived on the streets of Chicago for 26 years, offers an eloquent voice from outside the circle:**

*“When you're young, you trust in your parents. I had none.  
I trusted in the dope man and he failed me and left his legacy in my blood.  
My life has reinforced my disbelief in me.  
Edwina, please don't let my failure stop your work. Remember I was 38 before I met you.  
Take care of our dreams to fight for women like me. Don't give up hope.*

*When you go out to give talks, carry our message to the people you speak to.  
Tell them that we are all God's children,  
and that nobody was born into this world trying to be negative.  
Tell them we all came with great expectations that our lives would be happy and fruitful.  
So if they can't help us to recover, and find happiness in life,  
ask them not to hurt us.”*

**(Gateley, p. 285)**



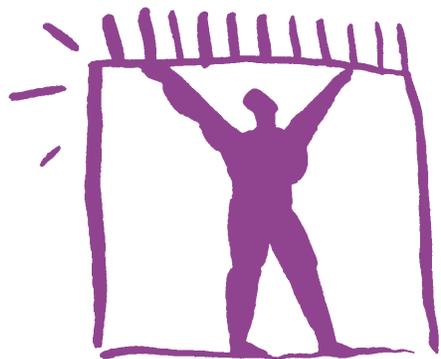
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## Afterword: The Convening Role

Through the Prostitution Round Table project, the Nokomis Foundation is exploring ways to broaden the community's agenda to include more fully the needs and concerns of women and girls who have been marginalized. What role can a foundation play in gaining the mainstream community's share of mind for people whose voices have historically been unheard, who have been rendered invisible in our society?

In the spirit of continuous learning, we would like to share a few of our early observations — approaches and strategies that we figured out along the way as well as some of the significant challenges in this work. We have identified key success factors:

**Focus, focus, focus.** Addressing issues related to marginalized women and girls can be extremely challenging. The territory is uncharted. Information and resources are not always readily available. The issues are complex. And often mainstream attitudes about these women and girls are based on misconceptions, stereotypes, and a level of discomfort. It's critical that individuals given the responsibility of facilitating and leading such an effort have the opportunity to focus their attention on these challenges. In the case of the Prostitution Round Table, for example, the Nokomis Foundation chose to involve community consultants as co-facilitators rather than adding the project to their ongoing staff assignments.



**Get grounded first.** The PRT facilitators spent several months conducting a scan — of the available research, of the community, of all aspects of the issue of prostitution. This upfront learning process yielded many benefits:

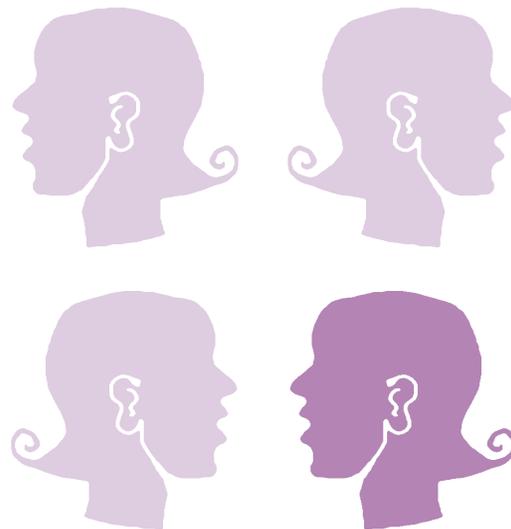
- By gaining a sense of the scope of the issue, we were able to narrow the focus of the project to a manageable size, understanding how this piece fits into a larger context.
- The knowledge gained by reading broadly helped us to gain a sense of the ongoing dialogue and varying perspectives on the issue. We discovered and adapted the Jacksonville, FL framework for understanding these diverse points of view (see “Recognizing Varying Approaches to and Perspectives on Prostitution,” pp. 16–19) which, in turn, served as a valuable tool for streamlining the learning process for PRT participants.
- The research informed our choice of language and our ability to discuss the issue effectively with others as we began recruiting them to participate in the process. It also helped us to identify the kinds of organizations and expertise to include in the Prostitution Round Table membership.
- Our learning about how individuals in the community responded to the issue of prostitution ultimately pointed to our strategy — a community learning venture. Given the limited knowledge or understanding of the issue and level of discomfort some people seemed to have with the issue, we felt that providing a safe environment for community exploration and learning needed to precede more conventional forms of “action”. In contrast, in Chicago, where a community scan revealed a significant pool of people had considerable expertise in the issue, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless opted to form a Round Table that focuses on coordination of services and direct advocacy.

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## Afterword: The Convening Role

**Be guided by clear goals and strategy.** The overall goal of the Prostitution Round Table project was defined early on as to help prostituted women and girls make healthy choices in their lives. Yet, our initial scan told us that we first needed to develop a base of knowledge and people who could lead such efforts effectively throughout the community. Therefore, we identified our key strategy as facilitating a community learning process; this strategy served as a valuable guide for the challenges ahead. For example:

- It helped us with recruitment of Prostitution Round Table members: since few people in the community felt they possessed any particular knowledge or expertise in this arena, positioning the effort as “community learning” appealed to a broader potential group and made more people comfortable with committing to the process.
  - It also helped us identify potential members. Do we recruit CEOs of organizations or people on the “front lines”? For us, the concept of community learning embodied the idea that leadership within communities and organizations does not necessarily flow only from those in leadership positions. Most organizations possess non-traditional leaders, people whose drive and passion for what they believe in enables them to influence change — to lead — regardless of their position on the organizational chart. We decided to attempt to leverage both forms of leadership through the Prostitution Round Table process and we successfully recruited both to the table.
- It helped address the propensity to act first (commonly expressed as frustration with “all talk and no action”). Once people begin to learn about the issues of marginalized people, the needs and gaps in services may seem so overwhelmingly clear that they feel compelled to act. This is a good thing! Yet, long term, we believed our strategy of developing an informed core leadership group would yield a more comprehensive community response than an action here and a program there. We accommodated these sometimes conflicting tendencies by keeping the PRT focused on learning — on the “big picture” — while nurturing sub-groups or organizations which were ready to move forward with responses.
  - It allowed us to avoid potential “turf” issues. As a learning community, participants were encouraged to come to the table in the spirit of sharing and building on each other’s knowledge and understanding.



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**Include the voices of marginalized women and girls.** From the beginning of the Prostitution Round Table project, including the voices of the women and girls whose experience included prostitution was established as a guiding principle. It is also a key value underlying the New Voices Initiative and the mission of the Nokomis Foundation. However, for various reasons we found this principle challenging to apply.

By definition, marginalized people include those for whom there exist few bridges, few lines of trust and communication between themselves and the mainstream culture. Many of their interactions with the mainstream have, in fact, been extremely negative, ranging from abusive treatment by customers, police and others to the lack of respect extended by health care workers, outreach workers, the media, etc.

For women choosing alternatives to prostitution, a significant barrier continues to be the social stigma associated with the experience; a history of prostitution makes it difficult for survivors to find or keep jobs, earn people's trust, or be fully accepted by the society around them. Speaking openly about that experience can leave survivors vulnerable to emotional, psychological, and economic repercussions. For these and many other reasons, some survivors find speaking about the experience to be too stressful and painful.

Yet, some prostitution survivors say they draw strength from helping others through their experience. We were fortunate in the Prostitution Round Table project to be able to include a few of these women as members and as guest presenters at PRT meetings. We cannot overstate the impact and importance of their contributions.

We also found other ways to include the voices of prostituted women and girls in our learning. For example:

- At PRT meetings, we viewed videos in which prostituted women spoke of their experience, their perspective on the issue, the barriers they encounter, their efforts to seek alternatives and their hopes and dreams. Discussions after viewing these videos confirmed the powerful impact of hearing these voices.
- We identified writings by prostitution survivors for PRT members to read.
- Through the "Prostitution: A Violent Reality of Homelessness" conference in Chicago, several PRT members were able to hear a panel of survivors speak.
- Facilitators and individual PRT members arranged to meet with individual survivors or small groups of survivors for confidential and anonymous conversations about their experience and perspectives. With the permission of the survivors, these insights were then shared at PRT meetings.

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## Afterword: The Convening Role

**Balance reliance on local and outside resources.** Although our initial scan uncovered few local resources with expertise in the prostitution arena, the vast majority of the presenters at PRT meetings were local individuals. As the group read broadly and learned about prostitution issues from a variety of sources, we identified an array of issues associated with prostitution for which local expertise was available — e.g., substance abuse, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual compulsion, etc. Involving these local resources had multiple benefits: PRT members gained a stronger sense of the community resources we could build upon to address prostitution issues and, in turn, individuals with expertise in these issues had the opportunity to consider the linkages between prostitution issues and their work.

**Nurture, nurture, nurture.** When we embarked on the Prostitution Round Table project, we did not anticipate how important — or how time-consuming — it would be to play a supportive, nurturing role to groups and organizations as they began to explore and implement responses to prostitution issues. This nurturing role took various forms. For example:

- In response to a suggestion by Chief Harry Dolan of the Grand Rapids Police Department, PRT consultants facilitated a meeting of the police department, schools of social work and criminal justice at Grand Valley State University, and others to discuss the possibility of initiating a Social Work and Police Partnership pilot in Grand Rapids. This group served as a core for continued planning, expanding community representation, deciding to focus the effort on street prostitution, and ultimately submitting a grant proposal for seed funding. The Nokomis Foundation provided funding to develop the grant proposal; although the initial proposal was not funded, the group remains committed and is pursuing other funding sources.
- To strengthen local services for prostituted women and girls, the PRT consultants arranged for a site visit to Genesis House in Chicago. Representatives from the police department, Rose Haven, and a neighborhood association participated; since the first visit, Rose Haven staff and leadership have maintained a link with the Genesis House program and have made a second site visit.
- To support faith-based efforts to address prostitution issues in their congregations, PRT consultants worked with a PRT member to design and deliver a three-session adult education program at her church. This program is serving as a model for other congregations.
- In addition to planning and facilitating PRT meetings, consultants designed and facilitated numerous other meetings in the community, ranging from a background session on prostitution for media representatives to presentations to community boards and college classes.

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**Be patient and keep the faith.** In the first six months of Prostitution Round Table meetings, participants regularly expressed a sense of feeling overwhelmed — by the complexity of the issues, by the pain involved in the lives of prostituted women and girls, and at the apparent lack of community response. Yet, the day came when one PRT member exclaimed that she finally was starting to feel a sense of hope — and some confidence that she was developing a level of knowledge and understanding to begin to think about effective ways of responding. Many heads were nodding around the table as she said this.

Part of taking a community learning approach means being willing to tolerate initial confusion and ambiguity and providing sufficient time for people to absorb new learning, reflect upon the ideas and how they apply in their own work, and develop the competence to move forward. This kind of learning does not happen overnight. In fact, we initially anticipated the Prostitution Round Table as a year-long project; we are now completing our second year.

**Document the work.** In some ways, a key “product” of a community learning venture is the research, knowledge, insights and resources uncovered along the way. Documenting this learning is vital to success: it serves to summarize and reinforce the learning to those who participate and communicate new learning to participants who are unable to attend a session. As the PRT progressed, we assembled a packet of materials that included detailed notes from meetings and presentations, copies of all reading materials and handouts, etc. As new members joined the PRT, this packet became a useful resource to bring them up to speed. We also shared the packet with interested individuals in our community and others, and have relied upon those materials in developing this report.



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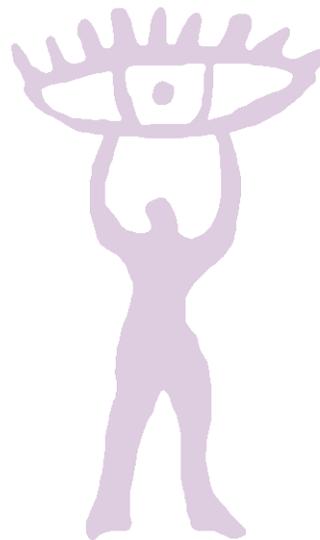
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## Recommendations for Reporting on Prostitution

As the Prostitution Round Table project progressed, PRT members found themselves bringing new perspectives to media coverage of prostitution issues. There was considerable concern, for example, about how the common practice of labeling women as prostitutes (including using derogatory terms such as hooker) fails to acknowledge their full identity — as mothers, daughters, partners, friends — and humanity.

Two members of the staff of the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID), Jeff Smith and Erica Freshour, who are also PRT participants, facilitated a PRT discussion analyzing local coverage. Based on this analysis, the PRT offers the following suggestions for increasing the accuracy and fairness of coverage of prostitution-related news.

### Provide an appropriate context that acknowledges the complexity of prostitution.

- Acknowledge the reality of the lives of prostituted women and girls. Poverty, substance abuse, childhood trauma, and violence play key roles in prostitution, yet are seldom addressed in news coverage.
- Acknowledge differing perspectives on prostitution. Prostitution encompasses human rights, health, neighborhood, and other issues — not just law enforcement.
- Cover not only the problem but also the solutions. Several local programs help men address cultural messages and sexual compulsions that lead them to seek out prostitutes; other programs help women and girls escape prostitution, reduce the harm of prostitution, and avoid exploitation through prostitution.
- Provide data that places news events in a broader context. When arrests are made, cite local, regional and/or national data that show how the situation compares with the past or with other areas.

### Strive for equal treatment.

- Report on male customers as well as women involved in prostitution. Coverage of prostitution often minimizes the role of male customers and seldom examines why men want to buy sexual services.
- Avoid stereotypes. For example, men from all backgrounds seek out prostitutes, yet news coverage often conveys the message that the involvement of affluent community leaders is “surprising.” And race and poverty are seldom acknowledged as factors in the disproportionate prostitution arrest figures for women of color compared with white women.

### Use appropriate language.

- Juveniles who are used for sexual services are not prostitutes; they are victims of child sexual abuse. News coverage should place responsibility appropriately — on the perpetrator.
- Avoid clichés — e.g., “the oldest profession” — which are neither accurate nor informative.



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# Screening for Prostitution Experience: Key Findings of GVSU Agency Survey

Senior Capstone Seminar Class  
Grand Valley State University  
School of Social Work  
April 26, 2001

At the request of the Nokomis Foundation's Prostitution Round Table, Grand Valley State University senior social work students conducted in-person interviews with representatives from more than 50 health and service organizations in the Grand Rapids area. We hoped to gain a better understanding of the extent to which prostitution experience is considered a part of the assessment/treatment process, agency/staff backgrounds in prostitution issues, and interest in training on prostitution-related issues. Key findings of the GVSU report are summarized below.

## Prevalence of Prostitution Issues

Agency representatives generally recognize that some of their clients have experience with prostitution, but few are directly asking clients about this experience.

- 88.5 percent of those interviewed believed that some of their clients were women with prostitution experience.
- Most agencies do not routinely screen clients for prostitution experience:
  - 25 percent ask about prostitution experience as part of their assessment
  - 27 percent ask about prostitution experience during counseling/treatment
  - Nearly 30 percent indicated that the issue of prostitution "occasionally" or "frequently" surfaces spontaneously in their work with clients.

## Need for Services

A vast majority (92 percent) of those surveyed indicated that they see a need for prostitution-related services, including after-hours care, prevention/education, counseling, and health care services. When they refer clients with prostitution experience, the most commonly mentioned referral was to Rose Haven. The YWCA and Heartside Ministry were also frequently mentioned for referrals.

## Need for Training

More than 80 percent agree there is a current lack of training related to prostitution prevention and intervention and almost 90 percent of the agency representatives surveyed reported they would be interested in receiving training to help assist prostitutes in making positive choices.





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Hughes, Donna M. and Claire M. Roche (eds.)

*Making the Harm Visible: Global Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls — Speaking Out and Providing Services*

Kingston, RI: The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 1999.

A collection of writings, ranging from poetry to research reports by more than 30 survivors, activists and service providers working to make the harm and exploitation of prostitution visible.

Kempadoo, Kamala and Jo Doezema

*Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*

New York: Routledge, 1998.

A collection of essays, narratives, interviews and reports presenting the perspectives of sex workers around the world.

Nagle, Jill (ed.)

*Whores and Other Feminists*

New York: Routledge, 1997.

Essays and narratives examining sex work and the sex industry from the perspective of self-identified feminist sex workers and their allies.

Phoenix, Joanna

*Making Sense of Prostitution*

New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999.

An analysis of the strategies by which some prostitutes, whose lives are torn apart by the effects of poverty and violence, come to understand their involvement in prostitution.

Sterk, Clare E.

*Tricking and Tripping: Prostitution in the Era of AIDS*

Putnam Valley, NY: Social Change Press, 2000.

A study, based on 10 years of work in New York and Atlanta, of the world of street prostitutes, including pathways into prostitution, types of prostitution careers, the roles of boyfriends and pimps, drug use, and violence.

Weitzer, Ronald

*Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography and the Sex Industry*

New York: Routledge, 2000.

A collection of writings on perspectives of sex workers and customers; victimization, risk behavior and support services; and politics, policing, and the sex industry.

## Fact Sheets, Policy Papers and Reports

Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns

*Prostitution in the United States*

A Report to the 211th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA, 1999 <http://horeb.pcusa.org/oga/diversity/advocom>.

Cler-Cunningham, Leonard and Christine Christensen

*Violence Against Women in Vancouver's Street Level Sex Trade and the Police Response*

Vancouver, B.C.: Prostitution Alternatives Counseling Education (P.A.C.E.), 2001. <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/pacekids/report/>.

Estes, Richard J. and Neil Alan Weiner

*The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico*

Philadelphia, PA: The Center for the Study of Youth Policy, the University of Pennsylvania, September, 2001 (See [www.upenn.edu/pennnews/releases/2001/Q3/restes0901.html](http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/releases/2001/Q3/restes0901.html) for the news release; [www.ssw.upenn.edu/~restes/csec.htm](http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/~restes/csec.htm) for the study, and "Shining the Light on a Hidden Tragedy" by Elizabeth Greene, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 1, 2001 for an overview).

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Prostitution, Department of Justice, Canada

*Report and Recommendations in Respect of Legislation, Policy and Practices Concerning Prostitution-Related Activities*

December, 1998

<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/1998/toc.html>.

Jacksonville Community Council, Inc.

*Sex Trade Report: A Report to the Citizens of Jacksonville, FL Spring 2000.* [www.jcci.org](http://www.jcci.org) (Go to "Studies," then to "Contract Studies.").

Minnesota Attorney General's Office

*The Hofstede Committee Report: Juvenile Prostitution in Minnesota* November, 1999. [www.ag.state.mn.us](http://www.ag.state.mn.us).

Minnesota Coalition Against Prostitution.

*Inner City Neighborhoods and Prostitution: A Solutions Document 1996-present.* [www.angelfire.com/mn/mcap](http://www.angelfire.com/mn/mcap).

Montfort, Sue and Peggy Brick

*Unequal Partners: Teaching About Power and Consent in Adult-Teen and Other Relationships*

(curriculum). Morristown, N.J.: Planned Parenthood Centers of Greater Northern New Jersey, Inc. 2000.

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O'Leary, Claudine and Olivia Howard  
*The Prostitution of Women and Girls in Metropolitan Chicago:  
A Preliminary Prevalence Report*  
Chicago: Center for Impact Research, May 23, 2001.  
[www.impactresearch.org](http://www.impactresearch.org).

Phillips, Lynn M.  
*Unequal Partners: Exploring Power and Consent in Adult-Teen  
Relationships*  
Report of findings, Morristown, N.J.: Planned Parenthood Centers of  
Greater Northern New Jersey, Inc. 1997.

San Francisco Task Force on Prostitution  
*Final Report*  
City and County of San Francisco, CA, March 1996.  
<http://bayswan.org/SFTFP.html>.

Schoot, Erika and Samir Goswami  
*"Prostitution: A Violent Reality of Homelessness"*  
*The Facts Behind the Faces: A Policy Paper from the Chicago Coalition  
for the Homeless* Winter 2001.  
<http://www.chicagohomeless.org/CCHpolicy.pdf>.

## Organizations/Programs

*Young Women's Empowerment Project*  
*Formerly Advocates for Prostituted Women and Girls (APWG)*  
6600 N. Sheridan Rd., 2nd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60626  
773-764-0987  
[apwg@juno.com](mailto:apwg@juno.com)  
[www.youarepriceless.org](http://www.youarepriceless.org)

Claudine O'Leary, Founder and Youth Work Coordinator

Mission: To offer safe, respectful and free of judgment spaces for girls  
and young women impacted by the sex trade and street economies to  
recognize and develop their goals, dreams and desires.

Services: Harm reduction services including drop-in center, individual  
support, groups, opportunities for girls to be involved in the project  
through paid learning/working experiences, and art projects.

*Alternative for Girls*  
1950 Trumbull  
Detroit, MI 48216  
313-964-5450  
[www.comnet.org/afg](http://www.comnet.org/afg)

Amanda Good, Executive Director

Mission: Helping homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid  
violence, teen pregnancy, and exploitation, and exploring and accessing  
the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to be safe, to grow  
strong, and to make positive choices for their lives.

Services: Prevention programming including mentoring, tutoring and  
summer programs, family outreach, parent support groups, and vio-  
lence-free family evenings; street outreach providing support including  
support groups, activities, a resource center and case management ser-  
vices to girls and young women involved in prostitution, substance abuse,  
gang activity and unhealthy relationships; emergency shelter and transi-  
tion to independent living services for homeless girls and young women.

*Breaking Free*  
1821 University Ave. W #S-216  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
651-645-6557  
[vcarter@uswest.net](mailto:vcarter@uswest.net) (e-mail)

Vednita Carter, Director

Mission: To assist prostituted women and girls and battered women  
involved in the criminal justice system to escape from violence in their  
lives.

Services: Advocacy, case management, community organizing,  
educational support groups, public policy/expert testimony, intensive  
mentoring, and training for service providers, community activists,  
and others.

*Children of the Night*  
14530 Sylvan Street  
Van Nuys, CA 91411  
818-908-4474  
[www.childrenofthenight.org](http://www.childrenofthenight.org)

Dr. Lois Lee, Founder

Mission: To assist children ages 11–17 who are sexually abused and  
forced to prostitute on the streets.

Services: Toll-free nationwide 24-hour hotline, street outreach,  
residential services, on-site private school, ongoing support for program  
alumni.

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# Resources

## Exodus

c/o Sophia's Circle  
P.O. Box 248  
Evanston, IL 60202  
708-387-2466

Olivia Howard, President

Mission: To provide a continuum of care for the ongoing emotional, financial and spiritual support of women committed to recovery and healing from the violence of prostitution to stable and self-sufficient lifestyles.

Services: Mentoring, group support, financial planning, goal setting, referrals, HIV risk education, educational and child care resources, spiritual retreats, counseling and case management, career skills support, and educational presentations on prostitution and substance abuse.

## First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP)

Office of the District Attorney  
850 Bryant Street, 3rd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
415-553-1866

F.O.P.P. is a collaboration of SAGE, Inc., the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, the S.F. Police Department, S.F. Health Department, the mental health community and merchants.

Mission: To educate first time offenders about the legal, social, and health ramifications of engaging in prostitution.

Services: A seven-session class for first-time prostitution solicitation offenders.

Additional information:

- Hallinan, Terence. *F.O.P.P.: First Offenders Prostitution Program*. Office of the Attorney General, City and County of San Francisco, January, 1997.  
[www.ci.sf.ca.us/da/press/1998/p102298.htm](http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/da/press/1998/p102298.htm).
- "First Offender Prostitution Program," Innovations in American Government Program, 1998 Winner  
[www.ksg.harvard.edu/innovations/winners](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/innovations/winners).
- Nieves, Evelyn. "For Patrons of Prostitution, Remedial Instruction," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1999.
- Ybarra, Michael J. "Patrons Given a Graphic View of Prostitution," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1996.
- See [www.sageinc.org/prog-fopp.html](http://www.sageinc.org/prog-fopp.html) for a description of the program.

## Genesis House

911 West Addison  
Chicago, IL 60613  
773-281-3917  
[www.geneshouse.org](http://www.geneshouse.org)

Gayle McCoy, Executive Director

Mission: To offer hospitality to all adult women caught up in the system of prostitution, to provide an environment where they can make a free choice regarding their lifestyle and to assist those who choose to leave prostitution by offering them appropriate services and support.

Services: Long-term residential program providing a nurturing therapeutic community environment with rehabilitative services; outreach services including counseling, support groups, and HIV education; and awareness, education, and advocacy services providing a voice for change in the political, legal and social systems which contribute to the perpetuation of prostitution.

## Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (H.I.P.S.)

P.O. Box 21394  
Washington, DC 20009  
202-232-8150  
[www.hips.org](http://www.hips.org)

Mission: To end the cycle of abuse of sex workers on the streets, to work with them to improve their lives, and to give them tools to pursue a self-determined, independent, and productive way of living.

Services: Street outreach, hotline, Divas Against AIDS peer education program, foot patrol peer education program for young men, case management/referrals, assistance in acquiring legal documents, and volunteer speaker's bureau.

## Paul and Lisa Program, Inc.

DP. O. Box 348  
Westbrook, CT 06498  
860-767-7660  
Susan Breault, Executive Director  
[www.paulandlisa.org](http://www.paulandlisa.org)

Paul and Lisa provides outreach services, community court-based rehabilitation, prevention education, and professional training and technical assistance for professionals concerned about runaway, homeless, and exploited children, including law enforcement, educators, mental health professionals, clergy, and social workers.

For additional information:

Greene, Elizabeth. "A Businessman's Charity Uses Education and Dedication to Aid Teenagers." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 1, 2001.

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### Prostitution Alternatives Counseling Education (PACE)

P.O. Box 73537  
1014 Robson St.  
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1A7  
604-872-7651  
www.vcn.bc.ca/pacekids

Mission: To reduce the harm and abolish the conditions that lead to prostitution, and to create a caring and judgment-free environment where individuals can make a free choice regarding their lifestyle.

Services: Outreach and crisis intervention services; an innovative housing program for young women in the sex trade; and advocacy, education, prevention, and research services.

### Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Recovery Society (PEERS)

211-620 View Street  
Victoria BC V8W 1J6  
250-388-5325  
www.peers.bc.ca

Mission: The empowerment, education, and support of sex trade workers.

Services: Outreach, counseling, employment, hospitality, mail and message services, and volunteer opportunities for current, exiting, and former sex trade workers; education and advocacy including workshops for youth, service providers, teachers, police departments and others on topics ranging recruiting methods of pimps to how to support a loved one in the sex trade.

### Sisters Offering Support

Honolulu, HA  
808-941-5554  
www.soshawaii.org

Mission: Prostitution prevention and intervention through education and awareness.

Services: Individual counseling and peer group support, referral to community resources, crisis line, community education.

### Standing Against Global Exploitation (The SAGE Project, Inc.)

1271 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
415-905-5050  
www.sageinc.org

Norma Hotaling, Executive Director

SAGE provides services to women who are survivors of sexual exploitation, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other forms of trauma and to girls who are at risk in the community and in substance abuse and custody programs. SAGE services include case management, relapse

prevention, anger management, breath and movement therapy, art therapy, safety planning, counseling, and acupuncture. SAGE also works with men who are arrested for attempting to solicit a prostitute, through the First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP).

Additional information:

- "Endangered Species," a 25-minute video. Includes two segments, one focusing on SAGE's peer educator training program, which received the Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation, and the other on the Angel Network Use Your Life Award presented to SAGE by Oprah Winfrey. Available from SAGE.
- Greene, Elizabeth. "Charity Run by Former Prostitutes Steers Girls Away From the Street." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 1, 2001.

### Youth Advocate Program International

4545 42nd St. NW, Suite 209  
Washington, DC 20016  
202-244-1986  
www.yapi.org

Nancy Nye, Director

Laura Barnitz, Program Associate and coordinator of the U.S. Campaign Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

Mission: To promote the rights and wellbeing of youth on a global basis, giving particular attention to the plight of troubled and needy youth and to those victimized by armed conflict and by state and personal violence.

Services: The Youth Advocate Program International is an affiliate organization of the National Youth Advocate Program, Inc. NYAP develops and implements community-based services for troubled and needy youth. It is the parent organization of state affiliate programs in Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, South Carolina, Georgia and Illinois. YAPI provides advocacy training for nonprofit leaders, social workers, foster parents, and young people. YAPI started the U.S. Campaign Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, a coalition of 25 nonprofit organizations working to prevent youth from being exploited through commercial sex and to improve services for children seeking ways out of sexual exploitation.

Additional information:

- Barnitz, Laura A. "Children for Sale: Youth Involved in Prostitution, Pornography, and Sex Trafficking." Washington, D.C.: *Youth Advocate Program International Report*, Summer, 1998 [www.yapi.org/publications/resourcepapers.htm](http://www.yapi.org/publications/resourcepapers.htm).
- Greene, Elizabeth. "One Woman's Commitment to Children Helps Spur National Campaign." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 1, 2001.

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# Resources

## Videos

### Endangered Species

This 25-minute video about San Francisco's SAGE Project, Inc. includes two segments, one focusing on the SAGE peer educator training program for prostitution survivors which received the Peter Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation, and the other on the Angel Network Use Your Life Award presented to SAGE founder Norma Hotaling by Oprah Winfrey. Available from SAGE (see "Resources: Organizations/Programs," page 73).

### Women of the Shadows

The first segment of the December 1, 1999 (re-aired July 20, 2000) ABC 20/20 program, reported by Cynthia McFadden. This 40-minute video chronicles the lives of two prostituted women — a heroin-addicted street prostitute and a well-educated call girl — and their struggles to change their lives. The segment transcript (\$8.95) and DVD (\$29.95) are available from ABC News Home Video [www.abcnewsstore.com/frontpage.html](http://www.abcnewsstore.com/frontpage.html) or by calling 1-800-225-5222.

### American Pimp

A disturbing documentary, by urban filmmakers the Hughes brothers, of the violent world of pimps. The 90-minute video can be rented at local video stores or the DVD (\$19.95) can be obtained from MGM Home Entertainment [www.mgm.com](http://www.mgm.com).

## Web Sites

### [www.bayswan.org](http://www.bayswan.org)

BAYSWAN, the Bay Area Sex Worker Advocacy Network, is a collaborative project providing information for sex workers and about the sex industries. The website is geared toward sex workers, activists, students and faculty. The site includes dozens of pages and links, including general information and sex workers rights and service organizations. Examples:

- "Prostitution in the United States — The Statistics," on the Prostitutes' Education Network page, scroll down to "General Information" and click on "Compiled Statistics."
- Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (H.I.P.S.), on the Prostitutes' Education Network page, scroll down to "Sex Workers' Service Organizations and Websites" and click on "Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive."

### [www.catwinternational.org](http://www.catwinternational.org)

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women is a feminist human rights nongovernmental organization that works internationally to oppose all forms of sexual exploitation. The website includes CATW contacts, related sites, organizations, and publications. Example:

- Raymond, Janice G. and Donna M. Hughes. *Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends*. Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, March 2001 [www.catwinternational.org/sex\\_traff\\_us.pdf](http://www.catwinternational.org/sex_traff_us.pdf).

### [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) provides assistance to parents, children, law enforcement, schools and the community for recovering missing children and raising public awareness about ways to prevent child abduction, molestation, and sexual exploitation. The web site includes information about NCMEC's wide variety of informational and educational materials, many of which can be downloaded. Of particular interest:

- *Female Juvenile Prostitution: Problem and Response* (December 1992), an 88-page handbook which includes information on setting up community programs to help survivors of child prostitution
- *Prostitution of Children and Child-Sex Tourism: An Analysis of Domestic and International Responses* (April 1999), a 108-page report in cooperation with the American Bar Association offering insights into the nature and scope of the child prostitution problem and effective law enforcement responses.

### [www.prostitutionresearch.com](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com)

Led by noted prostitution researcher Melissa Farley, Prostitution Research and Education (PRE) develops research and educational programs to document the experiences of people in prostitution. Its comprehensive web site includes

- Fact sheets, including a "Prostitution Fact Sheet and Prostitution: Fact Sheet on Human Rights Violations"
- A list of organizations providing services for women and children escaping prostitution
- Links to activist web sites
- More than a dozen articles on topics including prostitution, violence and post traumatic stress disorder; a comparison of pimps and batterers; prostitution, racism and sexism; prostitution and civil rights; and trafficking of women; and a review of medical and social sciences literature on prostitution.



