

CITY OF NANAIMO

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE  
NANAIMO'S ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE  
THE HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE  
SEX TRADE

2015

NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA

# Introduction

---

## SEX WORK IN NANAIMO, HISTORY AND TRENDS

The sale and purchase of sex in Nanaimo is not a new phenomenon; a ‘red light district’ was in place on Frazer Street in the 1890s and the sale of sexual services by individuals has been found in Nanaimo ever since. Then, as now, the exploitation of vulnerable women has also been a consistent feature of the sex trade. Then, as now, those exchanging sexual services routinely encounter violence in their work lives and discrimination in their personal lives. Though it might seem that little has changed, societal attitudes have shifted since the 1890s with a recognition that those involved in the sex trade are often marginalized within our community, leaving these individuals at increased risk of exploitation and harm inflicted by predators. Gaining an understanding of how to most effectively reduce the harms associated with the sex trade is thus essential.

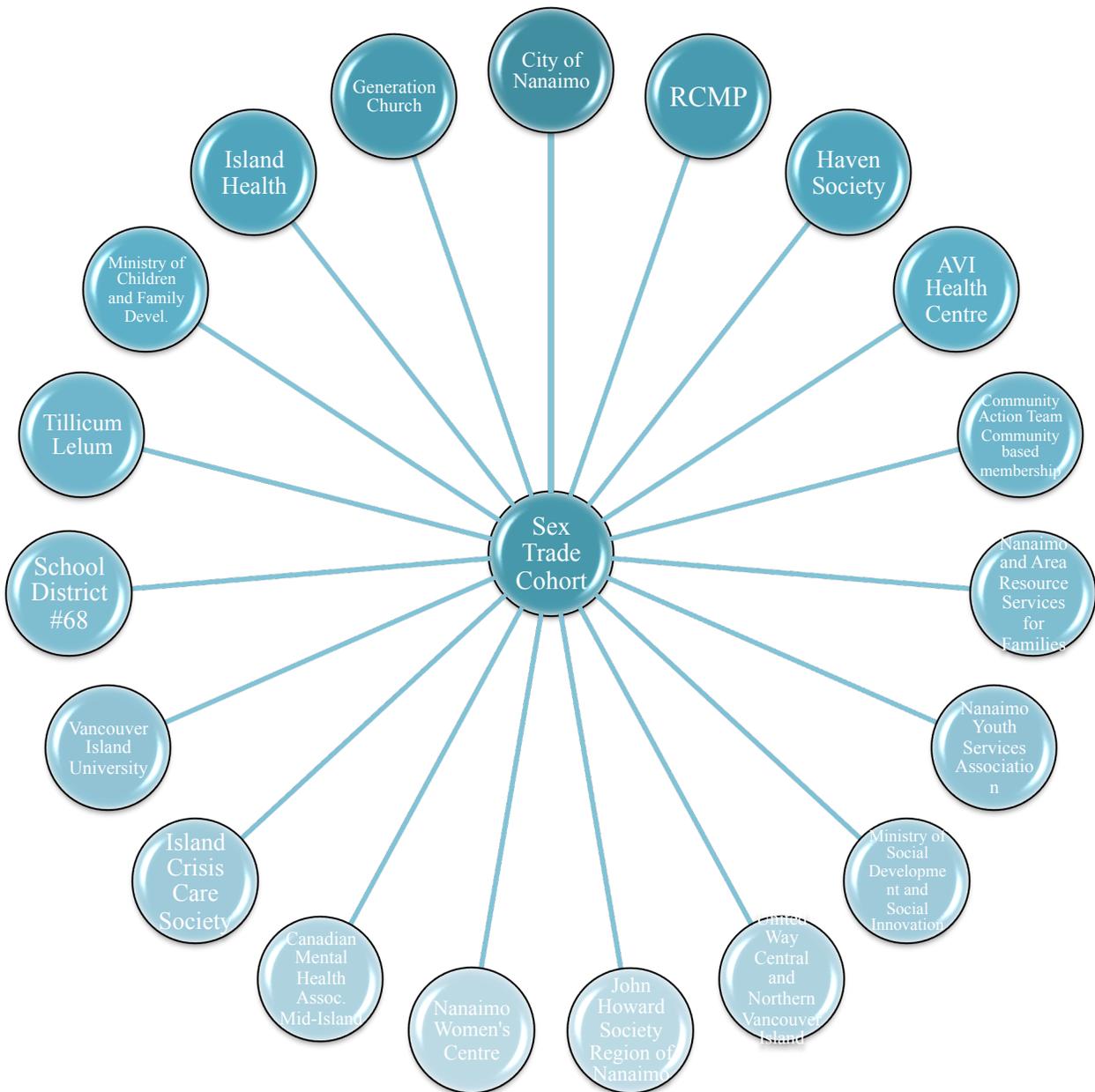
Presently, those found within Nanaimo’s sex trade are diverse, with representation from all genders, ages and ethnicities. However, within this group, women, particularly Aboriginal women, are over-represented within the trade as a result of historical and present day discriminatory practices. Individuals participate in the sex trade from a variety of settings including: the streets, brothels, massage parlours and personal residences. Nanaimo’s sex trade is diverse, with the experiences of those involved in the trade varying. It is important to understand that within Nanaimo’s sex trade, individuals may vary from being victims of human trafficking, employed through high end escorting agencies and/or found on a street corner looking for work. It is therefore not possible to generalize the experiences of all individuals involved in the trade. Additionally, as technology continues to become increasingly accessible, advertisements to exchange sexual services is increasingly found in web-based form. As a result, contact with individuals involved in Nanaimo’s sex trade is now often found through the Internet rather than street corners. Evidently, the sex trade within Nanaimo is diverse, complex and continuously evolving.

Taking into consideration the diversity found in Nanaimo’s sex trade, a coalition has been formed including social service agencies, RCMP, planners, sex trade workers and social service organizations. The Cohort has identified their primary objective being to focus attention towards addressing the specific safety needs of those most vulnerable within the trade and to provide supports to reduce the harms associated. Although all individuals in the trade may be confronted with issues surrounding safety, those in increased positions of vulnerability are those who participate in the survival sex trade. The survival sex trade includes those who participate in the trade to meet their basic survival needs including access to shelter, money, drugs, alcohol or companionship. More information pertaining to Nanaimo’s Sex Trade Cohort can be found on page 4.

Sex Trade Cohort Vision Statement:

*To reduce the harm associated with exchanging sexual services in Nanaimo, to protect the vulnerable and prevent sexual exploitation and to establish a co-ordinated, effective, collaborative approach in supporting those involved in or affected by the sex trade.*

COLLABORATION OF AGENCIES



# Nanaimo's Action Plan

---

## SAFETY

1

Continue to implement missing persons reporting system supported by *Nanaimo's Sex Trade Cohort* and the RCMP and to effectively and consistently make available the information to all cohort members.

Nanaimo's missing persons reporting system for those involved in the sex trade arose from *Forsaken, the Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*, by Wally Oppal: "The Oppal Report." In Nanaimo, we are committed to ensuring the safety of individuals who are involved in the sex trade and the missing persons reporting system continues to be a key component of this commitment.

2

Create/obtain a smart phone application that will allow for one touch alert.

A good example of this technology is the smart phone application "*Emergensee*." The application user can pre-set three personal contacts. The application allows to transmit live streaming video and GPS data to the pre-set contacts who will receive a Text and SMS containing a link to the person's live streaming video and GPS data. The contacts may use the information provided to access what and if support is required.

3

Continue production and circulation of "bad date" (violent offence) sheet and reporting system to identify predatory or violent consumers.

4

Provide access to existing and currently available safe facilities for vulnerable individuals exiting the sex trade through the provision of Provincially and Federally supported housing options.

## ENHANCING DIRECT SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

5

Facilitate a system that enables sex trade workers to connect with accessible services, resources and programs to meet their health needs. Provide outreach that addresses health, legal, and social, psychosocial needs.

For example, individuals involved in survival sex trade work often lack access to a primary care physician for a variety of reasons. Identifying and implementing systems that may mitigate barriers in accessing a primary care physician would positively support the health and wellbeing of individuals involved in the trade. Outreach services are another example of essential services required by those involved in the sex trade.

6

Provide a peer-driven safe space for vulnerable individuals involved in the sex trade to build relationships, participate in healthy activities and access community resources. Enhance the nutritional supports provided, specifically to those involved in the sex trade.

Local research conducted by Lafrenière & Barron (2014), illustrates the importance of access to a safe, accessible, comfortable space whereby sex trade workers may build relationships, access programming and provide opportunities for appropriate community referrals. A peer-driven safe space is essential to ensure the unique safety needs of those involved in the sex trade, particularly those most vulnerable, are met.

7

Provide opportunities for training, education, transitional employment options and ongoing support through intense case management to individuals exiting sex work.

Making appropriate connections with the community to ensure the availability of a structured care plan with access to services including: trauma counselling, addiction support, skills training, education and housing opportunities. Partnerships with all stakeholders, including local businesses, is essential for success of such a plan.

## Preventing Sexual Exploitation of Youth

8

Develop and implement a youth relocation plan and assist with family reunification.

The provision of a transitional individualized plan for youth wishing to exit the sex trade is essential towards increasing the safety of this vulnerable population. Such services, programs and resources may include: shelter, day programming, community mentorship, employment training and education options.

9

Prevent the sexual exploitation of young people by developing and delivering education and prevention programs and materials to inform youth and their families of the risks and harms associated with sex work. Such programming may become accessible through various settings including School District 68, local service providers and social media.

Various inter-connected factors may influence youth becoming involved in the sex trade including access to drugs and alcohol, deception and coercion, economic stability and autonomy. Youth are found in positions of increased vulnerability and thus their unique circumstances must be taken into account when developing programs, resources and services to protect youth from sexual exploitation.

## Awareness and Education

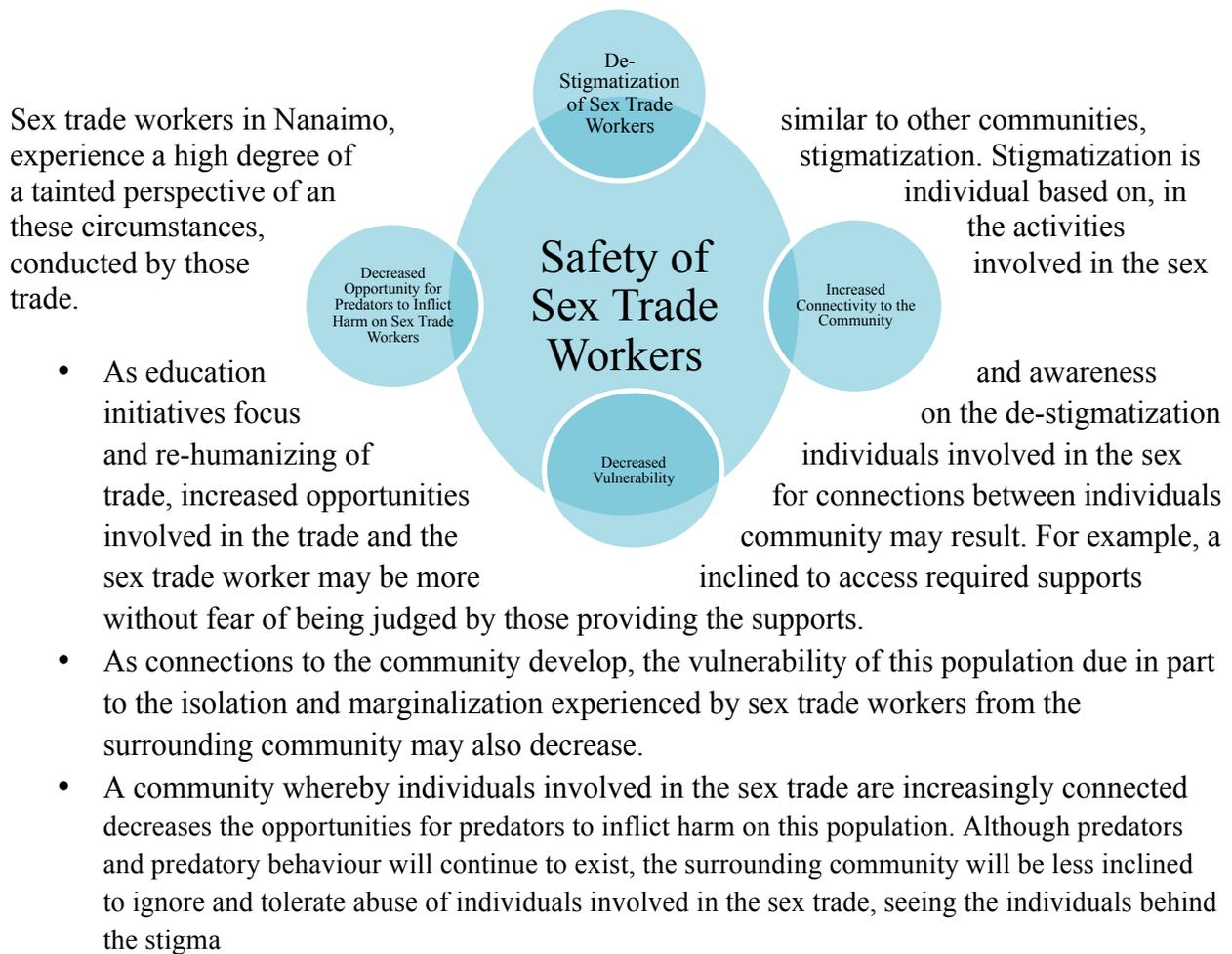
10

Inter-agency collaboration- working effectively within confidentiality arrangement. Develop public information strategies to prevent sexual exploitation and the recruitment of young people into sex work.

11

Increase education and awareness initiatives aimed at de-stigmatizing individuals involved the sex trade.

The below graph illustrates the manner in which education and awareness programs aimed at de-stigmatizing individuals involved in the sex trade simultaneously may provide opportunities for increased safety of this population. This graph does not imply a cause and effect, but instead provides a visual tool to describe associations between the factors.



12

Raise awareness to consumers of the impacts and consequences that may result through involvement in the sex trade.

Increasing education and awareness to consumers of the risks that may be associated through involvement with the sex trade provides opportunities for consumers to make increasingly informed decisions.

13

Develop a collaborative, centralized system for local service providers to share the information and resources required to effectively provide person-centred supports.

An example of such a system may be a centralized website where by service providers may collaboratively access and share necessary information and resources to provide person-centered supports.

14

Continue to identify, educate and implement applicable research initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluating best practice with the support of the Nanaimo's Sex Trade Cohort to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the sex trade activities and to identify the most effective method to implement supports in Nanaimo. Vancouver Island University (VIU), for example, continues to contribute to the cohort's local research of the experiences of individuals involved in Nanaimo's sex trade. This research, along with other local research initiatives, provides opportunities for programs, resources and services to more effectively meet the unique needs of those involved in Nanaimo's sex trade.

15

Educate local service providers to recognize signs of sexual exploitation or human trafficking.

Individuals involved in the sex trade may access a range of services, some not directly related to the sex trade. It is important that those providing services are able to effectively recognize and support sexually exploited individuals to appropriately refer to available resources and services. Services may include: Island Health, Immigrant Services, School District 68, Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation and Ministry of Children and Family Development.

*X's Story*

*A story from a sex trade  
worker...*

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

16

Develop a resource guide that provides information relevant to the immediate crisis needs for individuals in the sex trade including maps and information of local supports. Providing information to individuals involved in the sex trade that is clear, effective and accessible pertaining to resources and services is essential towards increasing the safety of vulnerable individuals in the trade.

A scaled down version of the City of Nanaimo's Surviving in Nanaimo guide with the addition of some maps may be a good starting point. Provision of drop boxes providing options for reporting such incidents.

17

Through the Nanaimo Sex Trade Cohort, establish ongoing partnerships between community-based organizations and academic institutions to ensure continuous feedback between research, policy and practice.

The Nanaimo Sex Trade Cohort is in the development stages of structuring the Cohort in such a way that the collaborations made available through the group are efficiently implemented to engage all partners and provide avenues to successfully reduce the harms associated with the sex trade.

18

Provide neighbourhoods affected by the sex trade with access to resources and supports required to increase safety of all those within the community.

Continuing to engage neighborhoods affected by the trade in discussions surrounding increasing community safety through access to education, awareness and supports in the work being conducted within Nanaimo's Sex Trade Cohort is one of the essential goals of the group.

19

Continue to offer safety oriented enhancements of community infrastructure in neighbourhoods affected by the sex trade.

Continuing to maintain community infrastructure including appropriate lighting, street cleaning and enhanced maintenance of public areas.

*X's Story*

*A story from a neighbour...*

To ensure safe and fluid options for exiting the sex trade, it is essential to provide various housing options including: short term, transitional and long term housing options.