

# **Street-Level Prostitution**

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## **Dispelling the Myths**

**Stories of the Effects of  
Street-Level Prostitution  
on Communities**

## **WHO WE ARE**

The Hintonburg Community Association, Inc., represents the Hintonburg community in the near west end of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. The HCA was founded in 1991, incorporated in 2000, and has approximately 400 paid members. The association is active in a number of areas that are important to life in the community, including security, schools, zoning and development, and parks and streets. In addition to work in many other areas, the HCA has been a leader in devising innovative approaches to the problem of street prostitution. In the belief that simply pushing the problem to another community does not contribute to an overall solution, we have focussed on creative strategies. We initiated the Ottawa John School, and served as the pilot project site. This has now become a pre-charge diversion program for the entire city. Similarly, we developed "Sex Trade Activity Report" (STAR) cards, which residents use to record and report the activity of street prostitutes and their customers. We also initiated a clean-up program for discarded syringes and other dangerous debris throughout the city, and developed a program of addressing problem properties through a combination of working closely with the police and with the city to insure compliance with zoning and property standards.

This document is available on the internet at <http://www.hintonburg.ottawa.com>.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The stories contained herein represent the views of those who related them and do not necessarily represent the views of the Hintonburg Community Association, Inc., or any of the other organizations or individuals that contributed to the production of this document. No attempt has been made to verify details or the incidents described.

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## INTRODUCTION

Street-level prostitution is a problem that has a serious impact on communities in cities across the country and throughout the world. Considerable information has been amassed about the women and men who are trapped for various reasons in the life of a street prostitute. A number of other projects have focussed on the reasons johns seek street prostitutes.

However, the purpose of this project is to give a voice to the countless innocent people in various Ottawa communities whose lives and livelihoods have been negatively affected by street-level prostitution.

This project was undertaken as a way to begin documenting the effects of street prostitution. As a first step, it was important to document the perceptions of the community, by collecting stories from community residents and business people in areas of Ottawa where prostitutes have been endemic. Residents with stories to tell were identified by word of mouth and through written notices. Interviewers then converted the oral tales into written form. Several people, including some who were affected most profoundly, provided written stories. In all cases, the original storyteller approved the final version. This is not a scientific sampling of residents, and there is naturally a bias toward those who felt they had stories to tell and for whom the issue has importance. However, the stories of all who agreed to talk are included here, and no attempt was made to select for content.

Many in the larger community feel that prostitution is an act between two consenting adults, causing little harm to anyone else, and should be largely tolerated. It is seen as a victimless crime. Most citizens have no idea of the devastating impact street-level prostitution has on a community. These stories illustrate the link between prostitution and other illegal activities, such as the drug trade, discarded drug paraphernalia and an increase in robberies and violence.

We have heard the following comments (in bold) many times from those who don't live with prostitution on their streets. We attempt to answer them here:

**What is the harm?** The harassment of ordinary women on the street, the recruitment of neighbourhood children to run drugs, the crack house next door, all these harms follow street prostitution into a community.

**It is the prostitutes' choice.** The majority of street prostitutes are heavily involved in drugs. They have a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, hepatitis and HIV. Working the streets is not a safe activity, but prostitutes have no choice, as they are trapped in a life in which they must make money to buy drugs or to supply a pimp.

**It is just an act between two consenting adults! It is no one's business. Keep out of the bedrooms of the nation!** But this act is conducted in residents' backyards, in the parks and back lanes. The condoms, syringes and drug paraphernalia that are left behind litter the street and the children's parks. It degrades the neighbourhood.

**It could be a tourist attraction.** Ordinary businesses suffer, as shoppers prefer to go where they won't be harassed. Consequently, businesses eventually close, and empty stores signal a neighbourhood's decline.

**It won't go away, legalize it!** Finding a place where prostitution will be accepted is difficult. Where will the women with sexually transmitted diseases work? In Nevada, illegal street prostitution flourishes around the legal brothels. Women who would not be eligible to work in a legitimate establishment undercut the brothel prices. Some men prefer the anonymity of the street to the visibility of a brothel. The illegal trade flourishes.

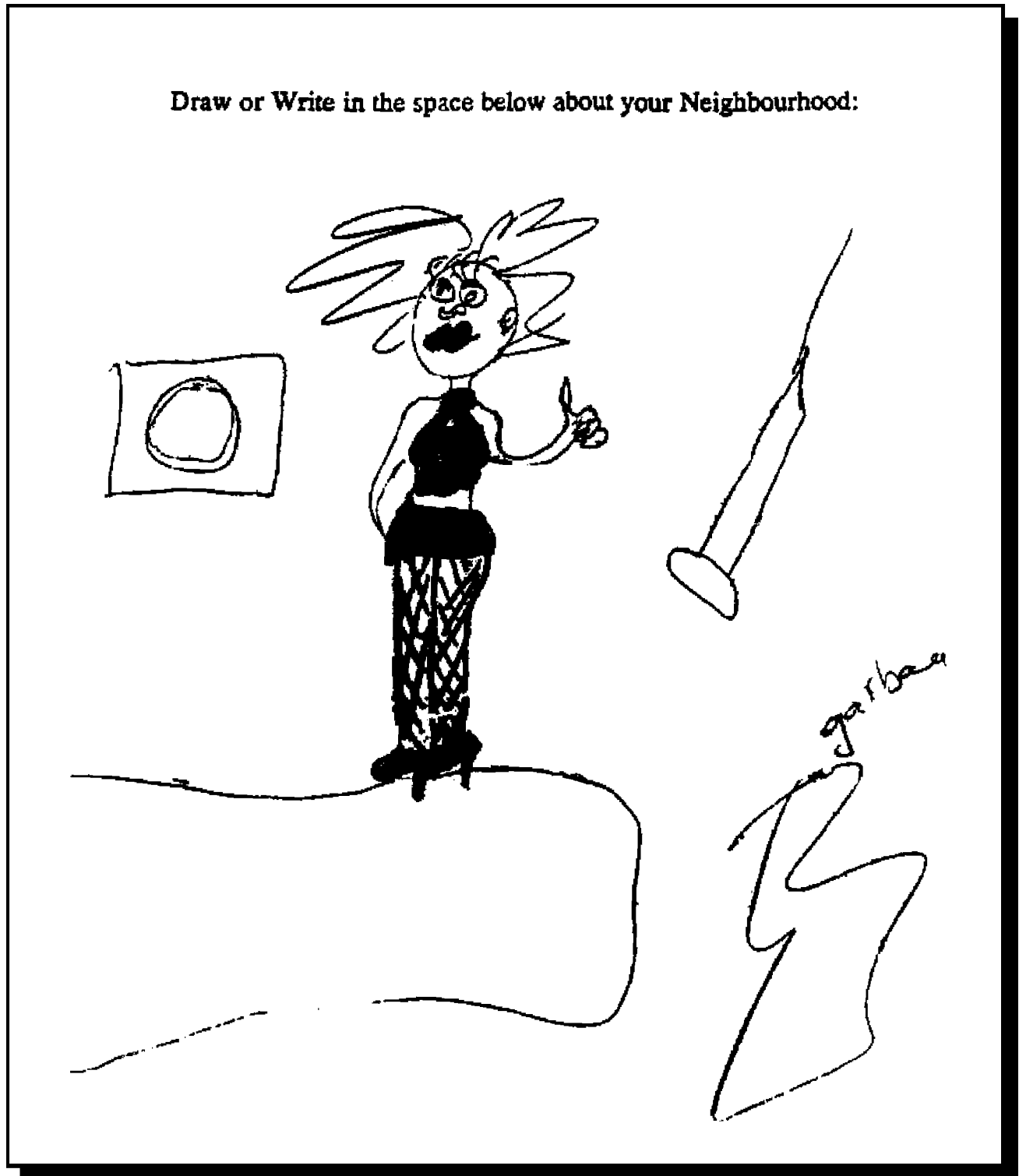
In the following pages, there are roughly two dozen different stories. Each story stands on its own to provide an example of how a single person or family was affected by street prostitution. Together, they clearly demonstrate the harm done to communities and the people who live in them.

These stories will attest to the way in which attitudes shift radically when street prostitution moves into a neighbourhood. Residents quickly learn first-hand the harm that is done to a large number of people—children, adults and businesses. For many, eliminating street prostitution becomes the top priority. In the final section we have listed some successful strategies to decrease street-level prostitution and reclaim the community, based on our experience.

### WHAT THE CHILDREN SEE

In the summer of 1997 Somerset West Community Health Centre conducted a Youth Needs Assessment in two downtown Ottawa communities.

In one exercise, a group of children (ages seven to sixteen) were asked to draw or write about their neighbourhood. This is what they drew: prostitutes, syringes and condoms.



MORE DRAWINGS BY THE CHILDREN.

My neighbourhood sucks!



Needles  
~~BAD~~  
flowers  
Good



## A MOTHER LEAVES THE COMMUNITY

I moved out of the neighbourhood partly because of the prostitution problem.

I didn't know how to get the problem to go away, so I did.

Prostitution is a problem children should not have to deal with. Walking your children to school, you are bound to see at least one used condom on the ground. You have to warn your children not to play in the tall grass because there might be dirty syringes thrown there. Every spring I take a syringe out of the kitchen cupboard and show it to my children, telling them, "If you ever see anything that looks like this don't touch it." The school has similar programs to educate kids about the dangers associated with

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***Walking your children to school, you are bound to see at least one used condom on the ground.***

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syringes. There are posters in the school with a picture of a needle in a circle with a big red line through it. It is sad that four-year-olds have to be aware of the dangers of used condoms and dirty syringes. I can't allow my kids to have bare feet on a summer day in the park for fear they might step on a used needle.

Prostitution affects other parts of the neighbourhood as well. There are drugs and drug dealers. There is also crime. Some people have large vicious dogs to protect either themselves or their drugs. One evening I was out walking in our neighbourhood and I was eight months pregnant. A man in his car was following me and trying to solicit me because he thought I was a prostitute. I don't know why there is prostitution in our neighbourhood—I just want the problem to go away.

## A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

In my neighbourhood, street prostitutes have been a serious problem. At times, they've completely taken over the streets. There were often several at once working only a block away from my house and right

near the school. Some of them are extremely aggressive, and stand in the street and try to flag down and stop cars to proposition the men inside. Some are more discreet, but it's easy to spot them as you learn to recognize the usual behavior.

One thing that's almost universal is the hitchhiking. If a woman is hitchhiking in our neighbourhood, she's soliciting. Another obvious sign is if she's looking into each car passing by, making eye contact with the driver.

It's particularly aggravating when I am driving alone, since any man driving alone is assumed to be a customer. I couldn't stop at many corners in my neighbourhood without having a prostitute come up to the car. The regulars know my car by now, so they don't bother any more. But it's still a problem every time a new one sets up shop.

Most, if not all, of the prostitutes in our area are addicted to drugs, so getting a customer means getting a fix. If they are having difficulty finding a customer, they pace and become very agitated and more and more aggressive. Drug dealers are always somewhere near where the prostitutes are working, and you can see the prostitutes getting dropped off and going straight to the dealer. The number of drug dealers and prostitutes always fluctuates together. The more prostitutes there are around, the more drug dealers there are.

The problem is not just seeing it on the street, or having the streets taken over, but also the disgusting and dangerous trash that's left behind. When the number of prostitutes goes up, so does the number of used syringes on the ground. I've found syringes on my lawn and in the local parks. As a result, we've

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***Some of them are extremely aggressive, and stand in the street and try to flag down and stop cars to proposition the men inside.***

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had to teach our kids to watch out for syringes on the ground where they play, and make sure they know not ever to touch them. We've taught them to not poke around in bushes or piles of leaves. Sometimes,

the bright orange tips are easy to see, but sometimes they're partly hidden, so it's hard.

Used condoms are another thing that's left behind. I think the customers toss them out of their car when they're done. I've found used condoms hung on the fence behind my house, since there's a lane behind the yard. One time, my bicycle picked up a used condom from the street just outside my house, and got so wrapped around and pulled into the gears that I had to take it to the bike shop and get the gear replaced. When there are lots of prostitutes, there are lots of used condoms, and it's disgusting.

Fortunately, there have been fewer prostitutes lately. People in our community aren't putting up with it any more, and I think this has helped. I certainly don't want to let them ever take over our streets again.

### **A HOMEOWNER PICKS UP SUBCULTURE'S GARBAGE**

The part of street prostitution that totally amazes me is the incredible volume of "garbage" left on the streets and in the parks of a community where street prostitution is active.

This garbage includes used syringes and used condoms plus various paraphernalia that is a part of the subculture: syringe and condom wrappers, sterile water bottles, bleach bottles, and syringe caps. I would never have believed the sheer volume had I not seen it and picked it up myself.

The spring melt in my community was a horrendous ushering in of a horrible summer that was about to begin. Syringes and condoms started to appear in the melting snow in parking lots and, more worrisome, in children's parks.

Every weekend I went out and toured the parks, parking lots and other areas, picking up and recording the quantity and location of syringes and condoms. Most were in or near parks, schools or daycare centre—where children frequent. It was distressing that the most vulnerable in our society, our children, should be the group with the most exposure to this potentially deadly material.

It was clear that no one in authority believed there

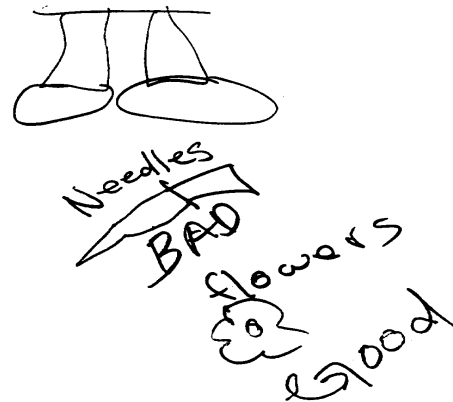
was a problem. Requested help was refused.

I decided to record my findings and document the magnitude of the problem. That summer I collected more than 200 used syringes plus bags full of used condoms within a one block radius of my home. The following summer, other volunteers and I collected 190 used syringes in a wider area of the community.

How can any community have any quality of life with this garbage all over?

### **A PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION?**

I live very close to a primary school. When street prostitution came to my area I was astonished that the most active area for soliciting would be right around the two primary schools. My community has always cherished children and to have these areas as the primary focus for illegal activity was devastating. My community and I have learned that you do not have street prostitution without discarded used



syringes as part of the activity. If the main area for street prostitution is at the primary school, that is where the used syringes will be left.

One day I was stopping at a local business. There were two street prostitutes out working as a tag team on the streets beside the primary school. The police were called, but as soon as they came, the two street prostitutes left. At the same time a truck parked behind the school right across from the gate where the children enter the school yard and playground. Minutes later, one of the street prostitutes returned and walked directly to the truck, obviously a familiar meeting place for both of them. School was almost ready to resume after lunch, so there were some young children heading back to the gate to enter the

school yard. They had to walk past the prostitute and john as they negotiated their transaction.

These children are not oblivious to this activity. At a very young age they know what prostitution is and how to spot a street prostitute. They have been taught what to do if they find a syringe and they know where they come from. They know their school yard is used for this illegal activity. The school staff regularly check the school yard and playground for syringes and condoms.

Why do the young children in my community have to put up with syringes and condoms in their play yard? How can the johns do this to any child? Many johns have children of their own. Why are the children in my community subjected to this activity that they do not subject their own children to?

## **A NEW HOMEOWNER'S DREAMS UNRAVEL**

My husband and I scrimped and saved and made do without for years so that we could buy our first house. Before signing the deal, we checked out the neighbourhood. Reliable sources gave the area a seal of approval. We checked out the neighbours—most had children or were about to. The location had everything we were interested in. Directly behind our dream house was a primary school with two playgrounds, a junior high school within walking distance, a bus stop just down the street, bakeries, lots of interesting restaurants, video stores, corner stores, all nearby. It was perfect.

I moved in with my white-picket-fence dreams and images of my future children racing between the school yard, the neighbours' homes and the corner store.

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***It breaks my heart each time I see a prostitute working the same corner where one of the primary school kids is a crossing guard.***

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Two years later, my dream started to unravel. Street prostitution moved in almost overnight. At first I was oblivious to the signs. My husband would point out

the street prostitutes. At first I did not believe him, but it didn't take long to realize that what he said was true as the physical evidence began to build.

We found condoms and a syringe in our backyard. I had to start scouring the yard each time my young nephew came to play, to protect him from what might have been discarded there the night before. When out-of-town guests visited, I would warn them of what they might find in my garden. As we toured the neighbourhood, they would see the local street prostitutes, stoned and working at the corner of my street.

It breaks my heart each time I see a prostitute working the same corner where one of the primary school kids is a crossing guard.

One day after work, still dressed in a business suit, I walked to the corner store. On my way, a car slowed. The man inside said, "Hey you're cute, nice suit, I want to see your eyes." Do you know what it feels like to be given the once-over 'cause someone thinks you're one of "those girls?"

My friends and relatives encouraged me to move from the "crummy neighbourhood." Whenever I tell people where I live, they question why I stay. However, I love my community and my neighbours and I want to stay and make this a better place.

Efforts by the community have made a difference. Street prostitution has decreased after several years of hard work. But the bad reputation my community gained came as quickly as street prostitution, and it is a reputation that has been very difficult to change in the media despite the positive changes.

## **A LOSS OF TRUST**

I've lived here for the past twenty years, and the thing that struck me the hardest about the increase in prostitution was the loss of trust in the people in our community. Years ago, it was more like a village where people were friendly and open. Now, you don't feel so much like smiling or nodding in a friendly way at people on the street.

It took us a while to truly appreciate how the prostitution was affecting the community until incidents starting sharpening our awareness. What happened to

me was, I was mistaken for a prostitute. I thought, I am a woman well over forty, so if they could mistake me for a prostitute, then anybody could be one.

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***I realized what he was after and said, "Well, you better get out of here. We take down the licence numbers of people like you and give them to the police."***

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It was in the fall during a municipal election about nine years ago when I was delivering pamphlets. I was wearing warm, comfortable clothes suitable for that time of year, and was quite tired, dragging my feet. It was just after dark and I was on my way home when a nice car slowed down beside me. A gentleman in his sixties, who was well dressed, was looking around while driving. He appeared lost and because of all the one way streets, it can be quite confusing, so I thought he needed directions. I went to the car and asked, "Can I help you? Are you looking for something?" He muttered something, and it was like he was unable to ask for what he wanted. I asked again but still couldn't hear what he said. After asking one more time, I realized what he was after and said, "Well, you better get out of here. We take down the license numbers of people like you and give them to the police." So he drove off very quickly. I wasn't scared because I was only a few blocks from home, but that was the incident that made me realize that the situation is much worse than we ever thought it would be.

## **A NEWFOUND ALERTNESS**

I never had a problem with prostitution before it came to my community and more specifically to my street. I felt it was an act between two consenting adults, what's the harm in it? I had no idea the harm prostitution causes to so many people and to the community.

One long weekend in the spring, I went into the children's park next to my house late in the afternoon. Neighbourhood kids were playing on the play equipment. They seemed oblivious to the used condoms draped over the bushes and flowers in the community-planted gardens, as well as those thrown into the sand in the children's play area.

I returned home immediately to get a bag and gloves to pick up this disgusting debris before the kids noticed it. Included among the discards that I did not see at the beginning was a used, bloody tampon left near the condoms. The children were still playing in the park as I picked up the condoms and tampon.

Two boys were playing near the gardens and climbing in the trees. One of the boys jumped down from one of the trees. He came down on one knee near the base of the tree and then he and the other boy ran off playing. After they left, I saw a syringe in the dirt near the base of the tree - with the needle bent and pointing up. That little boy's knee had come dangerously

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***For a full two months afterward, I patrolled that park every evening.***

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close to being punctured by that discarded syringe. My heart was in my throat as I realized the close call that I had witnessed with this child. From that day and for a full two months afterward, I patrolled that park every evening, with a 24-oz. framing hammer, and I was prepared to use it.

This episode was a wake-up call. Street prostitutes regularly waited in this same park to make a drug buy from one of the dealers living half a block away. They would often come back to the park after buying their drugs to shoot up.

The street prostitutes in my community are almost all intravenous drug users. They usually live and work within a block or two of their drug supplier. They shoot up soon after visiting the drug dealer. The sand area in childrens' parks seems to be a favourite area for shooting up—and the syringes are left behind in the sand box.

## **LIVING ON THE STROLL**

The traffic never stops. The neighbourhood has become seedy, and street prostitution has brought with it a whole new level of ignorance, not to mention the drugs, vandalism and robberies. Women don't feel safe walking alone at night and many of them have big dogs for protection. They are afraid of being mistaken for prostitutes or harassed by the prostitutes themselves.

The police don't do anything about the prostitution. They come and chat with the girls and leave them there. They leave the problem behind when they drive away, but we have to live with it. On one occasion the police told me I should move away. I had just filed one of many complaints against the prostitutes, which had again fallen on deaf ears. Not everyone has the financial means to move away and start over. Especially not when you've invested twenty years of your life into a house and a neighbourhood. Property values have plummeted because of the prostitution, which means any investment is lost. If prostitution were happening in an affluent neighbourhood, would the police tell people to move away?

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***Not everyone has the financial means to move away and start over.***

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The prostitutes hide from the police. If they see a police cruiser in the neighbourhood, they disappear until it's gone. They change clothes three times a day so that if you call in and complain about one of them the police can't identify them. When a car stops at a red light, they open the door and ask for a ride downtown or ask if the person wants their services. They try to bum money and cigarettes off anyone they see. The phone booth on the street is used as a drug office and the glass in the bus shelter is constantly shattered.

There is a fear factor associated with prostitution because many of the girls are HIV positive. Why are they allowed to remain on the street spreading disease? The police say it costs the taxpayers too much to pick up prostitutes, but what about the thousands of dollars it costs the health care system to treat the people afflicted with HIV and AIDS?

The government's policy of giving condoms and needles to the prostitutes is irresponsible. The prostitutes don't respect society enough to discard them properly and my neighbourhood is left to deal with the dirty condoms and used syringes.

This used to be a great neighbourhood to live in. Now, because of the prostitution, no one stays out past dark. Sometimes I feel like the prostitutes run the neighbourhood.

## A WIFE'S LOST TRUST

As I am telling my story, I would like you to keep in mind that I could be your wife, your sister, your daughter, or your mother. I am well educated and come from a well-to-do family. I am now divorced with a precious eight-year-old son. My husband and I were married for three years. I was twenty years old and a virgin, by choice, when we met. In my eyes, my husband was the ultimate mate, my soulmate. He was intelligent, charming, and well educated. He was older than I was and I saw him as my protector; I looked up to him. We both had good careers and were very financially stable. We got to know each other, and a year later were involved. We both wanted the same things out of life.

We married and began our life together and I soon learned that I was pregnant. We were both very happy because family was important to us. We talked about how having a child was going to change

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***A few months later, I discovered I had crabs. It was 2:00 a.m., and I thought I was going to vomit***

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our lives, that we would no longer be a couple but a family. We decided that I would give up my career and be a full-time mother. My husband was the sole provider and was earning a substantial amount. He did have some debts, which were incurred before we met but we knew my staying home to raise our son was more important than clearing the debts. We would make some sacrifices but still live comfortably.

I genuinely enjoyed being pregnant and having this little miracle inside of me growing each day. It is truly a gift to be pregnant, to have life inside you; it is a genuine miracle. Due date arrived and my son was right on time. It was a very easy delivery. I have always had excellent health. The only time I had ever been in hospital was to give birth.

When the baby arrived home, everything was fine until he became colicky. It was very stressful for us. My husband worked shift work so I was home alone most of the time. It was a luxury to take a five-minute shower. I never got any sleep and was constantly

worried about our son.

I noticed a change in my husband's behaviour. He would create things for us to fight about. If he stubbed his toe, it was my fault. I couldn't understand him. I tried to talk to him about things, he always said nothing was wrong. Then out of the blue he said to me, "When our son turns sixteen, I want his first sexual experience to be with a prostitute." I could not believe what I was hearing. He then said, "I want her to teach him everything there is to know." I thought in my mind that he was a sick bastard.

A few months later, I discovered I had crabs. It was 2:00 a.m., and I thought I was going to vomit. I became hysterical. My husband and our son were

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***Sometimes I would see my family and friends at my funeral. I would see my little boy crying for me.***

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asleep. I woke my husband and told him what I had found. He said I was crazy and told me to go back to sleep. I started screaming at him and told him to drive me to the hospital. I couldn't stand it knowing there were these things on my body. I got my son up and we all went to the emergency department. Believe me, it wasn't fast enough for me. My husband and I were both treated with Kwellada shampoo and the doctor told us to buy spray for the furniture. My husband went to the all-night pharmacy and you can guess what he was doing at 4:00 a.m. for the next three days. My doctor told me she wanted to check my son's eyelashes. She said that because my son didn't have body hair, that the crabs hide in their eyelashes. She found nothing thank goodness, but this whole experience was revolting. I confronted my husband about the crabs and asked him whom he was sleeping with. He of course denied it all. Here are some of the excuses he gave me:

- I was nervous about my mother's upcoming surgery and that nerves create crabs.
- My body created them all on its own because of my menstrual cycle.
- He told me that he had borrowed a colleague's jacket at work and that the guy had a rash on his

stomach so must have gotten the crabs from the jacket.

I didn't have actual proof in front of me and I was young and naive so I gave him the benefit of the doubt. Six months later, he gave me crabs again. His reason this time:

- It must be that women create crabs on their own because of their period. (He was obviously very desperate.)

I told my doctor what he had told me and she laughed at his lame excuses. He denied sleeping around. Yes, he did give me crabs twice within six months, but this was my marriage, not a boyfriend. We were married and we had a child together. Even though I obviously had my suspicions, hard facts I didn't have. He never went anywhere except for work. When would he have the time? I wasn't going to divorce him without hard facts. We argued all the time and started to see a marriage counselor. He sat there and told the counselor that he absolutely was not sleeping around. Even the counselor believed him. My husband was very manipulative and convincing when he needed to be.

A few months later, we learned I was pregnant again. Well my husband was not happy. He told me that we argue too much, it's not the right time. "Next year would be much better for us to have another child." He told me that if I loved him and wanted to save our marriage, that I would go in for an abortion. I didn't want to, but I did. I changed my mind at the

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***The next day, I went to the doctor's office and told her that I wanted every sexually transmitted disease test possible, as well as an HIV test.***

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last minute but it was too late. I hated myself for letting him talk me into this. I mourn that child every day of my life. It's not easy for me to live with what I have done.

Seven months later, I found the name of a prostitute my husband was seeing. He still denied everything. You cannot imagine how devastating this was. I

questioned him for six hours. He finally confessed and swore to me that he wore a condom, like that makes a difference.

The next day, I went to the doctor's office and told her that I wanted every sexually transmitted disease (STD) test possible, as well as an HIV test. I had to wait a few weeks for all the results to come in. Naturally we fought. I started to be nauseated by the sight of him but I was still trying to save our marriage. I needed time to heal. It was a total nightmare waiting for the results. Every time I would sniffle, the thought of AIDS went through my mind. Every time I opened a magazine, I would see AIDS in bold letters. This was back when AIDS was all people were talking about. We did not know back then what we know today about the AIDS virus. I would have such awful nightmares. Sometimes I would see my family and friends at my funeral. I would see my little boy crying for me. I would wake up from my sleep shaking and crying. Finally the results came in; all the STD tests came back negative. The HIV test was also negative but I had two more HIV tests to undergo. Just because the first one is negative, does not mean you don't have the virus. Finally, all the HIV tests were negative.

Almost a year to the date that this nightmare started, I was home alone with my son. It was late and all of a sudden, I doubled over in pain and thought for certain I was dying. I went to the hospital's emergency department and was diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease. The doctor told me that it is an infection in the pelvic area and that it is caused by a sexually transmitted disease. I could not believe what I was hearing. I told him that my husband had

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***The doctor told me . . . that it is caused by a sexually transmitted disease.***

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slept with a prostitute last year and that I got tested for everything and all the results were negative. The doctor told me that one of the tests was false negative and no symptoms had shown for a year.

He gave me a needle, antibiotics, a prescription and a requisition for an ultrasound. He told me that I had to return at 7:00 a.m. That afternoon my doctor

telephoned me and told me the results and they were not good. I had an abscess the size of a very large grapefruit on my right ovary and tube. This abscess had been growing inside of me all this time without me knowing. If the abscess were to rupture, it would spread throughout my body and it could be deadly.

I went to the emergency department and was met by two doctors. They told me that I was to be hospitalized immediately. They put me on intravenous antibiotics, to see if they could shrink the abscess before opting for surgery. I was hooked up, given pain medication and I did a lot of praying. I stayed in the hospital for ten days and finally the abscess shrank. Six months later, the abscess returned. Again I was hospitalized only this time it was pierced and it was gone.

I went to see my gynecologist who told me, "I know you are still young and you want to have more children, but I can't answer that for you now. All I can say is that you are a very unlucky lady and I am

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***My marriage, as much as I wanted to salvage it, could not be saved.***

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sorry." She told me that the chance of the abscess returning for a third time was more than likely. That the only way to prevent it from returning would be to have surgery and remove the right tube and ovary. So, I agreed, I just wanted this whole nightmare to be over. I had my surgery; I had never done so much praying in my entire life. The next day, I asked the doctor how it looked inside, was there too much damage? She told me that the surgery went fine, but that the left side may have been affected by the infection. She said that after a few months, she would do a laparoscopy, which is when they put an incision in the belly button, and insert an instrument with a little camera in order to take a closer look inside. I had that done and was told that it was total mess in there. You only need one tube and one ovary to conceive a child. Now I had nothing. My right side was removed and my left side was useless.

My marriage, as much as I wanted to salvage it, could not be saved. We separated and I started to see a therapist. I watched my whole life deteriorate in

front of my eyes. My three-and-a-half-year-old son started to see a child psychologist. I know that if my husband had not slept with a prostitute, that this would not have happened. My son would not be seeing a therapist today. He would still have his father at home with us and we would still be a family.

Your financial situation changes drastically when you become a single parent. I had to claim personal bankruptcy. As a result of all of this, I cannot watch a commercial on television with a newborn in it without crying and tearing up inside. Only recently have I been able to allow myself to begin to trust men. I don't know what to say to my son when he constantly says, "Mommy, please I want a baby brother or a sister. I promise I'll protect and love them." I don't go to baby showers: I can't. When I do meet a potential mate, how do I tell him that I can't have children? The thought of becoming emotionally involved with a man is very frightening to me. I am left with scars and pain that will never leave me. All I wanted was to be with the man I love and accept his love. I wanted to be a mother to my babies; I wanted to be and was always a very good wife and mother. I am a good person and to this day, I don't understand why I was meant to go through this. If I were born infertile, I would believe that God wanted it that way. But I wasn't. My husband did this to me, the man I loved more than anything, the father of my child. I did not have a choice. He did have a choice. He chose to sleep with a hooker and he chose not to tell me before he slept with me and exposed me to the STDs. I didn't have a say in any of this. A part of me will always regret and mourn the baby I gave up—my last chance at having another child. I have to live with that until my dying day, just like my husband has to live with the destruction he caused.

At time of separation, I was coping for my son. Today I am not just coping, but living for my precious boy and myself. We are happy and I am healthy now. Families get torn apart as a result of prostitution. Disease is out there: it has no race, no gender, no high- or low-income level and often it has no symptoms. It robbed me of my children, my marriage, and my child's father. I don't feel whole.

Please know that his one night of pleasure was Russian roulette. My husband had his pleasure for a night and it cost him so much more than a night of pleasure is worth.

## A MOTHER'S STORY OF HOPE

Prostitution in this neighbourhood is not new. I noticed it when I first moved here about fifteen years ago. I became increasingly aware of it after having a child since I was forced to walk around at different times of the day.

It was worse five or six years ago when girls strayed off the main drag into residential areas. You could literally look out your front door and see one hanging on the corner any time of day. Men would be looking for excitement on their way to work and seek these women out. It isn't just a nighttime activity. It got to the point where we found needles in our parks and school yards. Once I found one on my property.



There have been definite improvements since then. We have a mobile needle exchange, a local john school, a clean-up crew for parks, and a strong community association; all working to control and reduce the problems prostitution can bring. It has been a relatively successful effort. The number of used needles they find is on the decrease, and the women don't seem to wander off the main strip any more.

I have never felt afraid living here. I've educated my child to the dangers of needles, but I don't worry excessively about him when he's out with friends. He knows enough to come straight home if anything strange happens.

What we're experiencing is the nature of inner-city living. We're close to downtown, and while that offers a certain amount of convenience, it also brings things like prostitution and drugs. Despite these problems, we live in an interesting neighbourhood. Like many residents, we have no intention of leaving. Part of what we enjoy most is the way people look out for each other, which is increasingly rare in urban communities these days.

But as our specific situation improves, I have to wonder if this is a good sign for society or if these women are just moving into other areas, bringing the same problems with them as they go. There is only so much even the most active community can do to clean up the streets. Prostitution should be regulated by government and contained in one area of the city, as it is in Amsterdam. Such a system would eliminate pimps and provide a safer, cleaner environment for everyone.

### **A CONTRACTOR'S NEW UNDERSTANDING**

As a renovation contractor, in a community invaded by street prostitution, I have come to understand the inseparable link between intravenous drug use and street prostitution. I have had to work on properties that have been littered with syringes.

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***I have come to understand the inseparable link between intravenous drug use and street prostitution.***

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On numerous occasions, former tenants in the buildings I renovated were local prostitutes, or a prostitute had moved in with an existing tenant. I have cleaned out more syringes than I thought could be possible. Blood spattered walls were also not an uncommon find.

I have also talked to other contractors and building

managers. One contractor renovating a rooming house found the stud cavity between the walls filled with syringes. A hole had been punched in the drywall and hundreds of syringes stuffed into the cavity. Roofers fixing leaking flat roofs in my community have refused on several occasions that I am aware of, to start work until discarded syringes have been cleaned up.

### **AN UNWELCOME ONCE-OVER**

On two separate occasions, when I was walking from the bus stop to my home, a seven-minute walk, I saw a car slow down, do a U-turn and circle back so that the driver could get a good look at me. The first time, I thought this was strange. The second time I realized, with amazement, "Oh dear, he thinks I'm a prostitute."

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***I know what you are supposed to do—take down information and tell the police—but I was so shocked, I couldn't take down any information.***

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I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I am active in community affairs and I know what you are supposed to do—take down information and tell the police—but I was so shocked, I couldn't take down any information. Then I had to walk around the block so the guy wouldn't see me going into my house. I didn't want him to know where I lived.

In another, separate incident, my husband and I had been to a meeting, each in our own car. He got home first and was standing on the front lawn waiting for me, when a car came by and the driver threw condoms out the car window. Then I had arrived home, and the driver rolled down his window again and gave us the worst look imaginable. We did report this to the police, but by then the driver had gone.

What really upsets me is that they think I am a prostitute. It's frustrating for me, when I am walking alone, to have people slow down and observe my behaviour. I wear khaki pants. I don't look provocative. I'm tempted to ask, "Are you lost? Can I give you directions?"

And mothers in their thirties and forties, sometimes

when they are with their children, notice that cars will slow down and the guys will stare at them. I'm not scared, but it is terribly disappointing that there are so many men out there cruising our neighbourhood.

### IT'S RIGHT BEHIND MY HOUSE

One morning after driving my wife to work, I was returning home shortly after seven. I turned into the back lane to park my vehicle, when I noticed an unfamiliar car parked in a neighbour's parking spot. As I slowed down to see what was going on, I noticed two people sitting in the car. I recognized the passenger, who was a street prostitute in the area.

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***I walked back up the lane to get the licence plate number. . . . I could feel myself getting very upset. This is the lane where kids play, walk to school and neighbours socialize.***

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Upon further reflection, I will always wonder whether she was the same prostitute they found dead recently in the forest. After I parked my car, I walked back up the lane to get the licence plate number. As I approached the car, I could feel myself getting very upset. This is the lane where kids play, walk to school and neighbours socialize. I started looking for something to throw at the car. I was looking for a big rock to make sure this jerk didn't use this back lane again and he would have some explaining to do when he got home. Luckily for everybody, I did not find a rock!! The window rolled down and the prostitute started to talk. Not really caring what she had to say, I told her she had better move on or I was calling the police—which they did quite promptly. The licence number and car model were reported to the police.

### A BUSINESS OWNER'S INDIGNATION

I took over a business on the main shopping street in this community. I have many clients who come from other areas to my shop for the specialty items I sell. When I first took over this business, the street was a nice, quiet, neighbourhood shopping street. Then prostitution and drug dealing moved in one summer and the street took on a totally different character. At first this had no impact on my business, but as time

progressed the community became known as a rough place.

Across the street from my shop was a very active drug dealer. His clients would congregate below his apartment waiting for him to come home, or waiting for a shipment. Street prostitutes never seem to work very far from the location of the drug suppliers so it was not long before they started working in front of my shop and the neighbouring businesses.

One street prostitute came into my store to hide money in her underwear, she was drugged and oblivious to my pleas and threats to leave. I was shaken and afraid, was this riffraff starting to come inside? Another prostitute, again drugged, pulled up her skirt and squatted in my entranceway to piss—in broad daylight on the main shopping street! Another time one of my customers was hit with some kind of pellet gun from the upper window across the street.

One particular day one of my regular customer came to my shop. As he was about to enter my store he was solicited by one of the several street prostitutes working this area. He made a joke to me saying that I must be getting a cut from the prostitutes. We both laughed, but I was devastated.

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***As a self-employed, small business owner I can't afford to lose any customers because they don't want the hassle of being solicited by prostitutes at my doorway.***

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Other customers were offended by being accosted by prostitutes as they approached my shop, it became an uncomfortable place for customers to come to. Some female customers felt it was unapproachable.

How many others customers had the same thing happen to them and not said anything to me? Would they be back? As a self-employed, small business owner I can't afford to lose any customers because they don't want the hassle of being solicited by prostitutes at my doorway.

The community has come together to work on solutions to this problem. Although not solved, these

instances are no longer commonplace and fortunately my customers are no longer afraid to come to my shop.

## A STUDENT'S ANGER

Until a few years ago, I lived in this community for as long as I can remember. As children, we didn't know what was happening around us. I remember going to the local restaurant, unaware that drugs were being trafficked inside those walls and hookers were getting drunk at its bar. I didn't become aware of the prostitution and the fear it gives to others until I became a teenager. I used to work at the local thrift store, sometimes until after dark.

There is one night I will never forget. I was waiting outside of the store for my ride, my school bag over my shoulder, my purse in my hand. After a while, I

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***He reached down and pulled out a stack of bills. . . .The realization that he thought I was a hooker struck me. I grabbed my school bag.***

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noticed the traffic parading down the street. When I looked closer, I saw that most of the drivers were single males. They were johns.

It must have been after 10 p.m. when the car pulled up on the sidewalk next to me. It wasn't my ride. The man in the car was waiting. He kept looking in his rear-view mirror, trying to catch my eye. I was starting to get nervous. He reached down and pulled out a stack of bills, holding them so that only I would see them in his mirror. The realization that he thought I was a hooker struck me. I grabbed my school bag and wedged myself into the alcove of the store's doors, hoping that he would go away. He didn't. He just sat in his car and waited.

After what seemed like hours but must have only been a couple of minutes, he backed up his car. I was really scared. But he didn't get out of his car as I had feared; he didn't come to me like some predator. He drove away, looking for a girl who would take his money.

Across the road, some men saw the car drive away from me and yelled, "Why don't you get a real job!" I was stunned. Why did they all think that I was a prostitute?

I don't live there any more. I'm glad I got out of there. But I'm not afraid any more—I'm angry. I'm angry that just because I was standing near my work at night I was perceived as a hooker by more than one person.

## A MAN'S CHANGING ATTITUDES

I have lived in this neighbourhood for seventeen years. There had always been a few prostitutes around, but at first they didn't cause any trouble.

Then about five years ago, one evening when I was going to the bank machine about 10 p.m., a young woman "came on" to me. I told her I wasn't interested. Then she grabbed my jacket and started shouting that I had "ripped her off." A man appeared and the two of them manhandled me toward an alley. I screamed and managed to get free. I then went into a convenience store and called the police. The police came and I gave them a statement. The woman was later arrested and charged. She subsequently pled guilty, but this incident changed my attitude drastically. Before, I had thought prostitutes were harmless and we could ignore them. But after this, I was wary and would cross the street to avoid them.

However, things didn't get really bad until about two years ago, when a few prostitutes moved in right

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***A woman "came on" to me. I told her I wasn't interested. Then she grabbed my jacket and started shouting that I had "ripped her off." A man appeared and the two of them manhandled me towards an alley.***

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across the street. They were very rowdy. All night long you could hear cars coming and going. Sometimes I would be awakened by knocks on my door at three or four o'clock in the morning by people

who had mistaken the address. I didn't answer, but it is really alarming to be awakened in the middle of the night by somebody knocking at the door. Other neighbours told me that they also were getting knocks on the door during the night when they were trying to sleep. Another problem is that when prostitutes are living across the street from you and congregating with others on their property, sitting comfortably and peacefully on your own porch becomes an impossibility.

For a while there was a dangerous pimp in the neighbourhood, the sort of person you wouldn't make eye contact with. He had two or three women working for him. He threatened a few people in the street including myself.

I have no moral objection to prostitution, but the drugs and rowdiness that come with it are very damaging to a community, and the threats and intimidation are quite scary.

## CHILDREN DON'T HAVE CHOICES

There are four of us in our family, two adults and two teenagers. We have lived in our home since 1984. This area combines an eclectic mix of people from different backgrounds and businesses. Since 1992 an overnight change has occurred in our neighbourhood: Prostitutes, pimps, johns, drug lords and drug addicts blend in with everybody else. Crack houses, flop pads now appear all around us. As the years progressed so did the impact in our community: House values plummeted, crime increased, guard dogs are tied up outside of the known drug houses terrifying

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***A known drug pusher approached my younger son who was eight years old at the time to try to coerce him into becoming a drug runner for him.***

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the whole area, higher incidence of children finding used condoms and used needles. In one known building where prostitutes did rent rooms the fire escape doors were left open regularly in warm weather with some of the prostitutes overhanging on the fire escape staircase trying to solicit passers-by. My husband walking with my children has been

solicited. When my oldest son was eleven years old, he was also approached. Are the pedophiles looking for young boys? Are these prostitutes so stoned that they cannot see the difference between a boy and a man? Or are they so desperate for money for their drug habit that they will do anything? As these incidents increased so has the drug trade.

There is now a higher influx of car and pedestrian traffic that does not belong in our neighbourhood: strangers using our parks and our streets for illicit activities. Our pets are getting killed in higher numbers because of the johns and drug trade. A known drug pusher approached my younger son who was eight years old at the time to try to coerce him into becoming a drug runner for him.

Johns harass women of all ages. A "no" answer does not always work. One time as I was helping my boys deliver their flyer route I was approached by a man driving a late-model luxury car and asked, "How much?" Flabbergasted, I did not have an appropriate response for this man, but the stunned look on my face was sufficient for him to realize his mistake.

During the winter of 1996-1997, we were delivering flyers on one street in the proximity of a known drug dealer when one of the two pitbulls jumped the fence and was running toward me. I could see my youngest son standing at a distance from me. I told him not to run but to slowly back away up the street. The drug dealer came out to see why his dogs were barking frantically. I told him that his dog should be tied up in his yard because the snow was high enough for it to step over the fence. He stood there saying it was impossible for his dog to jump the fence. He then retrieved the dog and put it back in the yard. While this man was standing there and talking to me, the same dog again jumped the fence and came to me. He could not refute the evidence. I again politely requested that he should tie the dogs up when they were left in his yard or keep them in the house for the safety of all the residents. You can talk to the other residents and they all have a different horror story to tell.

Another time we were delivering flyers to a rooming house where quite a few prostitutes plied their trade. We were on the front stoop putting the flyers in the mailboxes when a prostitute and a john rushed by us

to get in the rooming house. My son and I were startled by the speed at which they were traveling. It is difficult enough to explain what a prostitute is to a child. But when you see the comprehension of what this means comes into the eyes of a child who is not yet ten years old, as a parent you know that this type of activity must be stopped. We no longer walk this way even though the street is closer and well lit. We do use an alternate darker street to travel.

## WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

I am puzzled about whether it is right to teach children how to pick up used needles safely. Maybe it is time to do this for their own protection but should this be?

I am a 66 year-old man, and have lived in this neighbourhood for 53 years and I wonder about this.

This was a good neighbourhood, you could leave stuff around and you weren't scared to walk outside at night. Now you have to watch yourself. I used to walk home and was never worried. Now I have to take taxis. I am worried about my safety and I am worried about the safety of the other senior citizens.

It's the prostitutes and the potential violence that have made me uncomfortable for many years now. It's the drugs too. I have seen it with my own eyes, people shooting up, jamming needles in their arms,

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***Now you have to watch yourself. I used to walk home and was never worried. Now I have to take taxis.***

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and turning into animals, yelling and screaming and fighting with each other. The screaming has woken me up at three in the morning. It sounds like a bunch of cattle. I have seen this around the church, the school, and the prostitutes turning tricks in the park. But it is not only needles, it is the used condoms that have to be picked up from where they've been thrown. They turn tricks around the church!

This problem seems to have gotten worse in the last five years. I think it's because they were chased out

of the area they were previously and all that has done is shift the prostitutes to another area: my community. This kind of business just degrades a community. Prostitution is a serious problem and I think it's time something was done about it, but I don't know who will challenge the problem. I don't know what the police can do about it because it seems their hands are tied. You see them making arrests and the next day the prostitutes are back on the street again. It's like a swinging door. But my main concern is not about me, I don't have any children but what is the effect on the children of all this? How can we bring up children with all this going on, I wonder?

## A FAMILY LIVES A NIGHTMARE

In the summer of 1996, at the age of eight, my youngest son was playing in the park next to our house. The region had cut down some tree branches and a few of the children had built a fort in a secluded part of the park. It was a typical teepee-like structure, and he was playing there. At this point I have to say that the children in this area were well taught to avoid touching needles and to go alert their parents if they spotted one. Well in this case I assume that a drug user had crawled in the fort the previous evening, shot up and buried his needle with the needle sticking up. What kind of person would do this? A deliberate act to harm a child in an area that was so obviously used by little children! My son picked up the used syringe by the needle probably not realizing the importance of his action. My older son aged twelve, was also playing in the same park. He came running home in shock, crying and screaming. He had realized the consequence in an instant.

With the help of concerned neighbours, the children's pediatrician and his staff, and CHEO's (Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario) emergency staff we survived a harrowing two-week period, while getting the syringe tested for STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and HIV. Holding him on my knees when the lab technician was removing a blood sample to be tested for HIV was heart wrenching. Putting on a brave front, it was difficult not to miss the fear and terror written on his face. Then the waiting period began: fourteen days of anxiety, questions, anger, and betrayal. The result was negative this time, but twice a year he would undergo testing probably for a long time.

The worst part was answering my son's pertinent questions about HIV and the AIDS virus. Some of these questions included: Can I still go to school with my friends? Will my friends play with me if I have AIDS? How will I know when HIV changes into AIDS? Will you still love me if I have AIDS?

When he went back to school in the fall, he was no longer the little boy that we knew. His brother and he would no longer play in the park. They would play in our yard only if my husband or I would watch them from the window or be outside with them. They became introverts and it took a bit more than a year for them to get over their fears of being kidnapped, molested, harassed and to once again feel safe in their backyard.

That same fall he told one of his school friends about the accident with the syringe. That night the mother called me and started screaming that my son was no longer welcome in their home, and that he was to stay away during school. I was trying to calm down

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a hysterical woman and my son was overhearing part of this conversation. He was crying, confused about why he could no longer play with his friend even though he was not HIV-positive. He will not discuss this now with any of his friends. What a big secret for him to keep.

He may now face a lifetime of HIV and hepatitis testing because of the illicit activities in our community. When he was in grade six, some girls in his class told him the only way he would ever have sex would be with prostitutes. He completely lost control. He threw chairs. Luckily he did not hurt anybody or himself. The waiting list for him to see a therapist was six months. He got therapy for anger management and went to two sessions, but decided it was useless and he would rather work with us.

The community is left to pick up the pieces that are left behind. Any neighbourhood can as easily change overnight as ours did. This can happen to you, your father, mother, sister, wife, son or daughter.

My son did not make a conscious decision to pick up a syringe but has to live with this the rest of his life. Johns have the conscious choice to make, either to continue or to stop picking up prostitutes. Once the market for prostitutes dries up they will move on, and so will the drug trade.

### **A SENIOR'S FEAR**

I was married in this neighbourhood sixty-five years ago, and except for some time away with my husband, I have always lived around here. I am friends with everybody, except those prostitutes. I don't ever want talk to them. I don't even want to see them.

I was going for ice cream a few years back, and a carload of young men drove up to me and started yelling. They were asking me how much I made that night. I know they were teasing but it scared me. I've seen the big cars, and I think they sell drugs to the prostitutes. What if those young men in that car were looking for drugs or needed money to

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***A carload of young men drove up to me and started yelling. They were asking me how much I made that night. I know they were teasing but it scared me.***

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buy drugs? They could have been on drugs. I am an old woman, what could I do?

This building is my home, and when I moved in ten years ago, it was a nice building for seniors, but now we have security. I'm glad we have security because a few years ago I saw prostitutes in the building. That's when the robberies started. The police told me to phone them if I see anything, but I won't because I don't go out at night anymore. I'm ready though. I keep the phone number for the police and for security right beside my phone, just in case.

## A PLAGUE ON THE COMMUNITY

In the summer, I usually arrive home from work in the late afternoon and sit in the backyard, read the paper, and have a beer. I live a few doors away from a public school, and children usually cut through the back lane on their way home. One evening while relaxing, I heard a car pull up behind my neighbours' garage. When I didn't hear a car door open I got inquisitive and looked around to see it was an unfamiliar car. I moved closer to see the driver with his car seat in the reclined position and a woman's head moving in his lap. Angrily I picked up a handful of gravel, threw it at the car, and yelled, "Get out of here!" The man sat up, looked around at me, and grinned, while the woman moved into the passenger seat and stared straight ahead.

I find used condoms in the back lane and have even found a used syringe in my yard. I realize prostitution is called the oldest profession and it will not disappear completely, but street prostitution is a plague on the community and it shouldn't occur in our face.

## A TODDLER FINDS A SYRINGE

I was devastated by a neighbour's news that her toddler had almost put a discarded syringe into her mouth. I felt so helpless for her during that time. A community is not a community if it doesn't fight to protect innocent children from the harms in society.

This new mother had her young toddler out in the front yard of her house. This renovated house was

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***The mother caught the child by the diaper just as she was about to put the object into her mouth. To her horror, she discovered it was a discarded syringe!***

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not on what was considered the stroll in the community, but it was only a short block away from it. It was summertime and she had her young daughter who was just learning to walk out in the front yard. She stayed close behind the child who was unsteady on her feet. As they approached some bushes near the edge of the yard something caught the eye of the baby and as

young children do she picked it up. The mother caught the child by the diaper just as she was about to put the object into her mouth. To her horror, she discovered it was a discarded syringe!

Shortly afterward this couple put their house up for sale, so that they could move and raise their child in an area that did not have prostitution and the associated drug trade. However, by this time the area had gained a reputation for prostitution. It is difficult to sell a house in an area that is known for prostitution and get any kind of price for it. It took much more than a year to sell and they finally sold it at a significant financial loss. How many people can do this or should have to do it?

An incident like this must never happen again.

## RETURNING TO THE COMMUNITY

You don't think much about prostitution until it moves into your neighbourhood.

Eight years ago, an increase in prostitution in our community brought with it predictable side effects—a surge in drug use and violence.

My wife and I decided to leave and move to the country. We thought it might be a better environment for our daughter.

Two years ago, we moved back to the city and bought a house not far from the old one. During our time away, things had changed. The problem had grown worse.

Rooming houses filled with drug dealers and prostitutes abounded. Vicious dogs trained to scare off passers-by and warn occupants of approaching strangers became a familiar sight. I used to worry one would get loose and seriously hurt someone, maybe even me or a member of my family.

I've been propositioned on my way to work, and my wife has been approached by strange men. We've woken up in the middle of the night to screaming outside our house. Until the police arrive, you never know if you're going to have to intervene somehow. The most I've done is yell out a window. I wouldn't risk going out there when weapons might very well be involved.

So we lost some sleep. What disturbs me most is the lack of safe playing spaces for the kids. I'd rather they play in the street than in the local school yard where prostitutes take their clients and shoot drugs. It's too dangerous. One of the area schools erected a fence to keep trespassers out. Their grounds are safer, but it changes something about being a kid. I wouldn't say we live in fear. We've simply learned to make precaution part of our daily lives.

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***Rooming houses filled with drug dealers and prostitutes abounded. Vicious dogs trained to scare off passers-by and warn occupants of approaching strangers became a familiar sight.***

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In my opinion, taking away the customer seems the only realistic way to curb the selling of sex as well as the problems associated with it.

Continued public apathy won't help rid our streets of prostitution, nor is legalization of the sex trade the answer. There would still be women who couldn't meet government standards walking the streets, vulnerable to all the same things they are now. Besides, where would we establish a red-light district? Nobody wants one in their backyard.

Things have improved lately. Community pressure and action have been effective tools in our area. We've pressured landlords not to rent to these types of people, we have community clean-up days, and the local john and jane schools seem to be helping.

## **A CONSTABLE ON THE STREETS**

As a constable for the Ottawa Police Service, my job is to deter would-be clients, as well as prostitutes, from participating in the sex trade. First and foremost, it's important to note prostitution itself is not illegal. However, communicating for the purpose of prostitution in a public place is. And in such an instance, a car is considered a public place.

Ours is a difficult task, and one we've been relatively successful in some parts of town. The other night we only had to arrest two women and one client.

Mainly, we conduct street sweeps, arresting prostitutes and their clients (or johns) at which point they have two options. First, they can attend john or jane school. John schools educate men on the dangers of intimate contact with potentially diseased women. The key to their success is testimony from community members whose lives have been negatively affected by prostitution. Johns realize the range of impacts their actions carry. If they complete the six-hour course they avoid a record. Jane school is for prostitutes. It's a three-day retreat away from the streets, their dependency, and their pimp. The school acts as a starting point to try to get these women long-term help and off drugs.

Should either a john or a prostitute choose not to attend these schools, they are charged with an indictable offence which usually results in a hearing, a record, and a fine. This alone is usually not enough to deter a prostitute from returning to her trade, so conditions are placed on her release: for example, a curfew or boundary limits she cannot cross. These are easy conditions to check up on and enforce.

We also target crack houses, or other places prostitutes are known to frequent, because drugs and the selling of sex go hand in hand. As such, community members suffer the dangers of discarded syringes and used condoms.

There are no easy solutions.

## **TEACHING OUR CHILDREN**

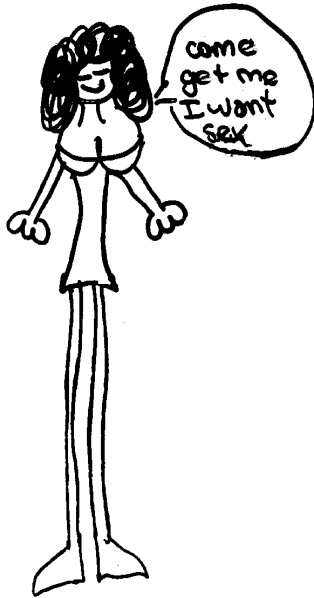
Eleven years ago, I had just bought a new home. The new area was beautiful—heritage homes, close to downtown, yet still a community. But within a year, prostitution and related crimes had moved in. In one year, my house was broken into three times.

In the mornings, the mailman told me, he had to wade through condoms and syringes in the industrial area near our home. But it wasn't only the industrial areas that showed the physical evidence of what went on during the days and nights.

We had two schools in our community. Needles and condoms littered the school yards and perimeters, and our front lawns. I had to teach my little girl about them, from a very young age.

As the years went by and my daughter went to school, I met her at school and took the city bus home with her.

My neighbourhood sucks!



As we waited, there would be prostitutes standing on the yellow line in the middle of the road, while their pimps yelled at them from the corners. Cars would slow down and pick these women up, go around the block, and then drop them right back where they found them. It would take only minutes. Men would be dropping their pants and mooning traffic in the middle of the road. I would stand in front of my daughter, shielding her from what was happening every day.

I meet her at the school bus stop now. Men in cars slow down while I stand there and look at me, waiting for me to move to them. I used to bring a large book with me with the word “philosophy” or “history” written on its cover, hoping to show that I wasn’t a hooker.

I used to love living downtown. But I have to think of my daughter. What happens when she turns 13 and men are still slowing down because they think that any woman that walks these streets is a hooker? I wonder if I will have to give in like many of my neighbours and leave these beautiful, old houses and my community.

## A HOMEOWNER’S DETERMINATION NOT TO GIVE UP

The newly fallen snow blankets the yard and all is peaceful. The Christmas tree is going up in its usual spot, in front of the window, where it has been for most of the forty-seven years I’ve lived in this house. I was born within these walls and hanging these ornaments, some old now, I look onto my yard and am grateful that winter is here. I am calm, without tension, for the first time in months. This peaceful scene belies some I’ve seen from this window.

I remember clearly the day I looked out and the naked man was sprawled across my front lawn. My husband, fearing the worst, rushed to help and fortunately found the man alive. Although, when finally roused he could barely stand and had no recollection of how he came to be on my front lawn. You see he had been to the house across the street where the prostitutes lived. They don’t live there now, the swat

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***I met the landlord of that house, after it was cleared. He was standing in the middle of it shaking his head in despair looking at what had become of his property.***

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team finally went in and cleared the house. I can’t tell you how it feels to open your front door, and see a black clad man in body armour, automatic weapon at port arms, ordering you back into your home. The bottom of your stomach drops out with the chill of the words, “Stay down low just in case.”

I met the landlord of that house, after it was cleared. He was standing in the middle of it shaking his head in despair looking at what had become of his property. He had to tear the interior walls down. They had knocked holes in the walls to throw the used condoms

and needles away and the spacing in between was full. Roto-Rooter took almost a month to clear the sewers of the flushed needles and condoms.

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***Nor can I quite convey the fear and the near panic I feel when the cars follow me down the street.***

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My friends have phoned me wondering why the streets are blocked off. What do I tell them? It's okay, it's just another crack house getting raided or they're clearing another house of prostitutes. How do I explain to them, "this is normal for my neighbourhood?" Nor can I quite convey the fear and the near panic I feel when the cars follow me down the street. Keeping pace with me just out of sight over my shoulder. Slowing when I do, speeding up when the panic almost gets the better of me and I start to rush. Why are they following me? The tension and stress is constant. Noises wake me and most times it is the usual night sounds, but the worst is silence. When I can't hear anything I lie there trying to figure out what woke me. It's really bad when the dogs are barking. I have two dogs now and am going to get another, a big one. It's strange how the dogs know not to pick up the used needles but if only I could get them to leave the used condoms alone.

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***I won't give up, this is my house and my neighbourhood and I'll stay here and fight. I'll build my fence higher if I have to, I'll get another dog, but I won't give up on my home.***

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At the moment my neighbourhood is peaceful with the silence of the freshly fallen snow yet I still feel the tightness in my shoulders as I look out this window and wonder. I wonder if it will be the same again next year or will it get worse? I wonder how much longer this will go on? I wonder how much more I can take? But this I know, I won't give up, this is my house and my neighbourhood and I'll stay here and fight. I'll build my fence higher if I have to, I'll get another dog, but I won't give up on my home.

## **A MOTHER FIGHTING BACK**

I live in a good neighbourhood. A number of years ago street-level prostitution and open drug dealing moved in around me. Almost overnight it changed a quiet working-class neighbourhood into a scary place to live. For some time concerns about the activity fell on deaf ears - many did not believe us, chose to ignore it and others knew but stated "what do you expect in this neighbourhood?" No one should have to live with this activity on their front doorsteps.

My house is built very close to the street which is a very narrow one-way road that allows only one lane of traffic. A very active drug dealer moved in at the end of the street and with him came his clients, many were the street prostitutes that worked a block or two away. The traffic by car and foot to this house was unimaginable and went on 24 hours a day, I know because my bedroom is at the front of the house and overlooks the street.

Every night I was awakened by people yelling, fighting, car doors opening and closing, the drug dealers' pit bulls barking, and high heels clicking on the sidewalk under my window. On hot summer nights you could not close the window so I got no sleep. This sleep deprivation and the terror I felt on my own street were wearing very deeply on me.

I remember one night, my son who was eight at the time, slept in the back of the house. He woke up about 3:00 a.m because there was a lot of noise from the drug house that particular night. I had not had a

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***For some time concerns about the activity fell on deaf ears. . . . "What do you expect in this neighbourhood?" No one should have to live with this activity on their front door steps.***

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full night's sleep for months, but this night I was so tired that I had trouble waking up when he came into my room. He was very upset and wanted to sleep with me. He then heard something and went to the window and looked out. He came back to bed and asked me to come and see what the woman was doing on the street below my window.

I have a very good light at the front of my house. It shone on the front seat of a car parked in front of my house. As I looked down the woman looked up at me while servicing her client and I could see what looked like semen coming down the side of her mouth. She smiled.

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***The women in my neighbourhood had to deal with johns eyeing and propositioning them.***

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At this point I was in a rage that my son and I had to live with this happening under my bedroom window. I ran downstairs in my nightgown and banged on the front window of the car yelling “Get the f— out of here.” All of a sudden I thought “What am I doing out alone on the street at 3:00 a.m. in my nightgown yelling at a hooker and a john?” I ran into the house crying and shaking. I was so angry.

The women in my neighbourhood had to deal with johns eyeing and propositioning them, but all I could think about was what they had done to my child. I knew leaving was no option. I owned the house. Who would buy it with the present activity on the street?

This event was a turning point for me, I was sick of being victimized. I have worked to fight back for my child and for myself. I am now a block captain for Neighborhood Watch, which formed in response to the security issues in the neighbourhood. I am also a guest speaker at the community John School where I try to relay the impact of drugs and related things.

**A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL’S PERSPECTIVE:  
THE LESSONS CHILDREN LEARN**

Why have the primary school grounds become part of the established prostitution strolls in so many communities? My school is no exception. When children are forced to witness street prostitution and its side effects, it teaches them lessons of life that take hours of work by their parents, community and school to reverse. The message of what is acceptable behaviour can so easily be mixed as they witness the seedy aspects of life on a daily basis while they go to and from school. We think children are

oblivious to many of the aspects of life, but they do see it and we must strive to teach them that it is not a lifestyle to take on as they grown older.

The school teaches the children from the beginning about syringes and condoms—never to touch them and to call a teacher when they find one. The children diligently follow through, but it is clear they are embarrassed when they find a condom and come to tell the teacher. They know what these things are used for and express revulsion. They wonder why they appear in their playground.

Pimps have assaulted prostitutes near the school, while on school property a fistfight over a prostitute occurred. There’s violent activity over sex. Syringes in the school yard. Drug deals nearby. Drug busts nearby. Parents, teachers, volunteers have been solicited by the prostitutes or johns.

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***If it is victimless, should we be telling our school volunteers, teachers and parents that everything is okay and not to worry when they are solicited around the school?***

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We have heard many statements that prostitution is victimless. If it is victimless, should we be telling our school volunteers, teachers and parents that everything is okay and not to worry when they are solicited around the school? Should we tell the children who witness prostitutes working around their playground and the violence that accompanies it that this is okay? Do we tell the children to disregard the condoms and syringes dumped in the school playground?

What lessons do the kids learn from what they see? Are these the values we want our children to take into adulthood?

Despite the revolting debris in their school yard, despite the fear created around their school—the community is coming together to reclaim this neighbourhood with a prime focus on the areas around the schools. This community has taken on the challenge to protect their children and to involve the children in the solutions. The school is seen as being key to the life of the neighbourhood.

## A COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK

I have a few items that stand out in my mind that relate to how I saw the problem of street prostitution in my neighbourhood as I both realized what it was, and how we started to deal with it as a community.

When I first learned that we had a street prostitution problem, it was a friend of mine that had been approached on a street in front of a store at mid-day. She thought the man was asking for directions, but was immediately propositioned by him, and asked if she would have sex with him. At the time I found this shocking, and was very upset. It reminded me of the couple of times that I had been followed by men in cars when I was seven or eight years old. Similar approach—they slowed down their cars and leaned over to ask for directions. When I came close to the car window, they were exposing themselves. In both cases, I ran away, but not without long-term effects. I thought then, and more recently when the incident happened to my friend - “What’s the matter with these men? How dare they take advantage of someone’s willingness to help?” It made me very angry.

We met with the police on more than one occasion as a community group, and asked what they could do about the problem of street prostitution in our neighbourhood. I recall one of our neighbours pointing out that fines for riding bicycles without a bell were about four times higher than the fines given to prostitutes. I recall asking our then district inspector why they kept going after the prostitutes—why didn’t they do anything about the men? I’ll never forget his response: “We don’t want to upset their families!”

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***We met with the police on more than one occasion . . . and asked what they could do about the problem.***

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I lived one block from the community centre, with a park in between. I attended community meetings at least once a month, and instead of walking, I drove my car because I was afraid of being fol-

lowed or approached by one of the johns. One of my colleagues in Neighbourhood Watch was followed home by a john after a meeting. It’s ironic and frustrating when we’re taking the time to work on making our community a better, safer place to live, and there are these predators coming into our neighbourhood and intimidating us so they can have a few minutes of “fun.”

Things started to gradually turn around when we (several members of the community association) participated in a new working group set up to address the problems of street prostitution. At this meeting, politicians from across the city (regional and city), police, the crown attorney, and social agencies, got together to talk about ways to reduce the effects of street prostitution.

Our new district inspector was a specialist in adult education. When the idea of starting a John School, similar to the one in San Francisco, was raised, both he and the crown attorney agreed to try it out. They worked with us to develop the pilot program, that still runs today. To support this program, the Police turned their focus to the johns, for the first time offering consequences for their bad behaviour.

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***Although the problem still exists . . . I feel we have come a long way to regain our neighbourhood***

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Although the problem still exists, along with its collateral issues such as drugs and other crimes, I feel we have come a long way to regain our neighbourhood, and in the process, become a stronger community. The community has developed stronger relationships with police, the crown attorney, and other agencies, and has gained a reputation for organization and dealing with problems. I have learned, through my involvement with the community association and in dealing with these issues, to become more active, and to no longer feel helpless if nobody else is “doing something.” It has made me stronger, and more confident that communities can work together to solve complex problems.

## THE POLICE PERSPECTIVE:

### THE CYCLE OF CRIME ( A LECTURE FROM THE OTTAWA JOHN SCHOOL)

Neighbourhoods with street-level prostitution experience a disturbing cycle of crime.

When street-level prostitution comes to a neighbourhood it is usually observed as a curiosity, and to some, as a form of entertainment. Most of the sex trade workers (STWs) are on the streets due to addiction or substance abuse. They operate in areas where steady traffic brings an easy source of cash (johns): this is where the cycle starts. The johns supply the money to the STWs who then purchase drugs from dealers who use the STWs for quick and steady money. In little time, a market becomes firmly established.

Often the dealer expands his market to youth in the area, initially offering free or “cut rate” samples. These new drug customers require cash to feed their new habit, and petty crimes begin to be noticed in the area. They commonly start with shoplifting, stealing goods from cars, breaking into houses, and robbing individuals on the street. When a substantial market for drugs exists, crack houses or shooting galleries begin to plague the neighborhood, as STWs and associates frequent these locations at all hours of the day and night. If you are unfortunate enough to live on the same street as one of these “flop houses,” your property value plummets and public disorder increases.

Impacts on the community include: discarded condoms, infected needles, public noise, late night traffic, graffiti, and general public nuisance. Children cannot play in the parks. School yards and parks are swept daily for discarded needles and condoms. Women and young girls cannot walk the streets without being propositioned from johns in cars or on foot. Taxis and cars come and go all night. The crack houses bring guard dogs such as pit bulls, mastiffs, dobermans and rottweilers to protect them from other dealers and to alert them to the police.

The dogs are poorly kept, frighten people passing by, and sometimes escape and run loose terrifying the neighbourhood. Dealers and their friends use gardens and sidewalks as public washrooms, and often pass out on front lawns and in backyards. Naturally, residents call on the police service for assistance, and many hours of community and police resources are expended to address the problem. However, an increased police presence in the community, along with the associated street arrests and encounters with the criminals can cause anxiety in local residents. In addition, it can take months to years to reclaim and maintain these neighborhoods. The police commence months of undercover operations in the neighborhood culminating with raids on the crack houses and drug dealers, but shortly the problems pop up again on nearby streets and the process begins all over.

Community members face a variety of difficult decisions:

- Do you sell your home and suffer a financial loss?
- Do you stay in your home try to ignore the problem until it directly affects you?
- Or, do you join the police and other community partners and join the crusade to eradicate the community of the **oldest, “victimless” crime**.

It is a common argument that legalizing brothels will stop street prostitution; however, considering the case in Nevada—where brothels are legal—shows this is not true. To make a profit, the brothel owner passes on overhead expenses (such as rent, furnishings, taxes, advertising, as well as health care costs such as disease testing) onto the clients. Many street prostitutes cannot work in a legal establishment because they have sexually transmitted diseases (STD), hepatitis, HIV, or because they are heavily involved in drugs and are unreliable. These STWs undercut the brothel’s prices by working the streets in the same vicinity. Clients continue to frequent street prostitutes often because they do not want to pay the higher prices at a brothel, or because they are afraid their car will be seen in the brothel parking

lot. In Las Vegas, although the brothels are located in specific areas on the outskirts of the city, the downtown continues to suffer from the effects of street prostitutes and associated drug dealers. When a potential client approaches a street prostitute he is at the risk of becoming a victim of violence. Some prostitutes, with accomplices, rob johns, and many incidences go unreported because the victim is too embarrassed to call the police. We have also seen violent confrontations when a john picks a woman who turns out to be a man in drag; sometimes the john isn't aware of this fact until the sexual encounter is over!

As a john, you are not an invisible participant: The community sees you circling the block, and many note your licence plate and vehicle description.

There are now several web sites in Ottawa and others around the country that list these plate numbers. If a prostitute is harmed the police could use these plates in their investigation and a detective could come knocking on **your** door . . . .

Although street prostitution is a so-called “victimless crime,” everyone in the community suffers from its effects—from homeowners and their families, to local shopkeepers, to the women who work this trade, to the johns and their families. The cycle must end, and this can only happen if johns stop paying for sex, which pays for drugs, which brings bad influences into a neighbourhood. The cycle begins and ends with you.

C. Knowlton Roberts,  
Superintendent  
Criminal Investigative Services  
OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE

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A note on our documentation of the stories.

In recording these narratives, it was our aim to preserve—to the greatest extent possible—the voices of the storytellers. Thus, the stories are essentially unedited and relay the actual language used. In this way, we have tried to act as facilitators, so that you may be able to hear the authentic voices of real people, speaking from their hearts.

## CONCLUSIONS

These stories were collected from people whose communities have experienced an invasion of street prostitutes. They give a voice to the children who see and who understand all too well what is happening outside their schools and in their parks. They give a voice to the women in the community, from young to elderly, who have been propositioned at any time of the day or night. They give a voice to the businesses whose economic well-being has been threatened. These stories are not unique to one community or one city. When street prostitution infiltrates a community, the devastating effects are similar, regardless of the community, city, province or country.

The intention here is not to judge what anyone does in private. However, street prostitution is different from the sex for money that takes place behind closed doors. This activity occurs in public—on the streets, in the yards, the parks, and the schoolyards. It visibly labels communities as “bad” places and can destroy a neighbourhood. It is not fair for people to do something in someone else’s neighbourhood that they would not do in their own.

Most street prostitutes are injection drug users. These women and girls need treatment and help, and the johns are not part of any solution but exploit the situation. There is a high incidence of HIV among injection drug users, and a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among street prostitutes, all of which puts johns and their families at risk.

Street prostitution leaves behind garbage. Used condoms and syringes are regularly found in yards, on the streets, in the parks and in schoolyards.

This turns a community from a place where people live and work to a place where women are for sale. These stories recount how any woman or girl in an area known to be a “stroll” is perceived to be a prostitute. Women and girls have the right to live in neighbourhoods free from harassment. Seniors are especially susceptible to this sense of fear when they are propositioned or when prostitutes move into their buildings.

The most affected members of the community are the children. Children are kept inside, confined to backyards, or shuttled to friends’ homes in better neighbourhoods. Families abandon neighbours, resource centres and churches, ignoring public places, parks, stores and restaurants. Community ties erode, as does any pride in one’s home and environment. The result is fear, insecurity, and feelings of disempowerment. Some children are recruited to take part in the illegal activities. Learning from criminals at a young age initiates a cycle that determines a future in youth courts, prison and perhaps even breaking and entering into your own home.

Businesses are also affected. Many are forced to leave or install expensive security systems. There is a decrease in the number of customers as the neighbourhood is abandoned. The remaining clientele is treated with suspicion. Friendliness disappears, as every customer is judged a potential crook. If a business remains, it disconnects from the community. There is no incentive to improve property or contribute to the community. Soon questionable and disreputable businesses move in, malcontents who feed off the underworld and have no respect for others.

These stories illustrate how street prostitution causes a community to lose its freedom and confidence, its residents ability to move about their own streets. This allows the prostitutes, pimps and drug dealers, even more room to operate freely and with impunity. This can be a vicious cycle, in many cases a slow, sure death for the community, unless a strong community can retake control. But this is possible. Although the problem is not eradicated, some neighbourhoods have seen a substantial decrease in the number of street prostitutes over the past few years. This requires many hours of volunteer and police effort to reclaim the neighbourhood. While the threat isn’t gone and likely will never go away, the community is ever-vigilant and never again naive.

## SOME THINGS THAT HAVE WORKED

- 1. Cooperating with various agencies and landlords to improve the housing stock .....**

*Street prostitution and other illegal activity is attracted to areas where landlords have allowed their properties to decline.*
- 2. Jane School .....**

*An option to go to Jane School may help some of the prostitutes get the help they need to go for drug rehabilitation and alternative lifestyle choices. When prostitutes are arrested, they often receive fines and then return to the street to make the money to pay the fine.*
- 3. John School .....**

*Many of the men cruising for sex are ignorant of, or prefer not to think of, the consequences of their actions. John School provides the men with information about the health risks to themselves and their loved ones; the effect on family, the community, the businesses; and an offer to help with their problems. Most men who attend John School do not reoffend.*
- 4. Collecting licence plate numbers of johns .....**

*Citizens inconspicuously collect information on johns picking up prostitutes. This information is passed on to the police, who can then target johns in sweeps or use the information as leads in investigations of assaults or murders of prostitutes.*
- 5. Police targeting drug dealers .....**

*Most street-level prostitutes work and live no more than a couple of blocks from their drug supplier. The prostitutes act as a beacon to the location of the drug dealer.*
- 6. Call the police every time you see a prostitute working the street .....**

*Ask for a patrol car to be sent. The police can't make an arrest, but their very presence drives away customers. When the police make it a priority and stay until the prostitute leaves, it helps to de-establish the stroll.*
- 7. Web sites of johns' licence plate numbers .....**

*Communities in many cities have taken the step of posting on a Web site the licence plate numbers of johns seen picking up prostitutes. Information on those sites, indicates this has resulted in a decrease in the numbers of johns circulating in those neighborhoods.*
- 8. Lighting and fencing .....**

*Work with officials and owners to strategically light or fence off areas where prostitutes and johns go. These areas are usually obvious, from the volume of syringes and condoms found.*
- 9. Public phone booths .....**

*Public phone booths are often used by street prostitutes as a place to arrange a drug buy or to hide from the police. Phone companies have been co-operative in reducing this use of their phone booths.*