

ENGAGING

COMMUNITY

ADDRESSING SEX TRAFFICKING
IN EDMONTON

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been funded by **Status of Women Canada** with additional funding from **The Canadian Women's Foundation**

ACT Alberta would like to gratefully acknowledge the essential contributions of research participants, forum attendees, dedicated staff members, volunteers, and community stakeholders whose experiences and insight form the basis of this project. We are particularly grateful to the survivors of trafficking who took the time to share their stories.

We acknowledge the following partners who have contributed time, expertise, and resources to the project:

CORE TEAM

Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation
Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton
YWCA Edmonton
ASSIST Community Services Centre
City of Edmonton – Community Services
City of Edmonton Councillor Scott McKeen
Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
Edmonton Police Service
Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women
REACH Edmonton
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Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, in response to growing concern over the issue of sex trafficking in Canadian communities, Status of Women Canada provided ACT Alberta with funding to develop a Community Action Plan to prevent and reduce sex trafficking of women and girls in Edmonton. This project was focused on developing a practical, cross-sectoral plan and was guided by Public Safety Canada's Local Safety Audit Guide: To prevent trafficking in persons and related exploitation. A Core Team of eleven distinct community stakeholders was convened to help guide and support this collaborative plan.

The project began with a Needs Assessment which provided the context necessary to develop a comprehensive and relevant Community Action Plan. The Needs Assessment included an analysis of Edmonton's demographics, a literature review, and a community-based participatory research study involving participants from a variety of sectors, including survivors of sex trafficking. To complement the formal research and stay connected with the community, we continued to consult with stakeholders throughout the duration of the project.

Stakeholders and research participants provided feedback in interviews, focus groups, surveys, meetings and forums.

We were impressed throughout the project by the level of interest from the community and the depth of the insights generated. Stakeholders identified both strengths and gaps in the current response to sex trafficking in Edmonton and provided suggestions for how we, as a community, can prevent and reduce sex trafficking locally. When we compiled the data from all of our consultations, four clear priorities emerged: (1) increase education, awareness and training; (2) focus on children and youth; (3) improve services through collaboration and community engagement; and (4) move beyond crisis intervention to address underlying inequalities in systems and structures. These four priorities provided the structure and scope for the Action Plan. We took these recommendations and priorities and developed strategies that were implementable and fit within the parameters and scope of the project. We also tried to create a plan that would not compete with, but rather build upon the work already happening in the community. By collaborating with partners, we were able to embed the Community Action Plan strategies into many existing projects and programs.

The Action Plan includes both short- and longer-term actions. ACT Alberta worked closely with Core Team members and other community partners to complete the short-term implementation projects before the end of the project in September 2015. As

increasing awareness, education, and training was the first priority in the Community Action Plan, we focused on training and awareness initiatives. For example, ACT Alberta staff provided training to Edmonton Police Services Police Information Check Section and other service providers. We also conducted a public campaign challenging individuals and organizations to participate in a free, online human trafficking training opportunity.

To ensure the sustainability of the Action Plan, we also laid the foundation for the long-term action items to be implemented after the formal project end date. Our stakeholders will carry much of this work forward. As this is a community-led project, there are opportunities for organizations and individuals to contribute to the implementation phase. Established and new community partners have taken ownership of this plan and are working to implement it within their own organizations and spheres of influence.



Amy Wilson, Project Manager

ABOUT ACT ALBERTA

The Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta Association (ACT Alberta) is a nonprofit organization mandated to identify and respond to all forms of human trafficking, a crime that affects women, men, and children. ACT Alberta's programs include coordinating services for victims of human trafficking, providing training to front-line service providers, engaging and educating the public, researching and collecting data on human trafficking, managing a Victims Assistance Fund, helping to develop policy provincially and nationally, and creating community-based responses to human trafficking. In addition, ACT Alberta works collaboratively with government agencies, law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations to identify the needs of victims and respond to human trafficking provincially through chapters in Calgary, Red Deer, and Edmonton.

DEFINITION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a concept that has evolved considerably over the years and is still frequently conflated with a range of issues. However, the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons provided a universal framework for understanding human trafficking in 2000. This framework has been broadly accepted and was the definition relied on throughout the course of this project.

According to this definition, human trafficking occurs when one of each of three major components is present, namely: (1) Action (such as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt), (2) Means (such as threat or use of force, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power), and (3) Purpose (exploitation through sexual exploitation, forced labour, or removal of organs).

Trafficking can occur either internationally (when an individual is trafficked across an international border) or internally (when all the stages of the crime occur within the borders of a given country).

According to data provided by ACT Alberta, human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, and the removal of organs has been reported in this province. However, this project is concerned exclusively with human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN EDMONTON

ACT Alberta has been tracking information on individuals victimized by trafficking in Alberta since 2008. Please note that these statistics are only reflective of cases reported to ACT Alberta within the province between 2008 and 2015 and are not generalizable.

As of April 2015, 54.3 percent of the survivors of trafficking assisted by ACT Alberta were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 35.9 percent for labour exploitation, 8.7 percent for both sex and labour exploitation, and 1.1 percent for organ trafficking. About three-quarters of the trafficked people assisted by ACT Alberta are women and girls.

Of those trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation, 81 percent have been trafficked internally within Canada and 19 percent have been trafficked into Canada from abroad. Notably, many of those assisted by ACT Alberta are foreign nationals who enter Canada through legal means (such as through the Temporary Foreign Worker program) and are subsequently trafficked.

To date, all of the individuals whom ACT Alberta has assisted who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation have been women or girls. However, ACT Alberta has received unconfirmed reports of men and boys also being victimized by this crime. Individuals victimized by trafficking in Alberta have been exploited online, in massage parlours, in street-level prostitution, and in private homes.

The first human trafficking charges in Edmonton were laid in 2009.

THE FOLLOWING CHART SUMMARIZES HUMAN TRAFFICKING CHARGES LAID IN EDMONTON FROM THAT YEAR UNTIL 2014.

Violations	Statistics	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Trafficking in persons	Actual Incidents	3	1	0	1	4	0
	Total Cleared	2	0	0	1	4	1
	Total Persons Charged	3	0	0	0	5	2

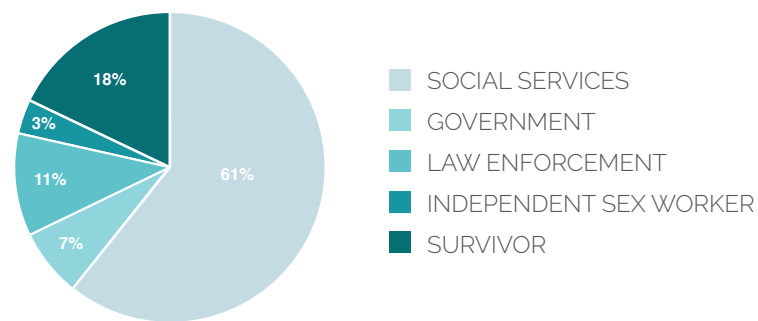
Table 1. Statistics Canada, 2015. CANSIM Table 252-0080: Incident-Based Crime Statistics, by Detailed Violations and Police Services.

PHASE ONE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The first phase of this project was devoted to gathering data about sex trafficking in Edmonton. It relied on the Local Safety Audit Guide published by Public Safety Canada and consisted of a demographics review of Edmonton, an extensive literature review, and a research study. For a full report of Phase One, please consult the Final Report.

The research study involved conducting in-person interviews and focus groups with a variety of research participants and analyzing the results in part using a Gender Based Analysis Plus lens. This analytical tool is used to examine how various factors intersect to create vulnerabilities, taking into account gender and other identifying factors.

Fig. 4. The different sectors research participants were from.



PERCEPTIONS OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN EDMONTON

Research participants used varying and shifting definitions of human trafficking that ranged from the extremely narrow to the very broad. For example, while some expressed the view that human trafficking only occurs when an individual is forcibly confined, smuggled over a border or moved city-to-city, others took a much broader view, arguing that various issues, including prostitution and sexual exploitation writ-large, must also be considered under the umbrella of sex trafficking. Definitional issues seemed to largely rest on the difficulties in distinguishing between various forms of exploitation. Research participants spoke to a continuum of abuse in which sex trafficking is only one of

many forms of harm. One abuse can shift into another, and it is often difficult to unravel the tangle of cause and effect. Part of the definitional challenge also lies in differences of ideology, particularly in regards to sex work. Some research participants conflated sex trafficking with sex work entirely and did not draw a distinction between the two. Conversely, the self-identified empowered sex worker interviewed stated that she had seen signs of exploitation but never trafficking in the sex trade industry in Edmonton.

The ambiguous definition is often shared by those victimized by this crime, who rarely self-identify as trafficked. Definitional confusion is

intensified by the stigma that surrounds the term, which is often tied up with notions of extreme forms of slavery. This finding reinforces a study on human trafficking that was conducted in Calgary in 2012, in which the effects of sensationalizing human trafficking were found to create challenges for appropriately identifying trafficked people. In the words of that study, "sensational media reports and awareness raising campaigns have created a stereotyped image of trafficked persons, which restricts law enforcement, service providers, and the general public from accurately identifying and understanding the lived experiences of trafficked persons."

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN EDMONTON

AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO SEX TRAFFICKING

Research participants drew attention to a variety of systems, institutions, and social norms that ensure that inequality and discrimination remain entrenched in Edmonton. These structural inequalities intensify and intersect with one another, creating layers of injustice based on the social location of individuals in society. One person can experience multiple forms of oppression that layer one another in nuanced and complex ways, contributing overall to an environment that is conducive to sex trafficking in Edmonton.

- **POVERTY**
Extreme economic distress threatens the basic survival of individuals and their loved ones. Impoverished people may be forced to scramble to provide basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare for themselves and their families. In the words of one service provider, “The core issue is about poverty and about resources.”
- **GENDER INEQUALITY**
Women tend to have fewer economic opportunities and resultantly work lower paying jobs. Rape culture, societal expectations, and derogatory attitudes deny female sexual agency, oftentimes effectively removing women’s ability to make empowered sexual choices. As one service provider argued, trafficking “is a highly gendered issue. Girls and women having to do whatever they need to do to either survive or provide for their children.”
- **NORMALIZED VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**
Childhood abuse, familial neglect, intergenerational trauma, and domestic violence all play a part creating an environment where control, violence, and manipulation is normalized and accepted. In the experience of one survivor, “if you have a history of being mistreated you’re already used to abnormal behaviours or manipulations being normal.”

- **ISOLATION**
Human trafficking is far more likely to occur when individuals are emotionally or physically isolated. One service provider noted that sex trafficked women and girls are “just looking for a sense of belonging and attachment. They just want to be loved and accepted.” The desire to feel loved and needed convinces many individuals to remain in abusive situations, including human trafficking.
- **DISCRIMINATION**
 - Against migrants**
Migrants face unique challenges in Canada. Certain migration barriers ensure that marginalized individuals are only able to enter Canada through low-skilled or illegal migration channels that lack oversight and safety mechanisms. There is a lack of structural accommodations for individuals with tenuous immigration status, making it difficult or impossible to access services.

Against Aboriginal peoples
Research participants repeatedly and strongly emphasized that Canada has a long and ongoing history of oppression of Aboriginal peoples through colonial policies and practices by government, religious institutions, and society at large. One service provider noted that “we certainly have a legacy of racism and discrimination that is still present and creates that vulnerability.”

Against people with mental health concerns and addictions
Research participants recognized that those who have mental health concerns and addictions find it difficult to access, use, and navigate systems and institutions in Edmonton. One survivor of trafficking recounted an incident in which she reached out to law enforcement: “I must have looked like I was freaked out and probably mentally

unstable. The thing is, if they think you’re mentally unstable then they just write you off.” In this case, law enforcement did not respond to her call; she was unable to access the criminal justice system due to an appearance of mental instability and she remained in her trafficking situation for some time thereafter.

Against sex workers
Not only do many sex workers experience severe physical and sexual assaults on a regular basis in the city, but many research participants reported instances of police not taking reports of rape and assault of sex workers seriously. Sex workers face discrimination and attacks that many other groups do not, leaving them more exposed to negative effects of structural inequalities.

Adults are affected, but youth more so. Although many youth are able to effectively cope with challenging life situations and adapt quickly to change, research participants repeatedly identified that youth who are affected by structural inequalities are more at risk to sex trafficking than adults. According to research participants, this is due in part to inexperience, a false sense of power and control, and undeveloped powers of resilience.

TRAFFICKERS IN EDMONTON

Research participants identified a broad spectrum of traffickers, including pimps, gang members, family members, romantic partners, friends, and employers. Most individuals who are victimized by sex traffickers know the person who is trafficking them. This pattern is similar to that found in other forms of sexualized violence, where perpetrators are predominately known to victims.

According to research participants, traffickers in Edmonton tend to be driven by three non-mutually exclusive motivations:

1 PREVIOUS TRAUMA.

Many traffickers come from backgrounds of abuse and neglect and may be affected by mental health issues as a result. In the words of one survivor, "they say you switch between being an abuser or being a victim. Maybe he felt like a victim when he was a child and then became the abuser, the manipulator, and it worked for him."



2 GREED.

Traffickers in Edmonton may be motivated by greed and guided by misogynistic expectations. In the words of one service provider, "they're looking for a quick fix, they're looking for a quick buck" and they see vulnerable women as an expendable means to that end.

3 COERCION.

Sex traffickers may also be trafficked themselves; some individuals (particularly females) may be forced to traffic others in order to ease their own trafficking situations.

Research participants reported that traffickers in Edmonton often get close to their potential victims through a fairly consistent grooming pattern. First, they identify individuals who are lonely, desperate, or have past histories of abuse, and then forge a friendship or a romantic relationship with them. Next, traffickers create economic and physical dependencies by providing luxurious gifts such as cell phones, expensive clothing, extravagant vacations, and drugs. Finally, the trafficker will force the victim into engaging in sexual activities without their consent and will take all or most of the financial proceeds.

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS STRESSED
THE EXTREME DIFFICULTIES OF
GETTING OUT OF TRAFFICKING
SITUATIONS DUE TO THE MECHANISMS
OF CONTROL EXERTED BY
TRAFFICKERS, WHICH INCLUDE:**

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

Traffickers will psychologically and emotionally manipulate victims in order to maintain control, often through feelings of shame or ties of romance or friendship.

PHYSICAL ADDICTIONS

Traffickers may deliberately ensure victims become addicted to drugs or alcohol in order to exert control over them.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Traffickers in Edmonton will physically and emotionally isolate victims. They may move them from location to location to limit the connections and relationships they develop, or they may physically confine an individual to a hotel room or house.

FEAR AND COERCION

Physical coercion is a key form of control that traffickers levy over victims. Traffickers also threaten and harm victims' loved ones to ensure compliance.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Victimized people may lack knowledge on how to leave a trafficking situation and be unaware of the options that are available to them, oftentimes due to the intentional withholding of information by traffickers.



PHASE TWO

COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN PHASE

Phase One added significantly to a local body of knowledge about sex trafficking in Edmonton. This knowledge, in conjunction with forums and ongoing consultations with varied stakeholders, was used to create the Community Action Plan. We identified the following four priorities:

PRIORITY 1

Increase awareness, education and training. Stakeholders stressed the importance of expanding the education on human trafficking and related issues currently being delivered in Edmonton. Confusion around the concept of human trafficking can lead to misidentification of trafficking cases, missed opportunities to assist victims, and inefficient use of resources.

PRIORITY 2

Focus on children and youth. We heard strongly from the community that youth are particularly vulnerable to traffickers, especially youth in care facilities such as group homes. Furthermore, many of the vulnerabilities that lead to sex trafficking have roots in childhood; effective prevention efforts must start there.

PRIORITY 3

Improve service provision through collaboration and community engagement. Although Edmonton has many services available, there are a number of gaps and barriers that could be addressed through increased collaboration and communication among NGOs, law enforcement agencies, and government departments.

PRIORITY 4

Address underlying structures and systems. Community members recognized the need for structural change in order to effectively prevent and reduce sex trafficking in Edmonton.

Ten goals were created that corresponded to these priorities and a number of corresponding strategies were developed to support the furtherance of these goals. **Please refer to the Final Report for the full Community Action Plan.**

PRIORITIES	GOALS	STRATEGIES
I. Increase awareness, education and training	1. Provide Training and Education to Service Providers	1.1. Deliver training targeted to front line service providers
		1.2. Challenge organizations to commit at least one staff member to take the British Columbia Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons' online human trafficking training
		1.3. Embed sex trafficking information into existing trainings and systems
		1.4. Continue to disseminate Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan
		1.5. Conduct further research
	2. Improve Access to Information about Services	2.1. Provide training and supports to women and girls working in industries where sex trafficking has been identified
		2.2. Improve accessibility of information about support resources
	3. Increase Public Awareness about Sex Trafficking in Edmonton	3.1. Develop and disseminate educational materials about sex trafficking to the general public
		3.2. Provide education to community groups
II. Focus on children and youth	4. Create and Disseminate Education for Youth	4.1. Embed information into existing youth programs
		4.2. Provide public educational opportunities for youth
	5. Develop Robust Response Mechanisms for Youth	5.1. Provide training to youth serving agencies
		5.2. Develop protocols with youth serving agencies
		5.3. Support a task force to research and lobby for changes to group care policies

PRIORITIES	GOALS	STRATEGIES
III. Improve service provision through collaboration and community engagement	6. Streamline Collaboration	6.1. Develop a comprehensive list of service provider programs and how to access these services
		6.2. Facilitate relationship and network building among agencies
		6.3. Develop and implement universal screening tools for partner organizations
		6.4. Develop protocols with partner agencies for working with trafficking victims
		6.5. Develop a regional response to trafficking
	7. Target Communities for Engagement	7.1. Target specific marginalized communities for engagement
		7.2. Create an advisory group of survivors of trafficking that ACT Alberta can consult with on training and awareness materials
	8. Address Service Gaps and Barriers	8.1. Build community capacity to make Temporary Resident Permits more accessible
		8.2. Find opportunities for free or reduced legal services
8.3. Find alternate ways to meet needs of victims and reduce barriers within the community		
IV. Address underlying structures and systems	9. Develop Safe and Inclusive Systems	9.1. Explore options for making public spaces safer for women and girls
		9.2. Explore the possibility of instituting Sanctuary City policies in Edmonton
		9.3. Reduce tacit support in surrounding industries such as hotels, taxis and car service, buses
		9.4. Develop collaboration between organizations to develop strategies to make the process of testifying safer for victims
	10. Strengthen and Support Existing Initiatives Advocating for Structural Change	10.1. Work with stakeholders to strengthen and support existing organizations, coalitions, and initiatives that advocate for positive structural change

If you think your organization can help support this work, please contact ACT Alberta to discuss possibilities for collaboration.



PHASE THREE IMPLEMENTATION

After the completion of the Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan, the project entered the final phase – implementation. Notably, this project was only required to implement one activity for the purposes of evaluation. However, due to the strong interest and support this project has received, ACT Alberta and the Core Team were able to implement seventeen of the recommended activities. This accomplishment highlights Edmonton's readiness to take action on sex trafficking and the strong collaboration and support of the community.

If your organization can help support the implementation of the Community Action Plan, please contact ACT Alberta to discuss possibilities for collaboration.



CONCLUSION

This project has been instrumental in creating a local body of knowledge on sex trafficking in Edmonton and how best to respond to this issue. In Phase One, we learned that a variety of systems, institutions, and social norms ensure that inequality remains entrenched in Edmonton, in turn creating a context that is conducive to sex trafficking. Structural inequalities rooted in poverty, gender inequality, isolation, normalized violence, and various forms of discrimination intersect and combine with one another in complex ways to contribute to layered vulnerabilities. Marginalized and disadvantaged people are thus made susceptible to a variety of harms and slip through systemic gaps.



The Community Action Plan took this local body of knowledge and adapted it to inform a collaborative response that consists of short-, medium- and long-term activities. A number of items were implemented, largely as a result of the outpouring of support from the community. This project would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance and participation of the Core Team, research participants, forum attendees, stakeholders, and dedicated staff and volunteers who worked on this project.

We look forward to continuing to implement this Community Action Plan and are confident that it will be effective in addressing the sex trafficking of women and girls in Edmonton. Together, we can create a safer and more equitable future for our community.

