

MISSING WOMEN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE CONSULTATION PROGRAM REPORT **Prepared for the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry** **Study Commission** **January 2012**

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This report was prepared for the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and represents the views expressed by members of the Downtown Eastside community. The Commission has not verified any of the statements or allegations contained in this report. The Commission gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by all of those who participated in and supported the consultations.

The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioner and Commission staff and, in particular, no conclusions have been reached to date on the issues raised in this report.

The Commission invites comment on the report by April 15, 2012, particularly with regard to the recommendations for change set out in the report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DTES Consultation Program was conceived by the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Study Commission as a means of seeking recommendations from the Downtown Eastside (DTES) community regarding changes to policing, to increase the safety of those in the sex trade and improve investigations into incidents of violence and missing persons. A Feasibility Study was conducted between September and October 2011, to design the Consultation Program. Consultations were carried out from November to December 2011.

This report summarizes the information collected during consultations. Section 1 describes the DTES Consultation Program. Section 2 provides excerpts from consultations. Section 3 summarizes participants' recommendations.

The scope of consultations was limited by the reticence of some community organizations contacted to participate in the process or facilitate contacts to community members. Their reasons included, among other things, unwillingness to engage with the Commission after community-based participants in the Commission's hearing process were not granted funding; the belief that the Commission's recommendations would not be meaningfully implemented because of lack of political will; fears that the process would be retraumatizing or unsafe for participants; and lack of organizational resources.

Ultimately, 57 people, both community members and support workers, took part in consultations. Consultations focused on participants' forward-looking recommendations for changes to policing, but other contextual issues were also discussed, including past experiences of violence and issues that contribute to marginalization in the DTES.

Participants cited barriers that prevented them from contacting police about incidents of violence, including previous negative experiences with police; differential treatment by police of those in the sex trade; delayed responses by police to emergency calls; discriminatory attitudes among police and skepticism about community members' credibility; the belief that the justice system would not afford redress; and fear of retribution within the community. However, some participants also reported having had positive experiences with police, particularly with officers they knew well and trusted. Support workers spoke positively of the changes they had seen in policing around the sex trade in the context of cooperative programs, but cautioned that a more unified and uniformly enforced policy is necessary to effect lasting and meaningful change.

Participants discussed the need for a fundamental change in the relationship between the police and DTES community members and suggested a restorative justice style approach to creating greater mutual understanding. Participants made many concrete recommendations for changes to policing, including the creation of community advocate positions devoted to assisting those in the sex trade in their dealings with police; a specific protocol for responding to missing persons reports in the DTES; assignment of more women officers as beat patrols;

sensitivity and other training for police, to be given by experiential people; and more stringent investigation and application of disciplinary procedures when police abuse their authority.

Participants also made recommendations for changes not directly related to policing to increase the safety of those in the sex trade. They suggested having more street surveillance and better lighting; more safe spaces, including a 24-hour women only drop-in centre and more drop-in centres for those in the sex trade; better distribution of Red Light Alerts, including through email, text messaging, online computer databases and by hand; registries and check-in systems; emergency locator devices; and more accessible phones. Some participants felt that decriminalization and red light districts would increase safety, while others advocated abolition of the sex trade and more enforcement against johns and drug dealers.

Participants also discussed greater social issues and the need for systemic changes to public institutions and perceptions of those who are involved in sex work. In the face of closures of centres serving those in the sex trade, many participants discussed the importance of community resources specifically dedicated to their needs. They described the vulnerabilities of street-engaged youth and the lack of resources available to them, as well as the larger problems contributing to marginalization of the DTES population, including homelessness, drug addiction, and mental illness. Some made specific mention of the effects of child apprehensions, both in terms of the children put at risk through foster care, and the women who experience psychological trauma when their children are placed in care through the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

While some of the recommendations that participants made conflict, there are clear trends. DTES residents and those in the sex trade would like to enjoy greater respect, understanding, compassion and protection from the police. Many believe that positive relationships are possible, if resources are dedicated to more cooperative initiatives and if a restorative justice approach could be taken to bring police and the community to a better understanding. They believe that employment of experiential people as police liaisons, advocates and police trainers could significantly increase the willingness of those in the sex trade to engage with police and report crimes. Participants in the sex trade envision a host of harm-reduction tools and strategies that could be implemented to increase their safety, but stress that putting such programs in place depends on continued funding to community organizations. They recognize that allocating resources for change requires political will and ultimately a change in social attitudes towards those in the sex industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The DTES Consultation Program is grateful to the individuals and organizations who generously shared their time, thoughts, experiences and creative recommendations for change to envision a safer future in the Downtown Eastside.

We would also like to thank the organizations that assisted with consultations, in particular PEERS Vancouver, the First United Church, and Atira Women's Resource Society, as well as Susan Davis of the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities.

TERMINOLOGY

Prostitution v. sex work

The Commission recognizes that there is an ongoing philosophical debate reflected in the use of the terms "prostitution" and "sex work." Some stakeholders prefer to use the terms "prostitution" and "prostituted" (women) to indicate that they believe the provision of sexual services for money is form of oppression, and more specifically, a form of violence, usually against women. Others use the terms "sex (trade) worker" and "sex (trade) work" to describe an economic exchange of sexual services for money which may or may not be abusive or exploitative, depending on the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the person providing services.

In this report, we do not attempt to take a position on this issue. As much as possible, we have tried to replicate the terminology that participants themselves used during consultations. In contextualizing statements and analysis, we have adopted what we hope is neutral terminology. We have used "the sex trade" to refer to exchange of sexual services for money, and "those in the sex trade" to describe the women, men and transgendered persons providing those services.

Some participants have also used the term "experiential" (person, worker or community) to describe those who have had experience in the sex trade, and we have also made use of this term.

Police

In consultations, participants often referred to the "police" or "cops" without reference to jurisdictions, and hence sometimes did not differentiate between the VPD, the RCMP and other policing units. In contextualizing statements in this report, we have also used the term "police" in the most general sense, to refer to all law enforcement officials, except where expressly indicated or made apparent by context.

Use of slang and profanity

As much as possible, participant contributions to consultations have been reproduced verbatim. Many participants referred to police as “cops”; many women referred to women in the sex trade as “girls” or “working girls,” and sometimes as “hookers.” Customers were referred to as “johns” and men who procured clients for those in the sex trade were referred to as “pimps.” Perpetrators of violence were sometimes called “perps.” Many participants used profanity. In excerpts from the consultations, these terms appear unchanged for accuracy, and are not intended to be disrespectful of any of the persons or groups referred to.

Acronyms

The following acronyms appear in the report:

DTES	Downtown Eastside
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
VPD	Vancouver Police Department
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
MPA	Motivation, Power & Achievement Society
MAP	Mobile Access Project
PACE	Providing Alternatives Counselling & Education Society

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

This report synthesizes and summarizes the information received through the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Study Commission's DTES Consultation Program.

Section 1 describes the DTES Consultation Program, including its purpose, the Feasibility Study conducted prior to consultations, the consultation process, and the difficulties encountered during consultations.

Section 2 provides sometimes lengthy excerpts from the consultations of participants' contributions, grouped thematically with brief introductions to each section.

Section 3 provides recommendations synthesized from participants' contributions.

SECTION 1 - DESCRIPTION OF THE DTES CONSULTATION PROGRAM

Purpose

The purpose of the Downtown Eastside Consultation Program (DTES Consultation Program) was to elicit recommendations from the Downtown Eastside community about how they believed policing could be changed to increase the safety of marginalized residents, in particular women and those in the sex trade, and to improve investigations into incidents of violence and missing persons. This paper synthesizes the information collected during the DTES Consultation Program and presents community members' and support workers' recommendations.

Background

On September 27, 2010, in recognition of the tragedy of missing and murdered women in BC, the Lieutenant Governor in Council issued an Order in Council establishing the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (the "Commission"). The Honourable Wally Oppal, Q.C. was appointed as the Commissioner. The Commission comprises a Hearing Commission and a Study Commission. The Hearing Commission will make findings of fact regarding the conduct of investigations into women missing from the Downtown Eastside through evidentiary hearings that began on October 11, 2011. The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Study Commission was mandated in early 2011 to work on policy issues alongside the hearing procedures.

In early 2011, eighteen participants consisting of organizations and individuals applied for standing to appear before the Commission at the hearings. All these participants were granted standing, either as Full Participants (with the right to take part in all aspects of the hearings) or Limited Participants (with the right to access all documents disclosed, but not the automatic right to cross-examine all witnesses). Thirteen of these eighteen participants applied for funding, on the ground that without it, they would be unable to take part in the hearings. The Commissioner recommended that funding be provided, to enable these groups to hire counsel to represent them in the hearings. Funding for all but the families of Robert Pickton's victims was refused. More information about this process and outcome is available on the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry website: www.missingwomeninquiry.ca.

Between August and October, 2011, through announcements made directly to the Commission and released to various media outlets, the majority of participant organizations granted standing but not funding formally withdrew from the Commission.

In September 2011, the Study Commission began formulating the DTES Consultation Program, to engage community members from the Downtown Eastside (DTES) in consultations. The object of the DTES Consultation Program was to collect the community's recommendations for changes to policing that they believed could prevent the tragedy of the Pickton serial killings from recurring. Recommendations were solicited both from individuals who are or have been residents of the community, particularly those who were themselves in the sex trade, and from support workers from organizations providing services in the DTES.

A number of the organizations contacted withdrew from the Commission around the same time. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the majority of organizations contacted by the DTES Consultation Program chose not to participate, although in some cases, individuals associated with organizations that withdrew did conduct private interviews. The decision by these organizations not to participate necessarily affected the eventual scope of the DTES Consultation Program.

Methodology

Feasibility Study

Prior to consultations, from mid-September to early October, a Feasibility Study was conducted to determine the level of community interest in consultations, and how consultations could be best undertaken in a way that was respectful, inclusive, emotionally supportive and safe. Contacts were made with organizations through phone and email, and a Statement of Purpose was sent to potential participant organizations. These organizations were invited on behalf of their members to suggest to the Commission the most appropriate means for conducting consultations, for example, through individual interviews, focus group discussions, written surveys, or other means, and to provide suggestions regarding necessary supports and appropriate logistical arrangements.

As an initial contact, Susan Davis of the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities provided extensive information about relevant issues and facilitated contacts to other organizations.

For the purposes of the Feasibility Study, the following 19 organizations were contacted:

- Aboriginal Front Door
- Atira Women's Resource Society
- Battered Women's Support Services
- Carnegie Community Centre/February 14 Women's Memorial March Society
- Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
- First United Church
- Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- Native Court Workers' Association
- Native Women's Association of Canada/Walk 4 Justice
- PACE

- PEERS Vancouver
- Pivot Legal Society
- Portland Hotel Society
- RainCity Housing
- Salvation Army
- Sex Workers United Against Violence (SWUAV)
- Union Gospel Mission
- Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)
- WISH Drop In Society

For a variety of reasons, some organizations did not wish to engage with the Commission in facilitating contacts with community members.

A number of organizations referred directly to the lack of Commission funding for participation in the hearings, and stated that this was emblematic of the lack of political will around the Commission process as a whole. Representatives of several organizations expressed the belief that the Commission process was fundamentally flawed, and that accordingly, no meaningful results could come out of its findings. Some stated that the community had been demanding an inquiry into the missing and murdered women for years, and the Commission as finally constituted was too little, too late. They expressed the belief that any Commission recommendations would not result in significant changes, because there was neither sufficient commitment on the part of the Provincial government, nor sufficient care in the greater Vancouver community about the issues. One representative stated unequivocally that a “militaristic” organization like the VPD would not change without a complete restructuring, and for that reason, the Commission was a “waste of time.”

Representatives of several organizations expressed the belief that there was no way to make consultations “safe” for the women who took part. Safety was perceived as having two aspects. First, women still living in situations where they are daily made vulnerable to violence could find discussion of issues concerning violence they had experienced triggering, and representatives of some organizations felt that the Commission would be unable to provide adequate emotional support to participants, who might then engage in self-harming behavior. Representatives of several organizations expressed the firm belief that the benefits of providing information to the Commission could not outweigh the potentially traumatizing effects of revisiting experiences of brutality, including in dealings with the police. Secondly, several representatives of organizations noted that women in the DTES face violence and threats from many different perpetrators, and women’s fear of retribution, in terms of physical harm and potential ostracism by members of their communities, is real. There was a belief among some that there would be no way to protect women who did provide information to the Commission (although it was not always clear if the fear was retribution from individuals in the community, members of organized crime, members of law enforcement organizations, or members of community organizations critical of the Commission).

Representatives of some organizations also stated that, because their resources were already stretched to deal with existing programming, without additional funding, they could not dedicate staff or space to undertake additional activities, whether in terms of facilitating contacts or participating in consultations. Some organizational staff expressed general support for the consultation process, but indicated that they were unable to become directly involved because of the relatively short period during which consultations would take place, or because of the nature of the services they provided (for example, food provision and drug and alcohol detoxification programs).

Despite decisions by the majority of organizations contacted not to participate in or facilitate contacts for consultations, the Study Commission decided to proceed with the DTES Consultation Program for a number of reasons. The Study Commission felt it was critically important to ensure that those whom the Commission's final recommendations aim to benefit had a voice in their formulation, to help make the recommendations appropriate and realistic. This is true not only for community members, but also for organizations that are already participating in multi-stakeholder programs on community safety and could bring considerable expertise in implementing changes. Additionally, the organizations and individuals supportive of the consultation process were emphatic that DTES community members should be afforded the opportunity to decide for themselves whether they wished to engage with the Commission and what they wished to say. The organizations that did participate were well-placed to act as conduits to the populations that the Study Commission wished to reach: marginalized women and those in the sex trade. For all these reasons, the Study Commission felt that it was possible to create a process that was productive and meaningful.

Preparation of questionnaires

In preparation for consultations, two questionnaires were drawn up, one focused on community residents and the other on support workers. Since the goal of the DTES Consultation Program was to elicit participants' own recommendations, and not to amass a set of scientific data, these questionnaires were used primarily as guidelines for highlighting issues in discussions and interviews. As much as possible, participants were encouraged to frame the issues in the manner that they felt was relevant, then follow-up questions were asked in response. Additionally, it was found that with the variety of community experiences, a prepared set of questions could not adequately anticipate or capture the breadth of issues that participants felt were significant to the discussion. In all consultations, the emphasis was on forward-looking recommendations for change. However, in many cases, participants willingly shared past experiences of violence to contextualize their recommendations, for example, about why they did not have confidence in or feel comfortable interacting with police.

The primary questions asked of participants to initiate consultations were:

- What issues are important to you that you would wish the Commission to hear?
- Would you/the people you serve go to the police to report issues of violence? Is there a reason why you responded the way you did?

- What are your recommendations for improving policing in the Downtown Eastside?
- Do you think changes are needed to improve the relationship between the police and community members? How could this be accomplished?
- What changes could be made to enhance the safety of sex workers?

Surveys

Surveys were also designed for use at organizations, with the idea that community members could fill them out with the help of support workers, and support workers themselves could respond. Only three completed surveys were returned, and the information provided through them was of a very general nature. No concrete recommendations were put forward that were not repeated in other discussions or interviews. As a result, surveys will not be referred to in this report.

Consultations

In late October, a schedule for consultations was drawn up and a process designed, incorporating the input received during the Feasibility Study. The DTES Consultation Program arranged to partner with organizations that could provide support to participants during consultations. After canvassing interest among its members, PEERS Vancouver, an exit organization for sex workers, offered to make its space available for a focus group discussion and to facilitate further contacts for those who wished to take part in individual interviews. First United Church offered the DTES Consultation Program the opportunity to hold regular drop-in sessions where community members could provide input over a period of six weeks. Atira Women's Resource Society offered to make it known to its housing project residents that they had the opportunity to consult with the Commission if they chose and provided space for consultations. Additionally, representatives and support workers from other community organizations spoke to the Commission in individual interviews arranged at various locations and facilitated contacts to interested persons in the community.

Some organizations that expressed a willingness to assist the DTES Consultation Program by facilitating contacts with their members were not ultimately involved in the consultation process. In most cases, this was because these organizations primarily serve the male population in the DTES not engaged in sex work. In some cases, the environment in which services were provided (for example, food line-ups) was such that it would have been difficult to ensure participant confidentiality or to make participants feel safe and supported interacting with DTES Consultation Program representatives while accessing organizational services.

Consultations began in the first week of November and continued to the second week of December. Because of the concern that adequate emotional support be provided to participants, the DTES Consultation Program decided that rather than advertise consultations widely, arrangements for consultations would be made with organizations where support workers were available to speak with participants during and after consultations and to follow up with them. Where drop-in sessions were held, they were set up through support workers and publicized within the organization in advance so that participants could self-select and choose whether or not to speak with researchers. For several consultations where organizational support workers were not available, a counselor known within the community was hired to attend and be available to provide support.

During most consultation sessions, a consultant working on the DTES Consultation Program¹ facilitated discussion while a member of the Study Commission took notes². Consultations with participants ranged from relatively brief interactions consisting of a few comments to interviews lasting an hour or more. One focus group discussion was held with ten community participants and four staff and support workers.

All information was collected anonymously. A plain-language flyer was created to explain issues of consent, and this was distributed where practicable to do so. In all cases, participants were told that any information they provided would be collected anonymously, and that they were free to withdraw from the consultation and retract or change information shared at any time, during or afterwards. Where it was possible, participants were later given printed copies of the notes taken during consultation to review and approve. At times, because of the nature of the drop-in settings, this was not possible, because participants were difficult to locate subsequently. However, in most of these cases, consultation notes were sent to support workers at the organizations for their review, in order that any information that might compromise a participant's identity could be removed.

The following table shows the breakdown of participants. It should be noted that there were some instances of overlap: for example, some people who participated in the focus group discussion also participated in individual interviews.

Description	Number
Participants who identified primarily as community members	33
Participants who participated in focus group discussions	14
Participants who identified primarily as community support workers	15
Total participants	57

¹ Brenda Belak

² Elizabeth Welch

Participants included women, men, and transgendered people. Some, but not all, of the participants were actively or formerly in the sex trade; others were community members who may have had interactions with the police outside of sex trade involvement. At least two of the people who took part in consultations identified that they had had close personal relationships with women whose DNA was found on the Pickton farm. Some support workers who were themselves experiential (currently or previously in the sex trade) provided information based on their experiences both as community members and as support workers. In excerpting comments in the following sections of this report, support workers have been identified.

Gaps in information collected / Difficulties encountered conducting consultations

As noted previously, some organizations that could have served as conduits to the community, because of their important relationships to community members, chose not to take part in consultations. This necessarily limited the number of people who were aware of and who had the opportunity to take part in consultations. As a result, the total number of consultation participants relative to the population in the DTES or the number of people in the sex trade in Greater Vancouver was small. It is not possible to know whether different information or recommendations would have been made had more people participated in consultations. We have made no attempt to analyze the information collected statistically, although we have noted some consistency in comments around a number of themes.

Other barriers were encountered connecting with community members. Some of these mirror the difficulties that police may have encountered in attempting to follow up on policing issues or respond to reports on missing persons.

Lack of trust for the Commission was a significant impediment. Any number of factors may have conditioned this perception, including the general feeling of disenfranchisement experienced by many DTES community members; the history of missing and murdered women in the DTES; community politics around the funding for organizational participation at the Commission hearings; lack of knowledge of the Commission and its activities; lack of trust for people not known within the community; fear of retribution; and the fact that many community members are suspicious of authorities, particularly those associated with law enforcement, and prefer to remain unknown to them. With the relatively brief time allotted to complete the DTES Consultation Program, it was challenging for researchers to overcome these barriers and convince community members that engagement with the Commission would be valuable and would not jeopardize their safety. In this respect, the assistance provided by support workers was invaluable.

Some community members expressed disbelief that positive changes could be made to police behavior and policing and said they could not conceive of practical suggestions that they believed would actually be implemented.

Because of the day-to-day survival issues that community members face, including finding housing, food, and in some cases, dealing with health problems, issues of addiction and legal matters, concerns for immediate needs often trumped interest in the Commission and its

processes. As an example, one woman told us that she was concerned because she believed her friend was missing and wanted to discuss this; but at the time, she informed us that she was also very ill and on her way to hospital for treatment. The DTES Consultation Program also took place at the beginning of winter, when many community members were concerned about finding shelter during the winter months and when at least one emergency housing facility, First United Church, was forced to limit occupancy and turn those seeking shelter away so as not to contravene City fire regulations.

Mental health issues and drug use are prevalent in the DTES. In some cases, participants were experiencing self-described symptoms of mental health issues or drug withdrawal that made it difficult to clarify what they wished to say or focus discussion on the issues within the Commission's mandate.

Despite these challenges, a great deal of information was received. Many of those who participated in consultations were highly motivated and very thoughtful in their contributions and recommendations. The substance of consultation discussions is presented in the following sections.

SECTION 2 - EXCERPTS FROM CONSULTATIONS

- *We shouldn't be allowed to feel that anyone is disposable.*
- *Down here people are called the "walking dead". They're just shells – and shells get thrown away. But people should not.*
- *Youth in the sex trade are humans too. We are not to be ditched and pushed around and treated like nobodies.*
- *It's a societal problem. All sex trade workers are painted with the same brush. We are not all the same. I am not just some poor sexually abused, abandoned, physically abused foster child with a heart murmur. There is not just one story when it comes to sex trade workers. We come from different backgrounds. Some people may have been doing really well, and then they ran into some bad times and ended up here. But once you label someone as that, there are connotations, stereotypes, and there is no additional openness to hearing who this person is and what they bring.*

Introduction

In order to present as accurately as possible both the import and tone of recommendations and other information received during consultations, this section of the report excerpts participants' comments as they were transcribed. A number of themes arose repeatedly during consultations, and comments have been grouped around these themes. As this section is lengthy, for easier reading, a summary of comments appears as an introduction to each theme. Italics have been used to identify text as participants' comments.

As noted previously, in order to protect the identities of participants, information was collected anonymously, and thus the excerpts provided here are not attributed, except to distinguish between community members and support workers.

In many instances, participants related second- or third-hand information reflecting what they understood to be the experiences of others. These statements are reproduced here not for their factual value, but to convey the beliefs that sometimes motivate decisions on whether or not to report violence and that colour interactions between community members and police.

While the focus of consultations was recommendations for change to policing and police investigations, many participants contextualized their attitudes by sharing their experiences or understanding of the violence that occurs in the DTES, and why they would not go to the police. Some of those stories have also been reproduced.

A number of the issues discussed fall outside the purview of the Commission and the DTES Consultation Program as conceived. They are reproduced in order to give an indication of the overarching issues of concern to participants and their understanding of the factors that affect the safety of residents, in particular women and those who are in the sex trade.

Those participating in consultations formed a heterogeneous group. Some issues attracted a great deal of consistency, while others were marked by sharply divided views. We have not attempted to reconcile divergent opinions. As noted above, in order to fairly represent the contributions of all participants, we have attempted to include as many relevant comments as possible, in the participants' own words.

The most consistently reiterated comment made was that everyone, regardless of where they live, how they make a living, and what their life experiences have been, is a person and deserves to be treated with respect and to enjoy basic human rights.

In Section 3, we have tried to distill participants' comments into a series of recommendations, noting again that with regard to some issues, such as the legal status of the sex trade, there are conflicting opinions.

We are grateful to everyone who spoke to us and generously shared their past experiences, opinions and recommendations.

Past experiences that prevent people from going to police

Many participants described negative experiences that had coloured their perception of police officers, and intimated or stated that based on their negative perceptions, they did not trust the police or see them as a viable option for reporting violence they experienced or witnessed. Some of the incidents that participants cited as affecting their attitudes towards law enforcement officials generally did not involve the VPD or the RCMP.

Incidents mentioned included, but were not limited to:

- being mistreated by police or witnessing someone else being mistreated by police;
- being treated disrespectfully by police, or being subjected to what participants perceived to be differential treatment because they were in the sex trade;
- reporting a crime to police, either at the time of the incident or later, and receiving no response or follow up; and
- throughout the report, those in the sex trade also made references to:
 - being forced by police to give a customer's money back,

- being forced to “do dates” or have sexual relations with the police without payment,
- being sexually assaulted by the police or hearing that others had been assaulted,
- being told that it was their own fault if they were assaulted, and
- being transported by police to another area of the city or the Lower Mainland, but not being charged with a crime.

General negative experiences involving police

In some cases, participants said that their own experiences or the experiences of others had destroyed their trust in police. As noted previously, some of these accounts concern second- or third-hand information and may not be accurate, and the year and location of the incidents recounted are generally not noted. They are not presented for the truth of their contents, but rather as evidence of community beliefs that may affect perceptions and motivations.

- *Right now, many people have either experienced or are aware of others', sometimes tacit, negative experiences, when they have come forward and tried to report things to police. Those stories get shared a lot. And even if they are not true, or what is reported is not exactly what happens, it colours beliefs and makes people anticipate negative experiences. So they need to have different experiences coming out and being shared, in order to change that perception. (support worker)*
- *I am traumatized by seeing the police shoot that guy a couple of months ago (just behind the police station). A lot of people saw that. I saw them arguing with him, then I saw them shoot and kill him. I went down later and I heard them taking evidence from people, probably lots of things I shouldn't have heard. Now I want to fill out a Victim Impact statement, but I don't know how to go about it by myself, and I can't find someone here to help me.*
- *I thought I was being stalked, so I reported it to the police. I believe they spoke to the man, because since then, I see him everywhere. I think they reported to him what I said, but instead of it scaring him away, now he follows me all the time.*
- *About a year ago, I witnessed severe police brutality against a marginalized woman: a woman of colour, small, with mental health issues. I stopped and confronted the cops when the whole incident went down. She was run at, pushed against the wall and held up against the wall by her neck.*

- *I ended up with her on the ground where she was in cuffs -- it was freezing and she was crying. All the while, she was saying, "They cannot get away with this, they can't treat me like this", so she was giving her analysis of the situation, and they were treating her as a crazy person. And the cop was saying "This is between her and me." I said no. The cop said, "I am not responsible if she sticks you or bites you." I saw him escalating through the roof with this woman.*

Clearly if you are going to be in the DTES you will encounter intense situations, and he was clearly not equipped for that. That was why I was trying to intervene: to witness and to let him know, "I saw and you won't get away with this," but also to stop him from escalating the situation. He's this big guy standing over this small woman on the ground. His supervisor came over, did a "good cop bad cop" thing, and calmed her down. There were three cops there, and one was a woman – the other cops weren't holding the guy who had this woman down accountable either.

There was another woman, a street involved woman, trying to intervene and they wouldn't let her. It was interesting how I was able to be involved and she wasn't and how the whole situation went down. I ended up reporting it. I imagine they took me more seriously because I am a white middle class woman. My housemate reported it with me. It has initiated a whole investigation. I also wonder about the investigation – it's taken a year, how much money has this cost? I gave this all in detail in forms for the complaint. I keep getting letters about updates on investigation. I know the officer has chosen to move to another location. This incident affected how I see the police, and I can imagine it affected other people who saw it too – the residents. It was on a Saturday, in the neighbourhood, so it was the residents who witnessed it. (support worker)

- *People don't trust the police because they see them selling drugs here, raping women, beating people. In the face of that, it's almost impossible to build trust.*
- *Once the cops almost ran me over. The only reason I wasn't hit was our dog alerted me. The cop looked like he was going in reverse, then he sped up forward. My dog barked and I looked back. That stopped me from stepping into the street in front of him.*
- *We heard that one woman was raped by two cops who took her and held her down. Lots of people know this story. The camera in the car caught the face of one officer, so he was identified, but the other wasn't on camera, or at least not his face, only from the back. So they are still investigating. That's what we heard.*

- *I don't trust the police. I was assaulted by a police officer in Nanaimo when I was about 19. I was going to my aunt's hotel room. I was drunk. This officer told me I couldn't go inside. I said I was a guest. He pushes me, gets me on the ground, puts handcuffs on me and grinds my face into the pavement. I had bruise marks on the side of my face. I tried calling a lawyer, but it was a Sunday and all the offices I called were closed. I let it drop. I told the other officers too when they took me out of the drunk tank, but they didn't care. I would have felt differently about it if someone had listened to me, if he had been disciplined afterwards for excessive force.*
- *I don't deal with the police. The one time I did, I didn't have ID on me, so they arrested me. While they were processing me, they laughed at me and mocked me to my face. So I don't want to call them or deal with them again.*

"Starlight rides" (being transported by the police to other areas of the city)

- *It is common to be driven out of the city. The police took my man out to Langley and left him without shoes and took his money when he was trying to get dope for us when we needed it, because I was dope-sick. They took his phone, our only phone, so then he couldn't get in touch with me to let me know what happened. It took him a day and a half to get back. Meanwhile, I'm left in our apartment dope-sick. He came back and found me lying on the living room floor.*
- *A cop picked me up and told me he would take me to jail. He dropped me under the Pattullo Bridge and took my phone, money, and shoes and left me there. This used to happen to a lot of girls back then – 1996 to 1998.*
- *Last year, a woman had the police stop her in the alley behind here, take her crack pipe and break it, and then take \$85 she had. She was taken by the police to a highway and left there by patrol officers. It took her about an hour to get back here.*

Differential treatment by police because person was doing sex work

Some participants reported that they believed the police subjected them to unfair treatment or treated them differently because they were in the sex trade.

Being forced to return money to customers

One complaint was that when police arrived to intervene in an altercation, rather than investigating the complaint or detaining the alleged perpetrator, they forced participants to return money received from customers.

- *One time me and my girlfriend had to return the money we got to the john, because the guy didn't like the date. We did what we said we were going to do but he didn't get off (ejaculate). He called the police and they made us give the guy the money back.*
- *We never call the cops, because they automatically treat you like a criminal. The first thing they will ask is, "Why was the guy so mad at you? What did you do?" They have tried to take our money away from us, said we have to give it back to the date. Once, that person wasn't even there any more, but the police still said we had to give the money back. The only reason they didn't take all our money is I had it hidden, so I only gave them \$5.*

Dismissive responses from 911 Operators

Some participants commented that 911 Operators did not take them seriously when they called in assaults.

- *Operators taking 911 calls are really rude and don't care. They'll say, "Oh, you're a sex trade worker," then ask you, "What is your concern?" and "Who at the police do you want to be connected to?" And when you finally connect to the police, it takes forever for them to come, because they put you at the bottom of the list.*
- *There were many times, when I was living in the DTES and was a street worker and a drug user, when I would call 911, usually from a pay phone, when I had been beaten and raped by a john, and I was in shock and hurt. I would be in flight or fight mode, my adrenaline was racing and I was really upset, and the person answering my call would tell me to calm down and just minimize me and everything I was going through as they were speaking to me. I had been fighting for my life and they were just minimizing it.*
- *The other night, I called 911 because there was a guy attacking a girl on the street and I could hear it from my apartment. I was put on hold for a minute by the operator before she even took my call. What would have happened in another situation that was more of an emergency? And you had to wait a whole minute?*
- *911 Operators need training in sensitivity and dealing with sexual abuse. They are really cold and unresponsive, and sometimes rude.*

No response or delayed response by police

Many participants who were in the sex trade said that when they had tried to report assaults, they were not believed, or the police response was delayed, by hours or even months, in some cases. There was a pervasive belief that those in the sex trade were not taken seriously by police, or that violence against them was condoned as something to be expected in the sex trade.

- *About six months ago, I was raped. I reported it to the police, and when they came, they wouldn't take a statement. Three months later I saw the perpetrator on the street and called the police to come identify him. They said they couldn't do anything. (Why do you think they didn't follow up?) It's discrimination. They just don't like me. (Did you try to get someone else to help you contact the police?) No. I've known people who have been killed here. A friend of mine was killed at the park in June, and I saw him that night. And I found out the next day he had been murdered.*
- *Once my friend was beaten up. We had done a date together and we got into an argument with the john. The guy pulled a gun and held it to my head, then he shot my friend in the leg and pushed us out of the car. We were on the side of the road, and we called 911 for help. When the operator figured out that we were working, she said she would send the police first. As soon as police heard we just finished working, they disregarded us. They sat there and questioned us, then they laughed and made fun of us. Meanwhile, our friend was bleeding from the leg, dying there beside the road. They wouldn't call an ambulance. They said, "Let's see if he makes it." Finally, they did agree to call an ambulance and it took an hour and a half to arrive. They should have done that right away. The police didn't care. We used our own resources to help my friend. We were tearing up our clothes to bandage his wound. My friend can't work now because he's so afraid that he will be found in a ditch. After that, I didn't bother contacting the police again.*
- *I was raped and I reported it to a [female police officer]. I had the license plate of the guy who did it. She did nothing for one and a half years. She finally contacted me three months ago, but only after I had written about my experiences trying to deal with this in [a media outlet in the DTES]. And then she came to me and said, "Now women won't contact me." A month ago, I did a photo line-up, but there were 20 pictures and it was really hard. PACE helped me a lot with dealing with this and dealing with the police generally. But our first meeting (with police) was very hostile. We ended up screaming at each other and walking out. Their attitude was, "You make a choice to be out there, and that's what happened to you." I've been harassed because of the article I wrote, and I haven't*

done sex work for more than a year, because I'm afraid to get in cars. But I'm still out there, standing on the corner, and when the police ask me why, I say, "I'm the eyes and ears of my sisters." WISH changed my life. Thanks to them I've been able to gain weight again – I was 90 lbs. after the rape – and regain shared custody of my child. They really helped me.

- *I was on Hastings and often they put the new recruits out there on Friday nights to walk around, young cops. So I was in an alley and I saw this guy and instantly had a bad feeling about him. I must have done him wrong somehow, but instinctually I knew I had better run. I came out of the alley by the Regent Hotel and he followed me. I was terrified, I ran and he followed me. Six blocks he followed me. I saw these two young cops, and I was loaded, I had just shot up in the alley. I was afraid this guy was going to retaliate against me. I went to the cops and pointed this guy out, and told them, "He's been following me for six blocks and he wants to hurt me!" And they didn't do anything. They didn't stop to try to see the guy. They didn't stop him. I ended up following them for blocks and they did nothing. Because I followed them, went into a hotel, slipped out the back door and ran onto another block, I lost the perpetrator, but make no mistake -- he was out to cause serious harm.*
- *We used to report bad dates to police. We would know the guy and the car and tell them about it, and nothing, nothing happened. One guy was beating and robbing women. He had auto-locks on his car doors and he would lock you inside. The only thing you could do was try to kick out the windows -- that was a last resort -- but they were plexiglass. I was stuck with him and I tried to kick the window and he was laughing at me. I finally kicked the shift to ram the car into park and wreck his transmission. It was all I could do. I got away. He drove a Yellow Cab and we ID'd him to the cops, and they didn't do anything.*
- *We tried to give an incident report when I was assaulted. I was punched in the face and bleeding. I had all my ID stolen. It took three hours before they arrived. I tried to lie and not to say it was a date who did it to me, but the cops found out we were working. They made a report but it got thrown out because they found out we were sex workers. They said they threw it away because the other person was not the guilty one; I was. When the cops finally realized we were sex workers and we were getting hurt all the time, they stopped coming; their response time was so bad, so lazy.*

- *We should be able to talk to the police without them judging us. I'm scared to call the cops if I have a bad date. Once I had a bad date and I locked myself in the bathroom for an hour. I called the cops and they never came. I had to call someone else to help me get out.*
- *If you are a sex trade worker, they take their time because they don't care. They think we are the lowest of the low, and we're not. We could be dead on the street and the cops still wouldn't care.*
- *One time I had been attacked by a guy with a hatchet. He was trying to kill me. I called the police and I had to wait 45 minutes. I knew where he lived and I thought this time I would get him. I could tell the police and they'd get him. I was crying because I was completely flipped out, I was dope-sick, and [the emergency operator] was not believing me. I waited near Victoria and Clark for 45 minutes, then I couldn't wait any longer and I walked back downtown. They never came, or if they did, I was gone by then. There was just nothing from their side.*
- *Women are still regularly getting beaten in the DTES and it's hard for outreach organizations to do anything. For example, when we do outreach walking around to residences, sometimes we are in alleys or somewhere, but we can't take action ourselves because we don't want to endanger our own staff. Police are rarely around when these things are happening, and we can't hang around and wait for them to show up, if we call 911, because they often take a long time to respond. (support worker)*
- *[I called 911 about an assault happening in the street below me]. When the cops finally got there, the guy was still there, but the girl had run away. So the cops talk to guy and the guy walks away. And their response is, "We can't do anything – there was no victim." They couldn't find the victim, so as far as they were concerned, they should just let him go. When it was safe, I went out to talk to them and that was their attitude. The thing is, the guy is always going to deny that anything happened. And with the woman, if you want to lay charges, you have to get a rape kit, and otherwise, there's nothing you can do.*
- *Last year, one of our Hustle friends went missing. We tried to report him missing, me and my street mom both made a report. They did nothing. We tried to follow up. They said they couldn't find the report. We gave them picture and everything. We haven't heard anything. That was during the Olympics – I haven't seen or heard anything since.*

Some support workers reported that on night shifts in the DTES, it was difficult to get a response from police if there were disturbances.

- *My experience is that the cops take more than half an hour to respond, even to an emergency call. We had an incident down here where one of the clients became abusive to a staff member. She was throwing things and uttering threats. I called non-emerg because I didn't know what else to do. It took hours of calling to get them to respond. In the meantime, I was trying to get the woman to leave and she was just hurling abuse at me and physically coming at me. She was targeting women. Women were peeking in through the windows and doors but afraid to come in. We finally got through to police through a personal contact. Someone knew a cop and we called that person and they responded. But if it had been a more serious crisis, I hate to think what would have happened. (support worker)*
- *Police really don't want to come here [to a drop in centre]. Even the support workers can't get help if there's a problem. With the mandatory enforcement of domestic violence laws policy, transition houses get help immediately if they call 911, because the police know that it could be a guy stalking his ex, and they have to respond immediately. They do that now. But they don't come when we call. (support worker)*
- *We had an incident occur [at a housing project] when I was working last night. Someone called the police and it took them seven hours to show up. (support worker)*

Racism

Several participants referred to racist attitudes and discrimination against Aboriginal people as a reason to avoid contact with police. At the same time, other participants said that they believed that racism was less of a factor in police responses to incidents of violence than the stigma associated with the sex trade.

- *There is definitely racism in the police force. My boyfriend was Native and when the police would see him on the street, they would take out their clubs. Men who are Native get the worst treatment. They would get beaten up for no reason. You would sometimes see the cops at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning walking four abreast on the street with their clubs out, just making it known that they were there. And they would beat people, especially Native men, hoping they would fight back so they could get a good dirty beating in. We had to walk around them, step out of their way. They would take a jab at my boyfriend because they knew him, because he had a history, even though he hadn't done anything in years. Their attitude towards First Nations is just, "There goes another drunk*

Indian.” But that’s not just in the police force – it’s in society. A lot has to change in terms of attitude. That has to start with the family.

- *It’s not just cops, there is racism [against Aboriginal people] in the way you get treated by ambulance drivers and paramedics. My sister needed an ambulance and they didn’t believe she was hurt. They took a long time to come and then were very sarcastic, suggesting that she wasn’t sick and just wanted pills or something.*
- *Racism is a problem, absolutely. Especially for First Nations. It is really sad, but it is huge. “You’re just a dirty Indian, or you are just drunk or alcoholic.” I hear it less than I did five years ago, but I still do. (support worker)*
- *There is racism, but it can be reverse racism, like “Well, you’re white you should have your shit together,” or “You should be smarter than going with a black guy” -- because a lot of pimps are black. I heard this when a woman was beaten by her pimp. I guess in the old school thinking, you weren’t supposed to pimp someone within your own race. (support worker)*
- *I think that the discrimination women face when they deal with police has more to do with social standing and the fact they are doing sex work than racism. It’s the attitude towards people who are poor and doing sex work or street involved. But then we have to remember that 50% of the women who disappeared were Aboriginal. (support worker)*
- *The issue of whether perceived ethnicity or race is a barrier is very complicated. You are dealing with race, social class, street engagement and other societal divisions all at once. So there is that intersectionality of discrimination. But I think the stigma regarding sex work is the primary reason that police don’t respond to violence in the same way as among other populations. Not because of race. I think if there were a series of murders of middle-class women of colour, there would have been immediate attention from the police and the media and outrage and many more resources devoted to it. (support worker)*

Homophobia

Men in the sex trade also reported encountering homophobic attitudes from police.

- *I’ve faced homophobia from the cops, blaming me, making me give money back to clients, asking questions that there was no way I was going to answer and that had nothing to do with the issue. So I never*

phone the cops. We police ourselves. I had a 6'2" driver when I was doing escort work, and he was our cop.

- *Police homophobia and transphobia is huge. There are certainly cases where workers have been exploited, forced to do dates with cops. But then it's homophobia mixed in with harassment and abuse. And I would suspect that it's an internalized thing, and even more so with transphobia. The cop can't be good with what they've done, so they take it out on the workers. Or you get, "I would beat the crap out of you but I don't want to get what you've got," and you hear stories about that. (support worker)*

Community members' perceptions of police attitudes and behaviour

Participants reported that they often encountered disrespectful or judgmental attitudes from police. Many said that police make assumptions about participants because they live or work in the DTES or are in the sex trade and that police are sceptical of community members' credibility. Some police officers were seen to lack compassion and sensitivity to those dealing with mental health issues. Participants also said that they had encountered police who believed that violence against those in the sex trade was an occupational risk.

Perception that police are judgmental or insensitive

- *Don't make women in the downtown eastside into garbage – treat us like people.*
- *When you deal with police, the first question they ask is, "Are you a prostitute?" I am honest; as soon as you say that, they disregard you, treat you as non-human, like an alien. I haven't met one cop who said something nice to me. Usually, it's "What did you do?" It's our fault we got beaten. The police should just ask, "What did the person look like? Do you know their name?"*
- *Last time police stopped me, first thing officer asked was, "So, what are your restrictions?" They expect that I am out of my "red" zone. I don't have a criminal record. That officer didn't ask me who I was. She assumed I was a criminal. I took offence to that. I said, "I don't have a criminal record – who are you to talk to me like that?"*
- *Mostly, cops have no understanding of addiction and mental illness.*
- *Police need to recognize that people engaging in sex work are already vulnerable, for a whole host of reasons. They need to understand the social determinants of health. Many people in the DTES are dealing with*

severe mental health issues. Police don't know how to deal with them. They also don't know how to deal with drug addicts with sensitivity.

I have borderline personality disorder and PTSD from childhood abuse, and all of this comes so much into account when I have to deal with the police. Sometimes there is a real lack of sensitivity around mental health and addiction and sexual history, with police and authority figures generally, and with men. The police need to be taking this into account when they deal with people.

- *Dealing with the police is like dealing with a wall – their attitude comes first. It's like approaching a border crossing.*
- *I've been harassed by the police when I've been wearing a short skirt. I had one guy make smutty comments to me and tell me I had to cover my butt cheeks because he could see my ass, or he was going to arrest me on an indecency charge. Why don't they say that to people on the beach?*
- *Every time I get my trust (with the police) back, it gets broken again. This past Wednesday, I did a date and was very high afterward. It was about 3 a.m. and I was walking home downtown. It wasn't a good date, it was not a good experience, and so I was upset and in tears. A cop who knew me and had arrested me under the Mental Health Act before saw me. Cops remember me, maybe because I'm young. Anyway, I told the cop what happened. ... I asked him not very seriously if he could give me a ride home. And he said he could call a ride for me. So I waited, and they arrived with a paddy wagon.*

I'm very claustrophobic. As a child, one time, I was locked in the drawer under a cedar captain's bed for three hours, so small spaces make me really uncomfortable and cause me a lot of trauma. I've never been in a paddy wagon before, so I really didn't know what to expect.

Then the cops got out, gave me a pat down, and said, "We're not going to handcuff you because you seem okay," so I got in and then they shut the door. Then I realized that it wasn't a wide open space like I thought, it was a very confined space, and I was freaking out. So I banged on the door. There was no window and I was super scared. But they wouldn't let me out or even check on me, even though all they were doing was offering me a ride home.

It should have been 10 minutes from there to my place by car, but I was in there for 45 minutes. At one point, they even stopped, and they were parked, talking to a guy on the street for 10 minutes and wouldn't let me out, even when I got to my address.

There was so much insensitivity in the way they treated me. I wasn't detained, so why couldn't they let me out? It's just an example of the kind of power imbalance that exists when you deal with the cops.

- *The police attitude seems to be that you have to be a criminal or a pedophile to live and work down here. (support worker)*
- *My own experience with the VPD is limited, but I find them somewhat condescending. They post these stories online about the DTES like "Welfare Day is Here" on "East Side Stories" [an online blog by a Vancouver police officer], and they are very patronizing. (support worker)*
- *The RCMP are harder to deal with on a service-provider level. They're too procedural and tight-lipped, bureaucratic, they're not community-minded and more concerned with making a quota of arrests. Surrey Vice squad disbanded because they weren't making enough arrests. (support worker)*
- *There is systemic bias within the VPD – maybe it doesn't look like what we think it will. It is not as overt as you might expect. ... The prejudice is extremely banal and mundane – nothing overt you can point at like the cops hating women, or hating women involved in prostitution. It is an individualist world view that doesn't recognize inequality.*

For example, look at Constable Steve Addison's blog. The VPD get a former journalism student to write this blog. He says this blog is apolitical, but it is a world view laid bare. All the support workers here follow the blog. I try to write measured comments on it and he deletes them. Examples of what he has written include: "I've never seen so many people passively accept their victimization," and "Back then, police officers didn't worry about mincing words. Women who got paid to have sex were called whores, not sex-trade workers. Twenty-somethings who stood on the corner and asked for handouts were called beggars and rubby-dubs, not marginalized youth. None of them were welcome, or tolerated, on Whistling Smith's beat, let alone invited to live there."

He defends his quotes. He says he wasn't glorifying it, but he was. The tone was, "We should just call them whores." (support worker)

- *The fact is that a great deal of the problem is police attitudes. There was one bike cop who used to work in the DTES, and he was there every day, riding around the neighbourhood, but his view was that violence was an occupational hazard for anyone who did sex work. So that attitude permeated all the interactions workers had with him. Even with Dave Dickson, people's experiences were mixed. (support worker)*

- *I think it's easy to be hardened down here to what is going on. They lose their compassion quickly, they forget about other people's situations. It's survival. Green cops have to survive. (support worker)*
- *It's easy to bash the police. It's easy for them to become a target for everything that people are experiencing that's wrong. But the fact is that the police don't represent what they could represent in their roles. Building trust is a difficult thing. It would be helpful if the police could be made more responsive, more compassionate, and if their approach could be less enforcement-based. ...*

The main thing is that the police need to deal with everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic position, without bias, respectfully. So they should be setting their morality aside, and their issue about wielding power. So much of it is about power and authority. Police, unlike you and I, by virtue of their position are tasked with the ability to intervene in situations. And that's both good and bad, but it also allows them to say basically anything they want. So a conversation about changing the police and making them a viable refuge has to start with talking about systemic problems and recognizing the inherent potential for the problem of misuse of authority, and how to deal with that. (support worker)

Issues of community members' credibility

- *Women living down here still find their credibility is suspect because of addiction. This is something that has never changed. If a woman is an addict, she simply isn't trusted to give accurate information. (support worker)*
- *Police often question people's credibility. For example, one woman pressed charges of assault against a man, then retracted them. The second time the same thing happened, when she tried to press charges, the police asked her if she was sure she really wanted to go through with them, since she hadn't the previous time. They more or less tried to talk her out of it, and questioned her sincerity. (support worker)*
- *There are good cops and bad cops, but the main problem in dealing with the police is getting beyond the attitude. They treat everyone like they're wrong. You can't get past that. Credibility is a huge problem. People who report problems are just not believed. Even support workers are not believed. The attitude of police is very intimidating, so it doesn't encourage people to come forward. For women, the male officers are also physically intimidating. It takes a lot to build trust in that circumstance. Police need to be out in the community more, building community, building relationships, so it feels like a community where*

people look out for each other. As it is, this is an area that most people don't even want to walk through. (support worker)

- *Some of these women have been on the streets or in the community for a long time. They were friends with the women who were murdered or had been on Pickton's farm. So having seen what happened with the VPD, there is no way they will go to the police. They have no faith or trust that they will be believed.*

Also with what happened with Ashley [Machiskinic] at the Regent [Hotel], the community was not believed. Her death was immediately being ruled a suicide, within the first 24 to 48 hours. Now, later, they have had to retract that, because so many women's organizations protested. (support worker)

- *One way to make it easier for women to report is to take the women seriously. I'm sure that the police have heard that before. But how do you get at the deep racism in the VPD? And the sexism and classism? Essentially they are not believing poor women. (support worker)*
- *There's often a snide attitude from police and ambulance – "Is it really a problem?" I understand them, because there is treatment resistance. The support staff will call the police, then they will come and the women will play dumb, and say "Why are you bothering us?" So it makes us look like we exaggerate things. (support worker)*

Ambiguity in the law and abuses resulting from low legal literacy

Some participants complained that police exceed their authority when they question DTES residents, for example by engaging in searches without cause, and that police rely on the relatively low level of community literacy about the law to intimidate people. Others noted that there are ambiguities around the enforcement policies for some provisions of the Criminal Code, particularly relating to drug possession and the sex industry. They felt that clarification of police policies and better knowledge of the law would assist both police and DTES residents during their interactions.

- *[The police] are not allowed to just search you. A lot of the time they conduct illegal searches. People don't know their rights. You must be arrested to be searched, but they do it anyway.*
- *I've been arrested before under the Mental Health Act (for fear that I would harm myself) and so since I've had the police follow me. I know my rights, for example, I know I only have to give them my name, but because they have access to the record of my previous arrests, if I'm resistant, they may react strongly. I've been grabbed and pinned to the*

ground, which is really upsetting. It upsets me of course, because here is this man and he is forcing me to have a conversation with him. Basically, if they stop me, they can type me up and know I'm a working girl and this is my history. Then they feel like they have the right to be as intrusive as they possibly can, even if I'm not doing anything.

- The cops just intimidate us for having narcotics and for working in general. They are always harassing us and running our names. Their main mode in dealing with women is intimidation. And when we do give them our names and identification, they even imply that we are somehow stealing someone else's identity. They will ask all these questions about what happened years ago, kind of as if they want to trip you up or prove you're not the person you say you are. We are guilty by our very existence.
- The biggest problem with the cops is that now they go and scare the johns away. They run the john's name and give him a big talking to, then they run the woman's name, and try to see if they can get you on something. It's always for sex work. They don't search for drugs.
- Often judgments are made just because they run someone's name in PRIME and it comes up with previous contact. [PRIME is an information database that police use which includes information on interactions with police, which is separate from CPIC.] So they assume that you're a problem or have previous arrests. One time I was assaulted and the police ran my name in PRIME and it came up with a bunch of incidents, so they assumed I had prior charges. In fact, I've had none – my prior contacts were assisting women to report -- and I was actually the victim of the crime in this case. So if they knew I had been a sex worker, what would it have been like for me then? (support worker)
- The biggest barrier sex trade workers experience reporting crimes is the judgment of them by police, the attitude that you put yourself at risk, and the fear of being charged for doing sex work. They don't know what the actual charges might be, and police don't help explain that. They don't say, "We can't charge you for that." They want people to fear that.
- Generally, I think the police need to be made more aware of legislation and recent court decisions, like the Insite decision, when they are enforcing the law. There needs to be more legal education among the police, so they follow decisions, but also among community members, to increase their legal literacy, and among support workers. Police actively try to get around the search and seizure laws. There is also a pervasive belief that you have to wait 24 hours before reporting a missing person.

- *Related to [the complaints procedure] is the fact that most workers do not know what police can and can't do. They don't know what's allowed in terms of arrests and police behaviour. They face a lot of harassment and bullying, and they don't know whether it's permitted or the police are exceeding their mandate. It would be good to revise the Pivot "Know Your Rights" campaign to give public education on legal literacy specifically to workers. Really, the police are a gang, and there is always a fear, that if you piss one off, another one is going to come after you. Workers really are not full citizens. They do not enjoy the same rights that you and I do. So in their dealings with police sex workers are always guilty first. (support worker)*
- *You have to go back to the fact that sex work isn't illegal. And then all of the challenges that are happening with the laws and Charter. Because this is a grey area in the law, it is ambiguous at best and confusing for law enforcement, even. So take that confusion of, "What are we supposed to be doing?" and put that in the hands of people who are ignorant or don't care. And people can get busted for all sorts of things, but the reality is that you don't want them on the corner and you are making a judgment that it's illegal and then justifying it in charges for drugs, Failures to Appear, etc. The confusion in the law makes for less safety for sex workers and more risk at all levels. Again, there's a need to address it at the high level, address what is the purpose of the law and what is it intended to do, and make sure that is clearly outlined at an enforcement level. Sex workers themselves are confused about what's legal and what's not. The police are confused. It makes things unsafe. (support worker)*
- *The police also need to decide how to deal with their legal obligations with regard to enforcement in light of the legal challenges to the Criminal Code provisions that are happening now. For example, with respect to s. 213 [offences relating to prostitution], there could be a moratorium of imposition of charges, until there is a clear ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada on the constitutionality of these laws. Now, as it gets more dangerous to work outside, more workers are moving inside, but then police are sweeping brothels and working to close down off-street dance and sex work venues through bylaw enforcement and other strategies. So they continue to enforce as before even though the status of these laws is uncertain. (support worker)*

Belief that justice system will not bring redress

Some participants recounted experiences with the justice system that made them believe there is no point in reporting assaults and other violent incidents, because even when they are reported, either charges will not be laid or the perpetrators will not necessarily be punished. They felt victims were being blamed for putting themselves at risk, while those in law enforcement failed to pursue and investigate pimps and those who assaulted and killed women.

- *I was volunteering at WISH when women were disappearing. It was awful. Everyone was scared. There was a real sense that everyone thought there was a serial killer but no one believed us, so we just had to do whatever we could to keep women safe. I realized that all we had in the face of that was this space for three or four hours a night, and after women were out there on the streets. (support worker)*
- *I was picked up by two guys here, then driven to Burnaby. I had a bad feeling right away. It turned out one had a stun gun. They were planning to stun me then stab me. Their plan was to attack and kill. But the stun gun didn't work. So when they stabbed me, I was conscious. They stabbed me five times in the leg. I screamed bloody murder. I screamed so loud that it freaked them out and they took off. And I kept screaming. I was badly injured. I still can't walk properly. Someone heard me and called the cops, so the Burnaby RCMP showed up. I told them these guys were in a white car and gave them a description. The two guys ended up coming back, because one had dropped a cell phone. And the cops got them. They arrested them.*

I ended up going to trial and testifying against them. The cops and the Crown both treated me well. The one guy with the stun gun got convicted on a minor weapons charge. But the other guy was acquitted and released one day later. He was back out on the street. I wasn't offered any protection, because he was acquitted. I had to cut my hair to disguise myself. Luckily I haven't seen them since. That was a few years ago.
- *I was picked up by an associate of Pickton and taken to Mitchell Island. I was pregnant at the time. This guy had a trailer. Later it burnt down. It had 40 crack pipes, but he didn't smoke crack. 30 watches. A bloody mattress. He tried to hook a battery up to my nipples to shock me. I pleaded with him that I was pregnant. I think his plan was to kill me and kill my baby. I managed to get him to let me go and get out and get away. I found out that he was making snuff videos. There was a woman down here who used to fix him up with girls. We heard about one girl who was taken there and stabbed 14 times. The woman was given an*

amnesty on her charges for turning him in, because she was being threatened. She is out on the streets now. But they ended up not charging the guy, because they couldn't find a body. That was eight years ago. I carry a push stick [a wooden stick used to push drugs into a pipe, distributed through BCCDC Harm Reduction supply] because I'm afraid I'll get attacked some day, either by them or someone else. But I've never seen either of them since.

- *Police need to stop saying that all the deaths out there are from overdoses. Women know what they're doing. They know how much to take. They don't die from overdoses. They need to help sex workers and not target us.*
- *The cops started moving women off the strolls when John Doe got back on the street (in early November). When we tried to protest, they said it was for our own safety, and did we want to meet him? They said it was for our own good. But there are no outstanding charges against him, and he was never charged in the murders. Of course, we know that Pickton couldn't have been alone in what he was doing. So where are the others? If we have to live scared, we are just targets for abuse. The cops are actually putting us more at risk. Why don't they go after him instead of us?*
- *So many women have been pushed out of windows by drug dealers and their murders are unsolved. What are they doing about that?*
- *Everyone in the DTES does drugs, and they do them openly, and all the time. It's Mardi Gras here every day. But they never go after the men who are pimping women. They never go after the Jamaicans who run Oppenheimer Park. Also, if a woman does call in an assault, they are so slow to respond. It can be an hour, or two hours.*
- *There is very little distinction, I've found, between pimps, boyfriend and dealers. Usually the boyfriend ends up as the others. So if we are not enforcing against dealers, we are not enforcing against pimps.... These are the guys the VPD is not going after. I understand the VPD make it a priority to go after the larger level dealers. This sends a message: it's okay to be pimping out and buying women. (support worker)*

Fear of retribution

Some participants also said that fear of retribution in various forms, from perpetrators, drug dealers, pimps, and from the police themselves, would prevent DTES residents from reporting violence or contacting the police.

- *In terms of barriers that still prevent workers from going to police, one of the biggest is that you will be seen as a rat, or as weak. You can lose street credibility when you approach services of any kind. Sex worker services are okay, but with others, there is a huge risk. So most people only take that step after they experience a really horrendous, heinous act of violence, or they wait, and often by the time they have come forward, the evidence has been lost or the details are no longer clear. That complicates things.*

When people are seen as rats, they potentially face retribution from the community, particularly ostracism. It could be by your pimp, your dealer, organized crime, the woman who babysits for you. People get excommunicated and then they don't have access to drugs, to the services they need, to places to stay. It's like an unspoken rule: you can't bring the heat into your community or network. These are the principles that guide reporting behaviour. (support worker)

- *I know about a woman who had her throat slit by dealers and was left with her tongue hanging out, down on her chest. Another got her fingers cut off, because she owed money to the dealers. Because it's organized crime, no one reports it. People are concerned about being seen as snitches. If they are seen talking to the police, they could be done by drug dealers. A lot of people believe there are connections between the police and the Hell's Angels. Women are being tortured by dealers for money, and the police don't do anything. People think it's better to just take care of their own business and don't involve the police. But everyone knows who the bad cops are.*
- *The Pickton murders are just part of a much larger system of abuse of women, in which many people are complicit. The media attention on Pickton and the Commission is distracting people from seeing that the situation is still going on. And people get targeted for the information they might have. Women are still very much at risk from more than just random violence, and there is fear of reporting violence, because those who perpetrate are well-organized, members of organized crime, and will seek retribution against anyone who speaks to the police. You can't trust anyone, even the people you have known for years, because you never know whom they might be talking to or working for.*

- *The big worry is about the pimps. Cops can get in your face, say something nasty, but pimps and dealers will beat the shit out of you, cut your hair off or shave your heads, if you owe them money. Lots of women get their hair cut off.*
- *Police should help girls that are trying to leave pimps. Why I didn't trust them? Even if I asked, they didn't really want to help. You need a safe place to go to when you're trying to leave a pimp. It's really hard and scary. They will find you and haunt you. You need somewhere safe to go to, or you will be stuck and put yourself more at risk. You can try to get restraining orders against pimps but pimps don't care. I was too scared to sign on my pimp or go to jail – neither were great options. The police didn't offer to help me to put him away. How can you be protected against someone who knows where you are, where your family is?*
- *In terms of retribution and how that limits reporting of incidents, for example, it's not uncommon for a woman to pass out and then be raped, say by four Spanish guys. That happens. And then what are you going to do? You can't rat them out. They attack in groups. There are street rules that you have to follow. And if you do report something, there's no way back. You may have nowhere to go. So most people deal with it by just self-medicating. That's all they have. It's like after Vietnam, when you had so many people with PTSD, and their only way of dealing with it was to take drugs to numb the pain, so they end up addicts, and they're only self-medicating to survive.*
- *I see the United Nations Gang beat the shit out of women down here. I see it a lot. It's really scary. It has helped me understand oppression more, seeing how threatening they can be without even laying a finger on a woman. For example, on Saturday I saw my friend who is about 19, an Aboriginal woman prostituted by the United Nations gang, being enforced against by them. A big SUV with three guys pulled up. They were standing over her and calling her horrific names and intimidating her. The guy at the wheel of the SUV was directing the other guys how they should handle her. These are the guys the VPD is not going after. I understand the VPD make it a priority to go after the larger level dealers. This sends a message: it's okay to be pimping out and buying women. These incidents sometimes arise because women owe money – so the dealers and pimps beat them and shave their heads. It's often because the women owe money or aren't doing enough tricks and making enough money for the pimps. If that happens, I don't see the women going to anyone because they are afraid or intimidated. (support worker)*

- *At one point, my pimp said if I ended up dead, he would make it look like a trick did it. I was concerned because he was very violent. I was working outside then. I told the police, if I end up dead, this is who's done it – I just want you to know that. Knowing that women are under a lot of duress, they just need interaction to know about it and have it on record somewhere. I found out later that other women had similar experiences too, with similar kinds of threats. They also just wanted someone to know. (support worker)*
- *I had knowledge third- or fourth-hand of a very serious incident. I took it to a police officer known in the community and he connected to the sergeant in Internal Affairs; he did what he could with the issue, he was great, but he needed first-hand info in order to act on it, and because people didn't want to come forward out of fear, nothing could be done. That makes it so unsafe for people. (support worker)*
- *Our work is built on relationships. The ability to help people is based on our ability to build relationships of trust and respect. And even then, people are scared and afraid to talk about what's really going on for them. Because if the police are threatening them, and especially if they are "dipping" – "we won't arrest you but you have to put out" – they don't talk about this kind of stuff. The perception is, "If I put up with all this stuff maybe I will benefit or be taken care of." A total control and power play. That happens. (support worker)*
- *Fear of retribution is a huge barrier to women reporting violence. Even to be seen talking to the police, there may be fear that you're ratting. But then there are police like Linda Malcolm, whom you can talk to anywhere, any time, without fear. So it comes back to relationship building. If women had good relationships with police – including police who are in uniform, that's important – and they talked to them all the time, there wouldn't necessarily be a fear of talking to police, because it wouldn't be outside the norm. But the police have to think about how to make that possible. During the Task Force investigation into the missing women, the police were going around checking in on women in hotels by sticking their cards in the door frame. And that was very intimidating. If people came home and found police cards in their doors and they didn't know why, what were they going to think? And what would other people think? So there have to be ways that the police can make themselves approachable and not make the people they're dealing with defensive. They have to recognize that privacy and personal safety matter, that these things are important. So normalize having a chat with the police, and people will be able to really look to them for help. (support worker)*

Other barriers to reporting violence

Other factors that put those in the sex trade at risk and diminish the likelihood they will report incidents of violence include feelings of resignation to abusive situations and lack of self worth, practical considerations such as the time required to make a report, and the potential stigmatization that could arise from a police record identifying the complainant as someone in the sex trade.

Lack of self-worth

- *The response time by the police is good. It's the people who won't follow up. Women don't take care of themselves. If they cared more about themselves, it might make a difference to the outside perception. It should never be okay for a person to hurt another person.*
- *The problem is bigger than Pickton. You know why people are being killed, why women are still being killed? It's snuff movies, they get them and drug them and kill them, and if you wake up, you wish you didn't, because it's worse. And the women arrange this, and that's why there are still people making sure that women are going to those places. Women need education to protect themselves, and think, that you don't take drugs or alcohol from anyone you don't know, because you don't know what they are giving you. You don't know what might happen to you. But they don't think, they are so desperate they just do it. So what we need to change is the awareness in the women, so they look out for themselves.*
- *A lot of it comes down to self-esteem. The saddest part is women will tell me [what happened to them] but not other people. I heard about a woman who took women down to Pickton's farm. A lot of what we do is choice. We chose to live here. We choose to be the person that society is making us out to be. But look at the safety issues women are facing. They are getting into cars, getting hurt, not getting paid, allowing themselves to be in bad situations. There are weird offers; girls will consent to getting beat up for \$20. Women don't take care of themselves. If they cared more about themselves it might make a difference to outside perception. You can't make anyone feel anything – I will only allow you to make me feel unworthy if I feel unworthy. And they do. I don't know who makes me madder – girls that will take \$8 or those that offer it. ... That is why we need programs for women's empowerment.*
- *I have assisted people making reports to police before, but most of them haven't gone to trials. There are various reasons why people don't wish to pursue charges. Sometimes they just don't want to go through with it.*

Sometimes it is related to homelessness, or the fact that people have to get back out and work, or the fact that they didn't do a rape kit. Sometimes it just doesn't seem to be worth the effort. Sex workers are non-citizens in so many ways they feel that no one cares about them, so in turn, they don't care about themselves. If you want a woman to go forward with a charge, the first thing you have to do is convince her that she is valuable enough. That takes rebuilding her trust, to assure her she is a human being worthy of justice and that it is worth pursuing someone who has acted against her. So that is a big step right there. And then there is so much stigma resulting from the criminalization of sex work. To come out and make a statement to police identifying yourself as a sex worker who has been assaulted, you would have to be a martyr to want to do that. And there are martyrs, who take that step, but that is how people see them. As martyrs, not as women getting help. (support worker)

Time required to file a police report

- *I have told girlfriends to go the police and they won't. They don't want to. They don't want to deal with the long process, do all the paperwork, go down to the station. They figure it takes too long.*
- *Most women who have been assaulted don't have the time to stop and do everything it takes to file a report. Even if they just had a bad date, they don't have time to stop. They just do more drugs and then they have to get back out there.*
- *Depending on an individual's situation, the woman has a quota – you have to go out to work for your pimp, so you have no time to stop to make a report. You just keep going. (support worker)*

Stigma and fear of being identified as someone in the sex trade

- *As it is, women make reports to the Red Light Alerts but not to the police. Even if we offer support, they still don't want to do it. They don't want to be identified as a sex worker, to have that written down in a report somewhere associated with them, so someone can always find that out. Sometimes following up can also be a problem, but the main thing is having their names down in a report.*

Positive experiences with police

Some participants reported that they had had very positive experiences with police and acknowledged that the police had a difficult role to play in the DTES, where endemic problems related to street engagement have engendered hostility towards the police. Many made a point of stating that “there are good cops and bad cops,” and that they had learned to place trust in a number of police officers with whom they had positive relationships. Several also commented that police relations with the community had improved over the last several years, in part in a direct response to the disappearances and deaths of women and the arrest of Robert Pickton.

The overarching theme in these comments was that good relations with police still depended very much on the individuals involved, and that systemic changes had yet to occur or were “not enough” to overcome the pervasive barriers that prevent many street-engaged people from relying on police when they are victims of crimes. Some participants suggested that further efforts are needed to institutionalize the positive aspects of the relationships that have been built.

- *I went missing for three weeks and someone filed a missing persons report on me. They followed up. When I came back, the cops came to my door to check that I had actually come back. I think that was good.*
- *I have sympathy for the police. They have a hard job to do and they see more attitude from the community than the community sees from them. You can understand how they might feel that they never see a change in the DTES. There is a circle of violence down here that just doesn't stop. They are not social workers. They could involve us more when they interact with the community. Support workers should be there working with the police. But the problem here is we don't have the capacity for that. We have too much to do as it is. (support worker)*
- *Some police have been friendly; some haven't. Years ago I had bad experiences – didn't want to call the police. I was scared of being arrested, scared of them forcing me to give money back [to johns]. Before they would always take your name and run it through the computer. Now police are trying to help more; some of them do pay attention more. There is a difference because so many women went missing. Some police will say hi. One introduced me to his friends when he was off duty, in front of a bar. I was really surprised by that. In the last two years, if I've had problems, the police have been friendly. When I had bad date, when me and my girlfriend were locked in an apartment, they called a SWAT team in and kicked the doors in. We had locked ourselves in a bathroom. The guys who we had a problem with were not from here. The police said to them, “You don't get your money back, and you have to treat them okay.”*

The police even read out our “menu” or price list. They said, “You can’t take advantage of these women. When you try to come back to this country, it will be marked down that you assaulted a sex trade worker.” I heard one of the guys ended up being deported.

- *At one time, I wasn’t seen out here for a while so the police sent my picture across Canada because I was always seen by Vice. I don’t mind them talking to me about it. They took DNA from me [note: not in the City of Vancouver]. If it does happen I want them to know it’s me.*
- *I only had one follow up with the police: when I was robbed. The guy was charged and I went to court and testified against him. A date had robbed me. I was going to leave when he grabbed my purse. We fought over my purse, and he brought out a knife and tried to stab me. I ran away, and he tried to run me over. He had brought me to a hotel at Marine and Fraser, and ordered drinks on his tab. So I went back to the bar and told the staff what happened. They told me he was the son of the bar owner. He had my purse. He had my phone. I called the police and the police did a GPS on the phone. The police called my friend and said they had my phone. The police were very respectful and helpful that time. They came up to me, they gave me a court date, asked me to testify. The police talked to me after, when I would see them. That’s it. I talked to Crown counsel before court. It was a good experience, better than before. The judge was very nice. He reassured me that there was nothing wrong with what I was doing for a living, so long as it was not in a public place; he reassured me. The perp was already in at the time for seven months, and he had to do another two months. He got a year’s probation order with restraining order for me and other sex trade workers. I saw him on Granville Street once; his friends tried to come near me. I told them there was a court order. A guy told them I would go to court. I’m not scared of the guy now. If he hassles me, I will just call the police on them. I didn’t feel strongly about that before, but now I do – I have rights too.*
- *I have never hated the cops because the cops saved my life. Two officers helped me to exit. Without them, I don’t know what would have happened to me. So I really credit them, and I remember that lots of police are good. (support worker)*

Contacts with “good cops” and “known cops”

- *I will go to a certain cop if he is available; I will go to a known good cop. But I never see them. Are you going to take the chance that it’s him or an asshole? Some will reach in girls’ bras and take their money. And you can’t do anything about it.*

- *I think working with the police has been successful for me because I've built personal relationships with specific officers. I have to know that they respect me and they respect the women I'm working with, or I would refuse to allow them to contact me. I have good contacts in Vice and that helps a lot. I know they will protect me. We have a lot of mutual respect. I have over seven years' experience working with the same cop in Vice, Brian. This is continuing on from the relationships that I built in Surrey, when I used to give training to the cops there through Servants Anonymous Society – it was training by only experiential staff. I met with the Vice Unit and did ride-alongs. Later that program was cancelled.*

The Vice Unit now is amazing. Brian is the most senior detective. He helped his [relative] exit when he was a beat cop, so he does care and he really gets it. He doesn't want to arrest women, he wants to help them exit. Brian will tell people about his [relative]; that opens it up in a way that makes it easy for clients to talk to him. Most cops don't have that experience. They don't know how to open things up to the client so that she can feel trust. Brian is open and honest and will always try to accommodate women's needs. He contacts me about people who are trying to exit sex work at any time, day and night. Because the window for exiting is short. So I tell him to contact me. You have to be there for people when that opportunity is there.

All of Vice is great. But Vice is only 7-8 guys. And the total force is what? 1100? And Linda Malcolm is only one. So they're great, but there are so many cops that don't get it. (support worker)

- *We know there are officers that we can work with, quietly. For example, if you want to relocate someone, because of a risk they are facing, there are key officers in Vice who can help facilitate that. (support worker)*
- *We've all heard the bad stories. I've heard stories about sex workers being raped in back of police cars. And I tell the police that sometimes. Sometimes cooperating with police makes life easier. But after something bad happens, it can take six months of working with me to get women to talk to Brian or Linda. I have to make sure that they feel like they're in control, not coerced. I know their feeling. I testified in a sexual assault when I was 19, and I remember feeling like I was not being believed when the police questioned me, but that's just their impartial way of questioning. It makes you think they doubt you're telling the truth. You still feel like you're on trial during investigations – they lack people skills. So if there are 10 good of hundreds that you don't know and you're not sure what you're going to get when you call the police, you don't. You make sure to stick with the people you know. (support worker)*

Cooperation between police and organizations serving those in the sex trade

Support workers' perspectives on police were often different from community members'. Their experiences were informed by interactions with police in collaborative programs on safety issues, some initiated in the wake of the disappearances of women from the DTES. While many were cautiously optimistic about the potential for better relationships and more robust responses to violence in the sex industry, they stressed the importance of institutionalizing a unified approach to policing of the sex trade and of the DTES within the VPD.

- *I think what we have seen with the police in the past is the failure of a coordinated and consistent response to issues of sex workers' safety. So on the one hand, we were partnering with them on a Confrontation Management Program, working with the police to revise bad date reporting and get more detailed information about perpetrators. The Confrontation Management Program was run through PACE with John McKay, to teach sex workers self-defence, verbal judo, and strategies to respond to violent situations in cars and get out of them. Workers who attended and graduated from the course got certificates. We were working from the position that violence against workers is a hate crime, and we had pretty good collaboration. I've done research with SWUAG at Pivot and officer John DeHaas was on that committee. It was a great collaboration. And then on the other hand, workers would be going out and there would still be stings going on, and workers would be arrested or treated poorly by beat cops. So there was no consistency between the different layers of law enforcement that we were dealing with. There was no consistent approach. You could never know that the efforts you were making on one level would bear any concrete results on another.*

Now what I see is that we need to have more of those useful, meaningful, mutually beneficial programs where sex workers engage with police. But every time we engage, the public face that the police show regarding sex work is different than what we see when we interact in these programs. So it's hit and miss in terms of the attitudes of the individual officers that sex workers and service providers meet up with, and this means that the signals workers and community organizations get from law enforcement are very mixed. (support worker)

- *Overtime, our relationship with the police has actually gotten better and better.... Our policy used to be to ban people who were engaging in aggressive or inappropriate behaviour as a way to de-escalate the situation. We started to rethink this, and decided that a zero tolerance policy really didn't make sense. But we had to find another way to deal with things. So this meant calling in the police, so staff would not be put in a position where they had to intervene in violent or potentially harmful*

situations. ... We had to create a culture whereby it was not appropriate for staff to wade into disputes, and the police had the responsibility for dealing with things. This can be difficult when our staff are actually experiential people from the community, whose backgrounds are similar to residents and who may have had their own issues in the past with police. They have their own preconceptions. But the ultimate outcome has been to improve the profile of the police here. We've also worked to develop relationships through the Community Policing Office.

Most cops now have undergone some sensitivity training and they are pretty good with the women, and inclusive of support workers here as part of the support team during an incident when they're called.... However, we've also had to do a fair bit of work on our understanding of this [shelter] space and expectations of privacy. For some people, this is a home. The sleeping quarters may seem very insecure, but in our eyes and the eyes of the residents, the sleeping area is akin to a bedroom. ... So we've had to invite the police to come in to talk to staff, so that we can explain that to us these "bedrooms" have expectations of privacy and that we need to agree on common standards of behaviour. (support worker)

- *We liaise with Vice because we know what kind of service clients will get with Vice; we don't know with beat cops what will happen. We try to show clients that they can have a positive experience with police officers. And the Vice cops try to show this too. Most cops show up here out of uniform, to make women more comfortable.*

I know that VPD don't really want to sting women. Vice contacts me to ask women to move sometimes, because they're getting pressure to arrest them. They'll say, "Can you tell them that if they don't move from this area, we are going to have to do something?" They want to avoid stings as much as possible. (support worker)

- *I sit at a lot of tables related to impacts and safety for sex workers in Vancouver. I want to be encouraged by the level of involvement by the police. I say "I want to," because some of it is token. Some of the involvement or membership is to say, "We were there." And there are either regrets, they don't show, or they stand behind the party line and say their hands are tied. That happens at some tables. At other tables, there is an actual interest in participating and partnering, to make sex work and sex worker safety better. Why? Primarily it is individuals.*

It's also departmental. It has a lot to do with rank and file: who you are and who you report to and department and politics within the police force. A lot of things go nowhere. But again there is that perception that

we are here, we are interested and want to be a part of things, but it's obvious that they are not doing anything. Or people will be assigned to attend the tables, but they have no idea what the issues are, they are lost in the fray. And you can see that. They want to be interested but they have no idea what's going on. Say, Living in Community: there have been different officers or departments represented at that table, and you'll get somebody assigned to it, and it seems like they are just told to go and not say much, but maybe they want to be involved.

I don't want to be a naysayer because lots of progress has been made. There are bad stories, but there are also good stories – they were treated really well by the police, they felt supported, there was no judgment. Those stories are becoming more and more [prevalent]. There is a shift happening. So I don't want to exclude that. But still there is a lot of harassment and discrimination and a lack of care and concern for people. (support worker)

- *When we look at what has already been done, Living in Community is a great example of a joint community development strategy that includes sex workers. There were so many people and so many different stakeholders working at the table. It is a key example of collaboration and a really great start. But going forward, we need to invest in the products of these collaborations so they can be implemented. If resources were actually put into carrying strategies forward, then we could test a variety of responses. The initial work has already been done. The partnerships are there. (support worker)*
- *When officers come and take part at tables, it's not always clear if they are supported internally or what kind of feedback they bring back to their departments. It's not clear if they are invested in the outcomes the way that other stakeholders are, or if they are just making appearances. Are they partners in this, or are they just doing recon? The fact is that with the police, we don't see a unified position – they may not have a unified position internally. We could be working really effectively with one officer but this does not mean that anything on the street changes.*

You have to remember that if the police department works with you, there are so many layers. We have succeeded in getting officers to come to our organization in plain clothes and leaving their guns at home. The women work with them and they expect some change to come out of that, some consistency. So then if we make that effort then the women go back out on the street and there is no change, the cops still treat them the same way, they feel like their time has been wasted. More than that, they have put themselves in jeopardy by collaborating. So if those women

could make a recommendation, it would be, "Please don't charge and harass me after you've asked me to come to you and work together. Don't expect me to work with you on community initiatives when the next day the BIA bike cops dump out my purse on the stroll." Under the Safer Streets initiatives by the BIA women faced a lot of harassment, not just from cops but from personnel hired by private security agencies who weren't cops at all.

Organizations and individuals both lose their street credibility by partnering with the police if no change occurs. So if women have a meeting with police one day and then face harassment the next night, they see that there is no real change. Why should they bother? We as organizations also lose our street credibility with the workers when we work with the police and nothing changes.

When the Missing Women Task Force Team approached us about gathering evidence, the RCMP said they would not arrest women with outstanding bench warrants. Their only goal was to collect information from women. We got a few dozen (I can't remember the exact number) workers to come forward, and we held the meetings at our Dunlevy office at the time. The police stood by the waivers they had promised. There was very little budget for food, just some coffee and water, but officers were bringing extra lunches, splitting their lunches with the women there. The officers showed real humanity. It was what we had wanted to see all along, a good productive relationship where the priority was the safety of sex workers. I see that as a model of what could be. And we asked in 2000 for one officer to follow up on rapes and assaults and any kind of violence against sex workers, for those incidents to be given priority across the board. Seeing the Task Force, I believed it could be done. I believe it could work because I've seen it. (support worker)

- *We have a lot of involvement with the police on various levels. I'm involved in a variety of initiatives, including a table regarding police policy on sex work, and that report is due in a matter of weeks or months. So there is work being done already. It's ongoing. One thing we would like to see is to have the police adopt a policy on street-based sex work so that it's low priority in terms of policing, something parallel to the policy of giving low enforcement priority for street-based drug dealers. The same kind of thing needs to happen for sex work. There is ongoing relationship-building that is occurring, including with the women, but it needs to involve them more to make going to the police on issues of violence more of an option. I look at my own interactions with the police as a middle-class white woman, and if even I feel uncomfortable with their attitudes,*

how is a woman who is marginalized, because she's poor, or addicted or street-involved going to feel in that experience? (support worker)

- *Jim Chu is a person who could lead a lot of positive changes in the police force, and I believe that he will do that. He has the leadership and conviction to take that forward. ... I'm encouraged by the fact that we have two inspectors and a sergeant who come to talk to us regularly now about sex work. I think that is very positive. But we need to take what is happening that's good and carry it further. ... The leadership is willing to change, and we've seen that, but that has to go all the way down, including through the cops who have been there a while. (support worker)*

Comments on programs already implemented to improve sex worker safety

Sex Industry Liaison Worker (Constable Linda Malcolm)

Some participants spoke about the Sex Industry Liaison Officer, Constable Linda Malcolm, as having provided support and helped them to navigate circumstances in which they were assaulted and wished to press charges. Specific comments are included below. A comment frequently heard was that "one Linda Malcolm is not enough." However, this praise was not universal. Other participants, including those actively in the sex trade, had never heard of Linda Malcolm, or had heard her name but had had no contact with her; and one person said that Linda Malcolm had not assisted her when the woman had reported being assaulted.

- *Linda Malcolm is validating; she doesn't look for the bad; she's not profiling me and trying to get me in trouble, seeing what I've done wrong. She asks, "How can we help?" She cares about our safety and wellbeing, and the two are different. For example, from a cop's perspective, the paddy wagon is safe. But it's not good for my wellbeing. She's sensitive to trauma and wants to learn how to help; she looks at me as a tool and asks me what she should do. She's open to feedback and has talked to professionals who have worked with me to get a better understanding of my situation. She's a good liaison, because she works with other community members. Also she has different boundaries; like it's okay for her to give you a hug.*
- *Linda Malcolm will come to you, very quickly, on a critical call. She was there within 15 or 20 minutes on one occasion. But she is not enough. We will burn her out and that will be tragic.*
- *I can't say enough about Linda Malcolm – her work and passion and the lens she works with and looks through on the issues. I knew there was someone before her in her position, Dave, and I know he had relationships built and by and large they were good but it is Linda who really goes above and beyond. And it's her. And when she's at tables, she's there for*

the right reasons: interested, takes complaints and issues seriously, and runs them up the flagpole.

Linda is great – she will tell you, if you have some outstanding charges or warrant, “I will see what you’ve got, and we might not have to throw the cuffs on you, we will see.” If that was across the board, it would make for a great enforcement practice.

So there is also a huge lack of consistency. Linda is consistent, and yes, it is her mandate. And I know she does fight with limitations. For example, what exactly is her job description and its parameters: she is front line and she is one person. There need to be many Lindas or she needs a unit or team to work with who she can delegate to because right now she does all the tasks.

There are complaints that she doesn’t do enough because she is hard to get a hold of or something, and of course. But when I do get a hold of her, then she gives 110%. And it’s client care – she takes someone from A to Z. And that’s not enforcement. If it’s a small part of her job description, she will weave it in.

Her position is within Community Policing, so there is a bunch of things with Community Policing that take her away from it.

So the long and short of it is we need more Linda Malcolms. It would be great if there were a specific unit or division like there is for violent crimes, drugs, etc. But then you get into politicking and finances. (support worker)

- *Linda Malcolm, the Sex Industry Liaison Officer, is a very special person, but she is just one person and everything goes through her. It’s just too much for one person to deal with. She goes to court, she helps people who want to exit, she does so many things, and eventually she is just going to give up if there isn’t more support for her position.*

Linda Malcolm is also doing training. She has done sessions with 600 officers talking to them about what women need and how to approach them. I think that is great. And as evidence that it’s working, after the first session, we had an officer come and make a bad date report to us. I thought that was evidence of progress. (support worker)

- *Linda Malcolm is a good installation and has worked very well with WISH. Her work is important. I’ve called her and asked her to deal with very sensitive cases, where there was potential harm to workers if the issues were not dealt with properly, and she has done it, she has dealt with them*

very discreetly. But we need about 8 of her, and in all different areas of the city – Surrey, New West, not just Vancouver. I've heard that sex workers have had mixed experiences dealing with her.

- *In terms of making more positions like the Sex Industry Liaison Officer, I don't know. I don't know Linda Malcolm. Girls get weary of buddying up with the cops. And there are confidentiality issues. They don't know if their information is going to be treated with confidentiality. It takes a long time to build trust. And they don't want to buddy up with the police if their boyfriend is selling dope.*

SisterWatch

SisterWatch is a program that was established by the VPD to combat violence against women in the DTES and facilitate reporting of incidents. It includes a reward offered for information proving that Ashley Machiskinich was pushed to her death out of a window in the Regent Hotel, a confidential tipline, a series of town hall meetings between police and DTES residents to share concerns about community safety, and a website for sharing news and information from women in the DTES. Some participants commented on the efficacy of SisterWatch.

- *SisterWatch is useful in some ways. I wanted info one time and didn't want to be tracked, so it's helpful for that, because the regular non-emergency services traces calls back, just like 911, but SisterWatch doesn't, it's anonymous.*
- *I've never heard of anyone who used SisterWatch – you need a phone to call the number. And it was rolled out at the same time, or right around, as the VPD's internal report, so it felt like a public relations move. Why would anyone call that number any more than you could call 911, a number people know? And it's still the cops. Suddenly the cops are benevolent and looking out for missing women? I think it's suspicious. Especially after witnessing police brutality.*
- *SisterWatch Tipline is not effective, because it's a recording. The person who answers is just a female EComm operator – I don't know what they are going to do for someone in a non-emerg setting. I don't think they have the skills. Whether it's answered or not may depend on whether 911 is busy. (support worker)*
- *We asked for a 1-800 line for sex workers to report violence a few years ago. We asked for a line staffed by former sex workers, to handle emergency calls. But our proposal was rejected because people didn't feel that sex workers could be trained to take up those kinds of roles. One thing that needs to be realized is that it would be very meaningful if these partnerships could not only meet workers' needs better but also employ*

workers and former workers. If former workers could get jobs as emergency call operators or acting as liaisons with police, it would be hugely important, because they would be getting income and retraining and experience out of it. Employment of women is key. You can't say "stop working in the sex trade" and give no other alternative for women to earn money using their skills. It would have been so meaningful and important to give workers the opportunity to fill a position like that. And it could have been done with monitoring or training by someone already working there, if they felt that was a necessary aspect of it. But it never happened.

At that time, we also proposed to have a former worker responsible for dealing with reporting on violence in a car, to ride along with cops. That idea was not supported then. Again, we hear this being considered now, but what is different now? If we make these suggestions, are they actually going to happen this time?

What should the police do to change the relationship with community members?

Participants made specific suggestions about how to improve relationships between police and community members, including the creation of a specific police unit devoted to the sex trade, funding of advocate and liaisons positions to be staffed by experiential people, the use of more foot patrols and women officers in the DTES, training to be conducted by experiential people and community organizations, and a more rigorous and accountable disciplinary system for police complaints. However, as a first step, many participants suggested a restorative justice process between police and the community as a precursor to any successful substantive change.

A restorative justice approach and relationship-building exercises

As noted above, many participants referred to the need for reconciliation and a restorative justice approach that would engage police and community to build better relationships. Perhaps the single most common desire that participants expressed was to see police treat community members with respect and understanding. Many acknowledged that this understanding had to go both ways. It was suggested that a formal apology by police to the DTES community and regular opportunities for positive interaction, including through community organizations, would go a long way towards bridging the current divide and building trust.

- *Cops need to walk in the shoes of the residents. What if they had to spend a week down here with no money before they go on the beat? That would teach them what it's like to survive.*

- *I think the police should volunteer in the DTES, like at the Union Gospel Mission or in the food lines. It would build better trust. It would show they are giving their time.*
- *It would be good if the VPD came out to community events and interacted more sincerely. Whether in uniform or not, depending if they're on duty. (support worker)*
- *Maybe something like restorative justice style approach would help to repair the relationship. (support worker)*
- *In Calgary, I had good relations with the cops. They were consistent; they were open when they asked questions without being probing. They always brought me cranberry juice, for my UTIs, and they would kind of laugh at me, like "You're taking care of yourself and yet you're putting yourself at risk at the same time." They would call my cell phone to check on me if they didn't see me for 3 days. When I asked them why, they said, "We should care about you." We need people who are consistent and non-judgmental. When I talked to the cops in Calgary, it was like an exchange. They would ask why I did such dangerous work, and I would say "Don't you think your job is dangerous?" They'd say, "Yes, but I have a button to push when I'm in trouble, what do you have?" (support worker)*
- *We see police once or twice a night on a drive through, not checking in with you asking if you're having a safe night, not getting out of their cars. There's one guy who always asks how I'm doing. He makes me feel important, he remembers my name and I feel like he genuinely cares. He's seen me when good and also when I'm not good, so he has a better assessment of when I'm fine but upset and when things are more serious.*

He trusts me, because he knows I'm not going to say "Fuck you" to him. It's really important to build rapport and trust, so when something does happen you trust them.

So cops taking an interest in you would make a big difference. There are some good ones, but there are also a lot of pricks, a lot of beat cops straight out of the academy, assholes, who just want to carry to a gun. The ones who genuinely care are building community and building relationships. And that's the way it should be.
- *There are some very nice police down here, but not enough. If police and people that worked on the streets were closer, that would make a huge difference. There's fear on both sides – police are afraid that people will say things about them being soft, they'll get taken advantage of, putting*

themselves out here. People down here are users, that's how they survive. Women are afraid that will have to provide services for free, nothing will get done and that will make them just sink. It's traumatic. It'll hold them down.

- *How to heal the broken relationship between police and people in this neighbourhood? I have no idea. That's not true: I have ideas but they would never happen. There needs to be a truth and reconciliation type process. The trauma is intolerable: the trauma of Pickton, the review and now this [referring to the deaths of Ashley Machiskinic and Verna Simard]. The trauma is so severe. People are hearing over and over again the most gruesome and horrible things. There needs to be an owning up of what they've done and some sort of reconciliation.*

What that would look like: I would imagine anyone in charge of the investigation at the time, those higher level with the police, should go to the corner of Main and Hastings and block off the streets and get down on their knees and say, "We have failed you and we are sorry and we acknowledge that we have done violence, and we have nothing to say for ourselves but to ask for your forgiveness." (support worker)

- *We need to build relationships through exposure. My story is powerful to police officers, because I put credit on the two cops who helped me. If I start with that kind of information, they know I'm not going to badmouth them. So they trust me too. We need to find ways to build mutual trust. (support worker)*
- *I was a part of a community policing program and that was good. I learned a lot about the different divisions, etc. It was a very squeaky clean in the way it represented police. That was something only a small number of people could participate in, it was in a few weekends in a month, and you had to pay a small amount. But if it was accessible and anyone could come, an open forum, you could ask questions and voice concerns and have it be interactive with the general public and people who interact with the police, that would improve relationships. "This is who we are, who are you and how can we help you?" Community consultation and dialoguing happening on a regular basis would help. And that would take a while. And it would need to be consistent. It's going to take a while to build those relationships but it would be a place to start. (support worker)*
- *The way to build a relationship is to go to them, go to where people are at. Go to where they are and ask them what they need and show them that you care. And show them that you want to care. That would be huge. (support worker)*

- *There needs to be some kind of program – anti oppression training or whatever – a dialogue between women activists or feminists in the DTES and the police, with the goal of reaching some inter-subjective agreement...*

I feel I have had a degree of success because I broke ranks when I started talking to the cops. But it's secret. I won't let people tell me who to hate. Cops are letting a system do their thinking for them, and telling them who to hate, the same as the feminists.

One of the reasons the interview [I did] at the RCMP hate crimes unit worked was because we established where we were coming from and then talked about what we agree on. The difference is if you sit down across from someone, you want to win the argument. Talking in "triangulation" can help defuse things – we were talking about it, the paper, not about our perspectives. I was asking him for input. A research approach that he found flattering made it possible. (support worker)

- *In the end, I think the goal has to be to work to get law enforcement to develop tools to speak to their biases. And they need to partner with different stakeholders and sex workers. It would be useful to have academia involved, to gather the empirical evidence to support specific programs, and to increase credibility. But it needs to be a sensitizing tool that goes both ways, to the experiences of sex workers and to those of institutional personnel. I will never forget going to a conference to speak on sex workers' needs and encountering a nurse who said she was slapped in the face when she tried to treat a worker. So there is a perception of treatment resistance from some workers. Responders need to share their experiences also. And we need to acknowledge both sides, and create partnerships based on experiences by making sure that everyone is safe to speak. But if that could be done effectively, think how valuable it could be. It could be shared internationally, because these same issues exist in many different countries. (support worker)*

Increased police resources devoted to the sex trade

Some participants said that there was a need for a special unit within the VPD mandated specifically to deal with the sex trade. They felt that the number of personnel assigned to issues of violence against women and those in the sex trade was insufficient, and that the Vice Unit, while sometimes very effective, had too few officers to deal with all the issues that presented. Some also suggested that there should be more follow up or referrals to appropriate follow up for those reporting incidents of violence.

- *They should have a special task force just dealing with sex work and missing persons. It is important enough that they should have enough police assigned to deal with this, and not the past cases, the present ones too.*
- *It would be helpful if we could see officers with no guns and no uniforms. And if their mandate really was protection for all. In terms of reporting, we need to see more uniformity. We had Verna Simard go out the window of the Regent and die, and what I wanted to hear them say was, "We have 45 officers working on this night and day," and put that out in the media. Because that would have said, "This matters, and this woman's death matters. Verna Simard matters to us." If that kind of message were being communicated through the media, that would do a lot in terms of building more trust and better relationships. So we have Maple Batalia killed and she is young, beautiful and talented, and they have 45 officers working 24/7 on this, and I would like to see that they are doing the same thing for Verna Simard, and saying that they are doing the same thing. If it needs to be measured in the number of officers assigned, if that is a measure of importance, if that's how it needs to be done, then do it. And make it the same across the boards. (support worker)*
- *We all work beside women as advocates when they deal with the police, and we will keep doing that, but even if there were funded advocate positions in the community, you still need a department within the police that deals with these issues. Not just part of Vice, or one person. There should be a unit dealing with sex workers' issues. (support worker)*
- *I would like to see more follow up. It pisses me off that I have a shitty interaction and my only way of dealing with it is to track down Linda Malcolm who is a very busy person and try to talk to her about it. No one is following up with me afterwards to see if I'm ok and what happened. If you go to sexual assault centre you get follow up with a counsellor from BC Women's Hospital. Maybe if there was something like that – there could be someone to check in with you so you don't always have to do that yourself.*

Creation of community advocate positions and more use of existing community resource persons

Participants suggested that creating funded advocate positions, staffed by experiential people to act as liaisons between those in the sex trade and police, could establish very important and effective links between police and the community.

- *It would help if there were former sex workers working with the cops, so they would understand what we're going through. We are just trying to survive. We also need compassionate cops.*
- *To help make reports, there need to be ex-workers there, male and female, in the police station and with the street nurses. This would really help to get people to give information.*
- *We need advocates from organizations that don't require you to be exited to use services, to help liaise with the VPD. It has to be a more grassroots response. We need familiarization with what sex work really is like, then cooperation from that standpoint.*
- *They should have something for sex trade workers like the Yankee 20 [a sexually exploited youth car where police ride with a probation officer or social worker]. They should have an experiential person working with cops to bridge relationships with sex trade workers. They should also earmark a position for sex trade workers with Victims Services, especially because PEERS is closing. (support worker)*
- *When staff of an organization are peers, they can be a huge resource for police. (support worker)*
- *When speaking to anyone from the community, the police should offer that the person can have someone else sit in with them. This would be better for the community member, because they would have some support. It might not be appropriate in some situations, and it shouldn't be mandatory, but it should be available. Police could ask "Do you want to bring someone with you?" (support worker)*
- *With respect to liaison positions with police, the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities and other former sex workers would be ideal sources of personnel. The BCCEC comprises former workers who are experienced in a broad range of fields, with different expertise in sex work and a range of educational and employment backgrounds. Organizations like PACE, PEERS, HUSTLE, WISH and MAP also have former workers of this calibre. So they have the capacity to provide people who could not only fill those roles but also act as advisors. And workers from the Coalition would always have a network of experiential professionals to go back to with ideas, to provide resources and perspectives. They could take projects and strategies to them to vet, to make sure that they have workers' interests at heart, and provide feedback on recommendations. It would show that their skills and experience are valued and genuinely considered. So, liaisons could be hired from the Coalition or other formers sex workers, but I think it would be important that those positions be*

funded through institutions, and not through organizations, because organizations continuously struggle for funding and this would set programs like this up to fail. (support worker)

- *It might work better if there were former sex workers to facilitate those processes, and if workers had discrete and friendly officers to go to. But part of the problem when organizations are staffed with experiential workers is that they themselves may have had bad or mixed experiences with police in the past. They won't want to put people in a potentially negative situation, or sometimes they just won't lend vocal support to a decision to contact police, or will subtly bias or taint the decision-making. So we also need training for organizational staff who are experiential workers, to ensure they can facilitate those contacts.*

But more than that, we also need to see concrete results of police responses to reporting. There needs to be something to point to, something positive: look, this person reported this and this happened as a result. Tangible results. And if there were former workers in cars to point to as liaisons, workers could more easily make those reports and see those results. (support worker)

Street patrols

Participants' opinions about street patrols were divided: some felt strongly that there were not enough street patrols at night in the DTES and that they needed to be increased; others felt that increased street patrols could result in more unwanted attention from police.

- *We need more street patrols, but it should be people who are specifically trained and understand homelessness. They need to build rapport with people on the street.*
- *Foot patrols can sneak up on you – that's not good. It's like they're trying to trick you.*
- *[reaction to previous comment] But if they are not visible, they don't serve a preventative function. They don't stand out.*
- *We need patrols, both cars and walking. Usually, they don't really book you for sex work; it's drugs they go after. Most of my dealings with the cops are ok.*
- *Maybe there could be more foot patrols. If it's cars, people won't stop to pick up girls. Foot cops are less visible and more approachable. If you're talking to cops in cars, it could look like you're ratting on someone else, and could actually cause you trouble. There should be foot cops in all*

areas, not just Granville and down here, and they should be as approachable as possible.

- *When Dave Dickson was working down here [as a police officer], he used to just walk around all day and talk to people. In uniform. And that worked. So they need to have more people doing that. That's a good way of policing. (support worker)*
- *I don't think we need more street patrols. What we need is better quality of patrols. People who can have relationships with workers and care about them. Workers need to know that the police will be there if they need them. Like Linda Malcolm. That way they are really fulfilling their mandate to protect and serve everyone. (support worker)*
- *Police should get out of their cars. There is nothing effective about cruising slowly in a police car up the Kingsway stroll. All that does is drive the johns away. They police should be trying to catch the predators, not the johns. John stings are a complete waste of time. Instead of pushing away good paying johns, the police should be trying to support sex workers, and for those people who would tell you we should fine and charge the johns, because they have money, I would ask, "And are you going to go out and give the women standing out there money as well? Because they need it." (support worker)*

More women officers as patrol officers

Some participants suggested that increasing the number of women working as street patrols or "beat cops" would help to improve relations with community members. Some of the comments already included emphasize that male cops can be physically intimidating and that someone who has been raped or assaulted by a man may not want to talk to another man. It was also suggested that community residents perceive patrol officers who are not in uniform would be perceived as less intimidating and more approachable.

- *It would help to have more women cops. (support worker)*
- *Most of the police in the district with working girls are male. It should be women. But women cops have their own issues. They are surviving in a male world.*
- *There should always be a woman and a man when it's a two-person team, not just two male officers.*
- *They should go out in mixed teams of women and men, because sometimes women cops are better at negotiating tense circumstances. (support worker)*

- *I have two suggestions. First there should be police in the neighbourhood who are around often, maybe three female officers, who just walk around and get to know people and build relationships. They should come in plain clothes. It would make them much less provocative. Their authority and the power imbalance from that wouldn't be so evident. They could have a patch on their sweaters identifying them as police. Secondly, they should actually help. They should provide results that people can see. (support worker)*
- *I'm not sure if we need more women cops. Having more women beat cops might help. There are two women cops working around Oppenheimer Park in uniform, just getting to know people, and that's good. Increasing the number of women on the beat could help if they worked on putting relationship building before enforcement. But we also just need more women as "go to" people, like Linda Malcolm. (support worker)*
- *The uniform remains a problem. People see the uniform first. We had these two women beat cops and we wanted to invite them in to meet women, and the women really weren't keen on it when they were in uniform. So if they could get around the uniform sometimes, they could make inroads. (support worker)*

Training

Many participants suggested that police would benefit from additional training specific to the circumstances of the DTES. They suggested that police should be taught how to approach and speak to those in the sex trade, and those living with poverty, addiction, and mental health issues, in a manner that was not provocative and showed real concern their wellbeing. 911 Operators were also identified as in need of specific sensitivity training. Participants suggested the police partner with community organizations and employ experiential people as trainers. Some acknowledged that police attract a great deal of community hostility and should be specifically trained to cope with that and to de-escalate situations.

- *The police need better training: anti-oppression training, colonization, cultural competency, sensitivity, non-violent communication – they need all those things. They need to acknowledge the effects of colonization, of mental health issues. They need to understand the social determinants of health. Community organizations should be giving the training – it would be cool if PEERS could come in and give police training, and to get MPA for mental health, so it's more grassroots. It needs to be not token training, by people who themselves sound like they don't understand or care what they're talking about, but based on real experiences and by people who are experiential.*

- *They should do psychological screening on the cops they choose for the DTES. They need to be half social worker. Instead we get guys who are Rambos, men who are burning out. If they are depressed, they should be moved out. They need to assess them regularly. The people who work at RainCity, Life Skills, and Atira are suited for the work. They understand what's going on. Cops need to be that way too.*
- *I find it like the trainings on reserve, where the white people would come to tell First Nations how to do things differently. If they are going to provide training and intervention, they should involve the people who have lived through those experiences. I realize that's not fool proof. I think that often people in power fall prey to power imbalances, and become bullies themselves. But it's worth a try. (support worker)*
- *It would really help to get police to understand how to talk to women to show that they care. They should be taught what you say to a sex worker. If they had non-biased sensitivity training, more exposure to the real lives of sex workers, they would feel more comfortable. Right now there's a huge lack of understanding; it's like a blind spot, moral judgment comes into it. They don't really want to know who we are and what our lives are like. (support worker)*
- *Police need to be more sensitive and compassionate. They need to understand people better and not abuse their authority. Maybe they should have training to get to know the different situations. They need to be more tolerant and understand that not everyone down here is an addict or an alcoholic. Abusing people again and traumatizing them again is not okay. They need to understand the value of human beings down there. That needs to be reinforced in the training. Maybe if they think of things different, maybe their approach would be different. Training should take place right down here. Not in government offices: there, there are government attitudes and feelings.*
- *In terms of training, the police need to be taught, "This is how you approach people." And that needs to be revisited regularly. There should be reinforcement, regular updating and retraining, so it's not just a one-off. A lot could be done around just treating people with basic respect, for example, in greeting someone. They should be starting with, "Hey, how are you? What's been happening tonight?" and not "Can I see some ID?"*
- *They need special training to deal with intense situations. You know, adrenaline cuts off the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain and prevents you from thinking clearly. You just react. So they need special training to deal with the flight or fight response, when they are in situations where they have to make snap decisions. (support worker)*

- *We should have police come along on outreach visits by staff; it could be part of their training. (support worker)*
- *Sensitivity training is not enough. It must be delivered by experiential people – people who have been there and done that, sex workers who have a personal, intimate knowledge of what they're talking about. (support worker)*
- *Bottom line is that the sex trade is still the unknown, and needs to be understood and humanized. Sensitivity training has to come from experiential people. We need experiential speakers telling their stories and we need to document their information better. We should make sure that those with contact with organizations that serve sex trade work talk about and deal with sex trade workers as people. (support worker)*
- *It's a problem that the police have come to symbolize what's wrong. They're an avenue to express anger towards the system, a place for people to locate their own histories and past experiences of the problems they've faced. So what police also need is coaching on how to be that target, to take that kind of reaction and deal with it without reacting to it. Because they are people too. (support worker)*

Disciplinary procedures for officers abusing authority or engaging in prohibited activities

Some participants also suggested that improving the complaints and disciplinary procedures for police who abused their authority or engaged in prohibited activities, and showing that police who transgressed the rules were actually punished, would go a long way towards increasing community trust. They also suggested more independent oversight and timely processing of complaints.

- *Now the police don't give anyone paper work on anything. So you can't deal with it – how can you check up on something if nothing was written down? A lot of women think they're getting off easy when this happens, but it means there's no record at all. Drug addicted hooker or the cop – who will they believe? If police just take the girls' stuff or want a sexual favour instead of taking her away to jail, that is shit. Then nothing is written down when a woman is complaining.*
- *If the process of complaints was improved and real consequences given to police, I would feel better. It needs to be made quicker. With my experience, I would be loathe to report again. ... [The investigation] is ongoing. It was one day, one incident, didn't involve multiple people and it's been a year and a half. I want to know what's going to happen, will he be given any consequences, or will he be just moved and given*

sensitivity training? I think it would be a good thing if there were consequences. (support worker)

- *We need a clean and unbiased oversight system, so that when there are crooked cops, or when cops do something they shouldn't, there is a way of reporting it and someone to follow up on it who is not part of the police department.*
- *If the police do something bad, rather than be disciplined (that won't make you change your behaviour) they should apologize. Like a restorative justice session. They should hear what they caused, the impact of what they did.*
- *If police were disciplined when they are abusive, that would make a difference, absolutely. It would obviously signal awareness at a high level that this is completely inappropriate behaviour, behaviour going against the mandate of the organization. It sends a clear message. But what happens is you take something to somebody, like Linda, and they will say "I will run it up my flagpole" and she takes it a certain distance, and nothing is done. And the guy [who complained] will come to me and say, "The cop is still on the beat and doing the same thing," and I can only say, "There is an investigation." (support worker)*
- *I've never tried to file a formal complaint; I do it internally. I have heard it's exhausting and so difficult to do that people stop or client says, "Never mind, this is fucked up." I've always let someone try to handle it internally. To what end do you make complaints? You still see the same people doing the same things.*

But if they were disciplined, if there were real consequences... In a perfect world we want people to treat people with respect because they feel it's the right thing to do. But if they have to do it because it's their job – then fine. Eventually you will bring them on side. (support worker)

- *We need to institute a system of accountability for police actions through the police complaints process. There should be an independent oversight system, with an independent body for investigation, so that the police are not just receiving the complaints themselves and reviewing them. It needs to be external. Right now, it is just workers' words against officers, and who is going to believe them when they are talking about officers asking for blow jobs or dealing drugs? Even when those things are happening. We are constantly hearing about "rogue officers" abusing their positions of power. There needs to be a process in place that allows people to complain about these incidents and be supported through the process. And if the complaint goes ahead, we need to consider*

appropriate outcomes. If a sex worker has been assaulted by a cop, the cop should face actual charges and not just be suspended with pay. But it's tricky, because if a sex worker has to stand trial to give evidence, it could result in retaliation. So there needs to be a way to guarantee the safety of workers in the process. A process aimed at getting an apology from police that works on a mediation model really could not work, because of the power imbalance because workers aren't full citizens. Where could you even hold those meetings? So the complaints process should work better, but desired outcomes would have to be considered very carefully with a view to worker safety and the potential risks involved. Sex workers would have to discuss what kind of complaints process would work best for them. (support worker)

- *The police walk around in their Kevlar vests and their uniforms, with their guns, and what they are essentially is a paramilitary organization. But there is a lot of murkiness to their role. They are the ones out there walking the line, and they become targets for all kinds of attacks just because of that. They wear protective body armour because they have to. But the problems that they face should not be problems of their own making, problems that they have created through their actions and attitudes. So when there is a problem because an officer has misused authority, there should be a way to take action and make it a public action. There should be a disciplinary procedure and people should know about it. I think of that woman who was knocked down by the police on Hastings Street. One guy knocked her down and the other two stood and watched. They didn't do anything. And those guys, all of them, should be moved out. Allowing that kind of behaviour to go on, permitting it, just perpetuates it and condones it. There's also such a problem that police can't break rank. When the one officer knocked that poor woman down, why didn't the other two who watched do the right thing and pick her up off the ground and say sorry? That's what they should have done. That's what he should have done. Supposedly the officer thought she was going for his gun, even though he saw her walking towards him for a block, limping. There should have been a public statement acknowledging what happened and apologizing, and instead, that officer was just tacitly supported by the silence around what happened. When there's an incident, there should be a public statement from the police saying that the officer in question has been spoken to by Professional Standards.*

Even in meetings, you see a refusal to break ranks. I've been in situations where I've had police say things that I consider verbally abusive to me in front of their own colleagues and no one has intervened to say, "That's not appropriate." They don't call each other out on things. (support worker)

What could the police change in terms of procedures?

Participants made a number of suggestions for changing police procedures in the DTES. They included a more immediate response procedure for dealing with missing persons complaints originating in the DTES; a more accessible means to report assaults; more attention to initiating investigations into reported incidents; and more stringent efforts to charge perpetrators of violence.

Reporting missing persons

Many participants voiced the understanding that there was a 24-hour waiting period before police could begin to respond to a missing persons complaint. They suggested that a protocol for a more immediate response was needed when the person was in the sex trade or known to be living in insecure housing.

- *It shouldn't be a mandatory 24 hours before you can report someone missing. Make it 12 hours. 24 hours can "seal the deal" for the missing person. In this community, a lot of people know each other well, and we know when someone is missing. There should be something like the Amber Alert system.*
- *There should be a website that lists all missing persons, so there is a way to check in on ongoing investigations and provide information, and to see if people have been found.*
- *If police haven't seen a woman in a while, that should be noted and followed up on. I remember talking to Dave Dickson in 1998, when more and more women were going missing. And we know that these women don't have family, they love dope, and not that many people are connected to them to see that they're not there. But we do notice, and they should notice, especially when there are more and more women going missing at one time. At that time, they started putting women's faces up on a poster, but that didn't do anything. It was just like the wall of shame. It was the sign of a negligent system.*
- *All shelter and housing staff should be informed of protocols to follow when people go missing and others want to report it. Also, people need to be able to find people when they are arrested. I was arrested under the Mental Health Act and my kids didn't know and couldn't find me.*
- *It can be really difficult to locate people if they go into hospital. I had a friend who was in an accident and almost died, but when I called the hospital, they wouldn't tell me she was there. So there needs to be a way to find people in those circumstances.*

- *It would be useful for police to have a “Book of Rules” for the DTES, including protocols for reacting more quickly when community members are reported missing.*

Initiating investigations

Participants suggested that police need to be more responsive and pro-active about initiating investigations when incidents are reported to them. In comments cited elsewhere in this report, some participants referred to the discretion that officers, in particular Sex Trade Liaison Officer Linda Malcolm, have to waive victims’ or witnesses’ outstanding charges, such as bench warrants, when collecting information about other crimes. It was suggested that a protocol making the waiver of minor charges possible would encourage reporting of crimes and assist investigations.

- *Taking statements from witnesses should be priority number one.*
- *The police have to think of it as a delivery of service model. They are there in an official capacity and they are dealing with a drug-addicted population, and they need a service model that will work. They should have a list of generic questions that they need to ask every time, to find out what is going on before they ignore someone. And they do get burnt out, sure. They hear lots of things. But how do they know for sure that the woman they’re talking to isn’t telling them the truth. They need to investigate. They also need better communication between shifts, so if someone is going off shift, they can tell the next people coming on what’s happened. They need a central log system that would allow them to tell each other what has happened that day so there can be follow up on everything and they all know what’s going on.*
- *I’m not sure that they actually process the rape kits [medical evidence taken when a woman is raped]. They take rape kits but we heard that they just hold onto them in evidence and don’t actually process them. What good is that? Women shouldn’t have to go through these invasive procedures if they’re not actually being prosecuted.*
- *One thing that really helps with Linda [Malcolm] is that she makes sure to take care of people first, regardless of their outstanding warrants. That is something that needs to be made more public. It would go a long way towards making people less reticent to approach the cops. Enforcement is one tool the police have, but it is not a be-all and end-all. If people knew that they wouldn’t get booked when they call the cops, it would be really critical to more reporting. The protocol on calling on drug ODs was changed. Before, if you called in an OD, they would always send both the police and ambulance, which discouraged people from calling 911, because they were afraid of being arrested. Now they just send an*

ambulance and if the ambulance determines there is a need, they will call the police. That has made it possible for people to call in ODs while there is time to do something. If there could be a similar protocol for waiving warrants in order to allow women to report violence, it could be very successful. So changing protocols and attitudes together would help. (support worker)

What would make those in the sex trade safer?

In addition to the general recommendations on improving community relations with police and modifying policing practices, many of the people we spoke with had specific recommendations on changes that could improve the safety of those in the sex trade which did not relate directly to policing. Suggestions included providing more supports for those in the sex trade through community organizations or enhancing existing services. Specific suggestions were to:

- improve lighting in dark areas;
- start community-based street-level safety patrols;
- increase the number of drop-in facilities open at night;
- improve distribution of the Red Light Alerts, weekly handouts that are produced by WISH to report “bad dates”, or negative experiences that women engaged in sex work have had with customers;
- set up databases containing personal information of those engaged in sex work, to help locate them in the event that they are presumed missing;
- develop and distribute emergency devices containing a GPS locator;
- make phones more available;
- provide self-defence training; and
- change the legal status of the sex trade, with conflicting views on whether to decriminalize it and allow for red light districts, or abolish it through greater criminalization and enforcement.

Physical visibility and safety patrols

Participants’ views of what could be done to increase safety in street environments varied. Some were critical of police or City policies to move those in the sex trade out of the public eye, to low traffic areas that were poorly lit. They suggested that improving lighting at these locations and providing surveillance systems would reduce the risks of physical danger. Some supported formalizing the “spotter” systems that those in the sex trade already use to watch

out for one another. However, not everyone we spoke with was comfortable with the idea of increased surveillance. At least one person stated that areas that were too exposed were also problematic, because they deterred customers.

- *Have highly visible surveillance people on the streets, whose job it is to look out for sex workers. They could wear yellow jackets. That way, johns will know there is surveillance.*
- *There should be storefronts where people inside just watch the people doing dates. They could be set up at regular intervals with lights, so people would also know they are places to go in emergencies and that people are watching the street.*
- *Sex trade workers should never do dates alone. They should always have a spotter who is looking out and can wait nearby and look away while the woman is doing the date. And there should always be someone taking down the license plate of the car she's getting into.*
- *We should have a network of spotters who just do that, maybe working with a volunteer or non-profit organization.*
- *We need a safety patrol, like the MAP Van and the needle-exchange van, but with the responsibility only to look for street workers' safety. It should be identifiable to workers, but not to johns. Then there should be some way for a woman to signal the van if she's in trouble, with a whistle or something.*
- *The problem is that you can't see women getting into cars.*
- *Downtown they separated girls. No one sees each other. Before all the girls were on one block; someone else would see you going with someone and know. The cops separated us because of the buildings (new apartments being built). They wanted you to work by a park where there was no one. It was really creepy. At least on Main and Hastings there are 20 people around me, not someone jumping out from behind the trees at me.*
- *We need more lighting, particularly around Oppenheimer Park. It is really dark there.*
- *We need better lighting in all the areas where women work. They keep pushing women out into different areas, and even if they were lit before, they're not now. Wherever women get moved to, it's dark and out of sight.*

- *I think the police create problems when they drive women away from places that they can work. I was in Kamloops and the bushes have been cleared from the edges of the park areas where women previously worked. There are these long expanses with just chain-link fence. There's no way for women to get dates in that situation. There's nowhere for you to stand. Where are you going to take someone?*

Safe spaces and drop-in centres

Of the drop-in centres and women's centres in the DTES, only a few facilities are open 24 hours. Some cater primarily to women or to those in the sex trade, but their policies on admitting men and transgendered people vary. Many participants felt that there was a critical need for a 24-hour drop-in space for women only, offering food, temporary shelter, peer counseling and other services. Several participants referred to the particular vulnerabilities experienced by transgendered people in the DTES.

- *It would be so good to have a place to go when a bad date has happened, somewhere safe with non-judgmental people to talk to. These places should be all over, like community centres. There should be no time limit. You can stay there until you feel ok to leave. And you don't have to be registered, you can just go. It needs to be somewhere 24/7.*
- *We need a place that is open 24 hours and women only. This place, sometimes guys are here. We need a really safe women's only space. It should be women only.*
- *Women need a safe space to go to at night.*
- *The resources available at different organizations are so variable. They can be there one month and gone the next. Sometimes you wait in the street for something to open at the scheduled time, then find out that it isn't there anymore, they've moved or the service isn't available. Or sometimes they just close early. You can't rely on them. And they're not safe spaces. The people working there sometimes really look down on you. Here, you see women take food really quickly, cram their pockets with it and leave – that's because they don't feel like it's a safe space. Also, the staff aren't always open about the resources available. You go there and think all you can get is one meal, and then you find out you can get a shower too, or clothes, but no one tells you these things. You have to hang out there for a while before you find out how things run. If they would let us run these spaces and have more control, we could do it really well and it would be fair. You wouldn't have women abusing the resources, because people call them out if they do. We do that on the street. You can deal with someone if they're abusing things.*

- *There is still an issue with regard to which places are trans-inclusive. One centre banned transgendered sex trade workers, even when there had been no prior incidents to support a ban, because they were not born women. These people are extremely marginalized and at very high risk while they're working, especially when they are not post-operative and are "taping up their bits" to pass while they are working the streets. (support worker)*

Red Light Alerts

As noted above, Red Light Alerts are "bad date sheets" produced weekly by WISH to report negative experiences women in the sex trade have had with customers based on their self-reports. They provide descriptions of perpetrators and of women's experiences with them. Organizations in the DTES print out the Red Light Alerts and post them on bulletin boards. Many participants said that the Red Light Alerts were useful, but that they could be improved and distributed more widely. They also suggested using other means to distribute "bad date" information such as text messages, web pages and television public service announcements.

- *Red Light Alerts are good, but they need to be more widely posted. Right now they're at organizations that interact with sex trade workers, but they should be posted in the street and around the community, on notice boards like the ones for tourists, or be handed out to take away, like people do with Metro and 24 Hours [free newspapers]. Also it seems like not all the reports received are put out. It needs to be made easier to report bad dates.*
- *The Red Light Alert Sheets are hard to remember. Sometimes I look at them, but I really can't remember all the information. It would be better if they had a TV report on them. Like if they could run them at 2 a.m. on one of the community channels. Then we could come in and watch them here every night.*
- *The Red Light Alerts are so out-dated, we really don't rely on them. The other thing is that there are so many incidents that aren't reported. You hear women talking about them, about the bad dates, when they come in here, to each other. But I'm sure those don't get written down. (support worker)*
- *When I worked as a dispatcher, we had our own database with bad dates. Any time a girl had gone out, the number was there with a report on whether it was a good or bad date.*
- *I remember one worker years ago saying that violence against sex workers should be announced, the way other crimes are announced on Crime Stoppers. Why not use that as a way to inform the broader*

community of the kinds of violence sex workers face? This would also send a message that violence against sex workers is as important as violence against anyone else in our communities. (support worker)

- *The Red Light Alerts can be pretty effective if they are actually printed and handed out to women. The police should hand them out. The other thing is that in terms of reporting, it would help if interaction with the police were coordinated. You report to one person and that person doesn't speak to anyone else, and then you find out that no one has talked to Linda Malcolm. There needs to be one person to go through to report bad dates, so that it is systematized. (support worker)*

Databases and check-in systems

Some participants felt it would be useful to have a database housing personal information about people in the sex trade, including full names, physical descriptions and photos, family or other contacts, and recent addresses. A small number also supported the idea of providing DNA samples to the organization keeping the data. There was disagreement among participants about who should have custody of such a database: some suggested police, while others felt that community organizations serving those in the sex trade were more appropriate. Others still felt that the idea of keeping such information was misguided, as it could compromise contributors' personal privacy for years after its collection.

- *There should be a registry for sex workers, like there is for violent offenders. People here often don't know each other's last names, so it's hard to report someone missing. But if the people registered themselves, along with identifying marks, contacts and what have you, it would be easier to look for them if they do go missing. If a missing person's report was filed, you would know exactly who they are. It could be kept by government or the police, but it would be better if it were kept by a support group that provides services to sex trade workers.*
- *As far as police having databases on women in prostitution, they already have that. They have the names. But there could be a social services agency, something like WISH maybe, but less laid back, with more structure – a drop-in place where women could go to check in and give their information. Maybe they could encourage people to use it by giving them money each time they regularly showed up. Or it could be run alongside the needle exchange or Insite, not as part of these organizations, because they're run under the health care laws and subject to privacy regulations about data sharing, but some kind of voluntary disclosure of information on the side, so that there could be a way to keep track of people and find them.*

- *Guys go missing probably once a month. It would be good to have a database or check in system to have it known that they are missing. It's not like they went to rehab or something. But I don't know who should keep data – PEERS and PACE are shutting down. I have no clue. If the police understood us more, I would be fine with them keeping a database.*
- *We should have a place where people can check in regularly that they are okay, and tell people where you are and where you will usually be.*
- *I like the spirit of [the idea of databases], but I am not comfortable or I don't agree with that level of personal information being stored, especially DNA. And especially when it was said the police would store it. But I understand the spirit. So in a perfect world, sure. That's not something that is viable with the current structure and situation. Maybe if the police weren't the keepers of the information, and a non-profit was responsible, an organization known to be reliable and ethical, but not in the hands of the police. (support worker)*
- *There have been a lot of suggestions about databases to store women's DNA and personal information. When we discussed this in the past, I remember one woman saying she always left a strand of her hair in the seat of the car, so if she disappeared the killer could be identified. But what does that say? We support investigations and the ability to find you when you're dead, but we don't support prevention to protect you and keep you safe while you're alive? I'm not comfortable with that. We should be doing more prevention. People who are known prostitutes and in the trade long term may want databases and may be more comfortable with the idea, but it wouldn't work for everyone. Lots of people would just never want to be identified as doing sex work, especially now with Border Services and the way they share information. What if your life changed and years later you were doing something else and that came up? You applied for a visa or security clearance and your past as a sex worker came up in a way that was very compromising? I think most people don't want that, because even if it's not a legal problem, the stigma would be there forever. (support worker)*

Emergency locator devices

A number of participants suggested that it would be useful for those in the sex trade to carry tracking devices containing GPS locators, if a device could be designed that was easy to disguise and difficult to break.

- *They should give out mace key chains with some kind of tracking device in them. Maybe it could be a necklace or something that you wore, and you could turn on and off, although it would have to be something safe so it*

couldn't be used to choke you or anything, and it couldn't be easily stolen. If you activated it, the police would be alerted to come immediately.

- *I think girls should have a safety device they could wear, like in a boot or something. Something that could be hidden and no one could see, and then if you were in trouble, you could just reach down and switch it on and it would call the police.*

Phones

According to support workers, it is difficult to estimate how many community members have cell phones. Linda Malcolm, the Sex Industry Liaison Officer, distributes recycled cell phones (called “sex cells”) enabled only for 911 service. Few pay phones exist in the DTES, possibly because of vandalism and the cost of repairing them.

- *There need to be more phones available in the DTES, including pay phones. There used to be more phones on the street and they just aren't there any more.*
- *They should hand out phones to sex trade workers, like they do sometimes at PEERS and WISH. But they need to be 911-enabled even if they are pay as you go. Phones have GPS and can be used to locate people.*
- *I think more phones are a good idea, but I know that it can be a problem because I've had my phone stolen, and one time a john smashed my phone so I couldn't use it to call for help.*
- *There should be emergency call boxes on the street or some kind of safety button, like the ones they have on the Skytrain.*
- *There should be a sex worker hotline that you can call and be connected to someone right away in an emergency.*

Self-defence training

Several participants suggested that self-defence courses should be provided for those in the sex trade.

- *They should provide self-defence courses to sex trade workers so they know what to do in an emergency.*

Changing the legal status of the sex trade and enforcement of laws

The legal status of the sex trade is the subject of ongoing court challenges and sometimes acrimonious international policy debates, and a thorough canvassing of the issues merits a

much larger discussion than is possible here. There are starkly opposed views in the community as to whether the sex trade should be decriminalized and regulated, or abolished through greater criminalization and more stringent enforcement of existing laws. Many participants were eager to discuss policies and had strong views on red light districts and most effective ways to legislate for the safety and wellbeing of those currently engaged in the sex industry. Their comments are included here to give an indication of the range of views on these issues, recognizing that the Commission's mandate is not to bring a resolution to this complex issue.

- *The police are concentrating on the johns, scaring them away, forcing girls to take more dangerous tricks. They think they're helping, but they're not. They're chasing ones that might pay away. Instead the sleaze balls get in. There should be a red light district.*
- *There should be a red light district. We are burying our heads in the sand. The government has tried thousands of ways to change it or stop it. None of them has worked. There must be more to gain working with it.*
- *There should be a red light district with a roadblock that's monitored by police. If you want to enter the area, you would have to allow the police to run your ID to check your profile for any past charges relating to violence against women, or any kind of violence. Then once you were cleared, you could go in and pick up girls.*
- *I think they should legalize prostitution and allow indoor work in any area, not just in a red light district. They could have monitoring on indoor work. Just a sign that says, "You're being monitored," then video in the rooms. Lots of guys would still do it. Some might even get off on it.*
- *They should legalize prostitution and control it, with appropriate medical tests for sex workers and real control over the working conditions.*
- *Police are cracking down in certain areas, and this is spreading [the sex trade] out. Now, they are going all the way out to Langley – out in the middle of nowhere. We need one area – like a red light area. That way, all the girls are together; and if that girl just left on a date, someone got the plate number, if she doesn't come back. ...*

If they provide one area we can work out of – like a red light area – a safe area the police know you are there. Like before on Franklin – it ran from Victoria Drive to Quebec Street– there should be areas designated for sex work. Then people know where to go; the police know to go and go there regularly to check on the girls and know they are okay. That makes more sense than working on every corner of the neighbourhood, and it's good because society won't be made at us for doing it outside their homes.

- *When you work as an escort, you have a safety net in place. I phone when I get there and get the money up front. Forty-five minutes later, the dispatcher phones, and if there is no answer, the driver is at the door. ... You constantly know that after one hour you're out, and if something bad is happening, you only have to keep things going a certain amount of time before someone's going to be taking action. That's good. But it doesn't always work. Once when something did go wrong for me, the driver had left to take a piss. He was supposed to sit there, and of course that was the one time something happened. But with escorts, what I like is the service will call and get the girl out of there. Someone will be pounding on the door. And I have never seen a girl get charged. In the DTES, you don't have those supports.*
- *Indoor work is safer, but I like outdoor work better. It's less hassle. (Because I work online), if I do indoor work, I need to make up this big story and lie to get the money. In indoor work they can actually find out your real life, and that's more risky – it's an invasion of privacy, they can end up hacking you. I check out all my dates online before I do them. I Google their names, find out where they live, tell other people where I'm going.*
- *Decriminalization of sex work is really key, because it would enhance workers' control over their own labour; it would allow them to work inside; it would allow them the ability to negotiate the terms of transactions and to hire security to protect them. Criminalization isn't working. It is killing people and causing far too much harm. Decriminalization would allow for self-regulation and other autonomous processes that would make conditions safer. If sex work were decriminalized, workers could pay tax, collect EI, get maternity leave and benefits, and get WCB. We could employ labour standards throughout all levels of the industry. Invest tax resources from sex workers, so those who are survival workers are supported in exiting and those who chose sex work above other kinds of employment enjoy full rights as citizens.*

I am not in favour of changing every provision of the Criminal Code dealing with sex work. Keep s. 212 that deals with procuring minors, but repeal 213, 210, 211, and write new laws as needed to fill the gaps as new situations develop. (support worker)
- *Escort work is not necessarily safer than street work. So you're inside a building with someone you know nothing about, and you don't know what they might have in that room, what kind of weapons or what they plan to do with you. Your only protection is someone waiting outside, who has no idea what is going on inside. Illegal brothels are really*

dangerous, the people who run them take all the girls' money and control whether you leave or not. There's no choice for us. We have all these situations and none of them really involve options. The only option is what you have to do to survive. Women need to feel they do have a choice, and they need to feel equal.

- *Women who are addicted will tell you they want legalization of prostitution, because they just want to be able to keep using drugs. I don't think that will work to really make them safer. I think we should be using a model like in Sweden, where the police charge the johns and leave the prostitutes alone. Then there would be no dates for the girls, and they wouldn't be able to keep using. They should go after the guys, who are tax payers, and charge them with stiffer penalties, say 30 days and \$5,000, and it should be publicized. Don't go after the dope-sick girls. We need to look at the models from other countries. Sweden has the lowest prostitution rates, and also the lowest drug use rates, but maybe that is also because they have a more holistic health care system. In the end, it's all about money.*

- *I would like to see the johns criminalized. The VPD has done a pretty good job in not criminalizing women who are prostituted, but I do not like to see them enforce a de facto decriminalization. They should send the message to buyers, pimps and traffickers that this is not okay.*

It matters how the VPD treats prostitution. If they see it as men having a right to sexual access to women's bodies, and so to make it more accessible for men, it will affect their policing on prostitution. They should be enforcing against the johns, like the model in Alberta where cars are impounded. Arrest the johns and press charges. If they want a john school let it be post-charge rather than pre-charge. We have to say that violence against women is not okay, whether done by johns or pimps. It is important to remember that Pickton was a john. He could have been enforced against as a john.

I ultimately left [WISH] because of the limitation of their harm reduction model. One night, younger girl came in, young and pretty and dressed like a club kid. She was different so I noticed her. I was told, "You cannot mention anything about exiting or a different life for them." So I was able to give her some French fries. It felt very disempowering. She left, and I was the only one on the floor when we were nearing closing. She came back in, and her pimp had beat the shit out of her. She was bleeding. I calmed her down enough to talk. What she wanted from me was eye shadow. I was thinking, "I could do no more than give you eye shadow." She said, "My pimp beat the crap out of me and said I look like shit, and I

should go make some money.” She went to the bathroom and my supervisor came out and said, “You could say to her what you are not allowed to say” [i.e., that what she was doing was dangerous and she might want to consider exiting] and this was when we knew there is a serial killer. I went into the bathroom, but maybe she had just done a fix, and she threw me out of the way. I saw her on the corner of Main and Hastings half an hour later, and she was working it trying to sell. This was the reality, and who was enforcing against her pimp? (support worker)

- *I’m not totally in favour of total decriminalization. Decriminalization won’t take away the issues of poverty, homelessness, addiction, exploitation, or self-esteem, or systemic reasons why people end up in the sex trade. Before decriminalization, work needs to be done solving issues first. If people had other options, I’m not sure that people would choose sex work. We need equal access and opportunity to education. There are lots of single moms supplementing income in the trade to feed their kids -- that’s what they have to do to give their children what they need. But they don’t want to be doing it. I see women who appear to have everything together, and they say, “I said it was by choice that I was doing sex work, but it was ripping out my soul.” These are high functioning women. Later they say, “I thought it was by choice but I was fucked up.” It’s not always by choice. And you can change. You can change your mind, it may start by choice and be not by choice later. I agree with abolitionists on some levels, but safety is extremely important, and I can’t impose my views on others. (support worker)*
- *Regardless of any changes to the laws, we’d be doing the work that we do. The poverty that affects the women we work with will not change, regardless of whether there is complete decriminalization or not. What we need to keep providing are services to support sex workers’ safety, health and well being. (support worker)*

Funding community resources for women in the DTES and those in the sex trade

Many participants commented on the importance of services provided by community organizations. During consultations, two organizations providing services to those in the sex trade, PEERS and PACE, announced that they were facing significant cuts to their funding. PEERS, the only Vancouver organization focused on providing services for those wishing to exit the sex trade, announced it would be forced to close its doors some time in the first half of 2012. At the time of writing, PACE had lost funding for staff salaries and was continuing to negotiate funding to make up for the shortfall, with the possibility of diminished programming capacity. Participants expressed anger and dismay that these organizations had lost financial support when, in their eyes, even existing services needed to be expanded.

- *They should make sure that people in authority, not just cops but also health workers and others know where to send people to get other kinds of help and know what resources are available.*
- *We need more services like PEERS. We need more sex trade workers' advocates. There are not enough out there. Years ago there was more out there – like PACE. But with cutbacks there are not enough. This is a problem is that it is not going to go away; it is still going to be there.*
- *Services like the WISH van [MAP van] are great. They're good to talk to if you've had a bad date. They usually always answer the phone and they're always there. But they need more out there for that. There is only one van and it has to go all the way from the DTES to New Westminster during the night.*
- *There have been changes since the missing women in terms of resources, but there are no parallel resources for men. It would be good if we had a call line, or a regular town hall. We need people to deal with like Linda Malcolm and like people at PEERS, who have been in the sex trade and have experience working with the police – someone who is experiential and a guy. I have had contact with outreach worker teams – they hand out socks, granola bars and water, and harm reduction tools, which is very helpful.*
- *There has to be a plan for making changes at a lot of places and in a lot of ways at once. Now, many services are closing once they have finally got the trust of women, and that makes it worse. There won't be change until people want to make it better for themselves, but to start with, you have to make sure that they have a place to go.*
- *PEERS shutting down is a tragedy – this can't happen. PEERS has been my lifeline – it is the only organization that has never turned me away. Every other organization has at one time or another closed their doors – because I've aged out, because I'm not within their mandate, or whatever, and that is not true for PEERS since day one.*
- *You have to have someone on your side that believes you, cares about you and is going to help you through with whatever that service is. So if a sex worker is saying, "I don't want to do what I'm doing anymore," without us, it won't happen. It won't happen with the police. The police won't refer people. The police are not your friend, not the people you go to for help, because you won't be believed or supported and it may turn out worse for you – especially if someone has some legal problems going on.*

If someone is advocating on the client's behalf and accompanying them through the process, that makes a big difference. Clients won't do it on their own. They won't do it. If you want some support, if a sex worker needs support through the Ministry, it's a similar situation, in that it makes all the difference to have relationships with front line support workers. But all of those services and supports are being eliminated. (support worker)

- *We need supports for sex workers. Put your money where your mouth is. There was a unanimous city recommendation for an increase in support for sex workers on every level. Exiting is primary. And yet they are shutting doors. PEERS is shutting it doors, PACE is at risk. WISH still struggles. The different tables and groups that do the work with increasing workers' health and safety never have enough funding and buy in, just tokenism. It is less and less and less when it should be more and more and more. (support worker)*
- *Having the bad date sheets has been effective, in the sense that they are used, just like they were when they were first started. But [these measures] would be more effective if backed up by an exit service. We are just saying, "So, you are being beaten and murdered, your friends are disappearing, and here is a sheet so you can be responsible for looking out for yourself." There is no recognition of the johns; we are just normalizing the violence.*

... We need to see more actual exit services. Now there are no transition houses or any programs for women that want to exit. We need job training, women's detox beds, treatment on demand.

PACE and WISH are not exiting organizations. They are a harm reduction piece that is important. But there is not adequate space and safety. We have made harm reduction an ideology and we've stopped there. It's easier to maintain someone than help them reach their goals or imagine more for them. (support worker)

- *I think people don't understand how much insight workers bring to these situations [that directly involve them], how much foresight they have and analysis on how to improve things. Pre-Olympics, the women we were working with wanted to contact sex workers in other cities that had hosted the Olympics to ask what kinds of issues they had had with customers and how they had dealt with problems such as violence. That was right after Vancouver had won the bid. We were that far ahead already. We have to find ways of listening and hearing this population, and really considering what they recommend. Because they are the ones living it, who know what will work and what won't, and what might be*

harmful to them. We have lots of opportunities to build relationships – even to implement some of their recommendations in part, if it's not possible to fully roll out a program. We can start with pilots, and test things that haven't been tried before. Once successful, these pilots should not be dropped but invested in. That should be the criteria of ongoing funding. That was how the MAP Van started. It was a WISH-PACE partnership. WISH and PACE facilitated the project as a pilot, and it was one of the first programs to give jobs to experiential workers. The only outreach van of its kind in North America. And they are just doing what they would do naturally, if the industry was safer – spotting for other workers, checking in on them to make sure they were doing okay, and helping them. MAP continues to struggle for funding even after 7 years of proven success. The health van could also employ former workers in a similar way, in meaningful roles. (support worker)

- *PEERS is the only exit organization, and now it has lost its funding and will be closing in May 2012. We want to find out from them how they have those initial conversations with people about exiting. They have a wealth of expertise and personal experience with this. Without the counselling, encouragement and support services they offer, all we can really do is try to help women to get into detox, but there are only 12 women's detox beds in Vancouver. So 12 women at a time can do seven days of detox. And then what is going to happen to those women after? With Access 1 [Vancouver Coastal Health referral for detox and housing services], you can sometimes expect up to three weeks' delay before a woman can enter the program. There's a big problem for follow up there. You may not be able to contact the person when there is a space available for them. And even if you can, what happens after? The future after that is hopeless.*

Until now, WISH, PACE and PEERS have worked pretty closely together as good allies. WISH provides front line support; PACE provides education and other programs; and PEERS provided exiting services. And now PEERS is gone. We can't fill that gap. And making organizations compete for funding is ridiculous. Now the total resources for organizations dedicated to serving sex workers have been cut by a third. And where are all those experienced people who have been doing this work going to go?

Experiences of youth

Some of the people we spoke with had first become homeless, street-engaged, or in the sex trade in their teens. Some had come out of foster homes and/or had experienced childhood sexual abuse, then been institutionalized for periods under the Mental Health Act. Others were women whose children had been taken into care by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and were concerned about their futures. Some of these participants did not

relate experiences they had had with police or suggest recommendations for changes to policing, but wanted to communicate that the difficulties of living on the streets at an early age, with few options for care and housing, often lead youth into a cycle of risky or violent relationships. Those who had been living on the street were critical of the failure of service providers to meet their needs.

- *I started when I was 16. There was PACE but it didn't have enough resources. There were no services to go to. We would just go to friends, to each other. They kept us trapped. There were not enough services for kids. The cops just said we were bad. At time there were lots of us, all on drugs – all minors. We would hang out around Clarke. The cops just left us there, never stopped us; there was no help. When we saw the police, we would run the other way.*
- *[They] shouldn't be housing teenage girls down by Oppenheimer Park. It's not a good area. I used to live there. There's a lot of violence. There was a stabbing in the park this summer and the whole area was taped off. The guy eventually died from his wounds. It's just not safe. I've heard of women beaten, robbed, raped. They shouldn't be in this area at all.*
- *There are resources, but once you reach a certain age or if you are under-age, you can't use them. There aren't enough services for boys doing sex work. I usually go to Directions. You have to be under 21 or you won't be allowed in, and there is security at the door. My other refuge is my street mom's house. She also works in the trade and if anyone tries to follow you in, she will beat them with a bat. That's my refuge from violent situations.*
- *Using resources sucks because you get put into something you don't want to. We don't want that. I hate being known as a charity case. I want resources that meet my needs; that's what Hustle and PEERS have done so far. I've been a street youth for so long. Most of the resources for youth don't use a harm reduction model, which makes it hard if you're used to living on the streets and by a street code. You can't have visitors. You can't use drugs – you have to be clean. They don't want you hanging out with people who are actively working. I used to work every day. Now if I have money, I have to hide it or they'll ask you where it came from.*
- *There are a lot of risks for street youth: STDs, going hungry, you have no safe place to sleep. You never know what will happen. You could die that night. No one will care if you are dead the next day. You are just another statistic. No one cares about street youth. Vancouver doesn't care.*

On Granville Street, they tried to kick us off because we were "interrupting people's lives", but we weren't. It's unsanitary. It's not healthy on the street. You get malnourished. You don't get to wash

yourself every day. You risk getting hit by a car, or a cop beating you to death, 'cause cops like to pick on people, mainly youth, because we are easy targets.

- *A lot of people don't understand how sex trade work and street youth go hand in hand – it's simpler than going out looking for a job. You can easily stash your backpack, pick up someone, get money for food and a hostel or hotel room for a night. That's what a lot of street youth do. But a lot of people don't understand that. It's just an easy means of money. I was 14 when I started. I joined the sex trade while I was living in my foster home. Our foster mom was oblivious to it. We had these strange men to the house, and she was offering them tea and coffee. She was oblivious for a year.*
- *Many of the women here get diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, something that is often seen to have developed as a result of childhood sexual abuse. Most of the therapies employed are containment therapies, aimed at changing women's behaviour.... Right now there simply isn't a program to deal with historical childhood sexual abuse (whether it happened in the residential schools or because of foster care or other institutionalization). Some lawyers ... tried to bring a class action case against MCFD, but they ran into the problem of liability when it was found that most foster care survivors had been abused by multiple offenders. (support worker)*
- *I would really like to see what we can do for our future generations: boys and girls. Put preventative measures in place so they don't end up going missing. I believe a lot of women wouldn't have gone missing if they had not experienced abuse in the foster care system. Those systems are not working. What needs to happen to stop it so it doesn't keep happening. We need to focus on the future, what can we learn from the past looking forward. I'm an ex-alcoholic ex-addict. This has been my journey. My kids are in the foster care system. Had I broken the cycle of violence of violence, abuse, addiction, that I was subject to as a child, I wouldn't have ended up on the street and my children in foster care.*

We need to look after our children so they don't become the next missing women and children. No disrespect to the past victims, but we need to move forward. So we don't hear in the news that another women has gone missing. We need to stop the cycles.

Removing children is not always the answer. Sometime it may be when there is severe abuse. But in some situations – we should be just thinking about their incentives and what their laws say. Those books and laws are not always right. Instead of giving money to foster care, they should give

money to families for food, clothing, and so on. Those are stressors. If someone doesn't have coping skills, they might take it out on the child. We should have support workers so family has support. And not court ordered through the Ministry, because they are negative. Money could go to helping family plus the safety net. Basic rights, everyone is entitled to human rights.

Other systemic social and institutional issues

Many of the changes that participants felt were needed to improve the safety and welfare of DTES residents, women at risk, and those in the sex trade fall outside the narrow rubric of changes to policing or police investigations. Support workers in particular related that without a host of systemic changes to increase the supports to DTES residents, changes instituted in police forces would result in superficial or ineffective impacts. Issues raised included poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, mental illness, and inadequate resources, in terms of funding to community organizations and government programs, for those in the sex trade. At the heart of many comments was the belief that societal attitudes had to be radically altered to remove the stigma attached to the sex trade and increase understanding of those who work in it. Support workers stressed the need for more political will and better coordination of services to increase the safety of those in the sex trade, in addition to discussing specific critical areas of concern.

- *In terms of the risks to workers, and the changes that could be made to policing and to generally improve their health and safety, we have had so many studies, so many projects already. The evidence is already there. So for a lot of us, I think the question is, why go through this again? What is different this time? How far is the Commission or government willing to go to make a change? And how are the systemic changes that are needed going to be implemented? (support worker)*
- *All of the big factors that create marginalization – poverty, addiction, mental health, sex work, trauma – all of them are lumped together into a “less than”. You just don’t matter as much. The level of care and concern that we would afford “normal” citizens just don’t apply to you because you are just wasting time, money and energy. But that’s not just police – that’s a systemic problem.*

My experience in non-profit [is that] I was surprised about how little we care as a society about the people that need help the most. And that’s the top down. I could say that the VPD or any group would benefit from sensitivity training or development around how to deal with marginalized populations and what they really face: gender, transphobia, what is mental health, all those things. But that has little effect if there is no buy-in from the top down, if you don’t have allies and people that are willing to incorporate that as part of the culture. So if the government is not on

your side and the administration and boards, if they aren't onside, it doesn't really matter. It is a total uphill battle. And I see that more and more. Sensitivity training needs to happen, but it can't be the only thing, the main strategy. Without other things, it won't make enough of a difference.

I think there is a phobia. When you talk about fewer and fewer options – it's society. There is so much stigma and phobia in terms of talking about sex and acknowledging sex work happening period. So heads are in the sand. It's that culture. People need to acknowledge that sex work happens and is potentially unhealthy, and they need to understand and internalize all the things around it – the shame, trauma, abuse, that children are exploited – all these things need to be acknowledged in a way that people will realize that we have to care. (support worker)

- *...That whole Pickton thing – “we got him”. Yeah, you got him, what did that do? For anyone who was out there, any other predator out there, it did them a favour. “Wow, so now the heat's off and we can continue to do what we are doing.” There is a persistent problem that there are predators out there. They are out there. The media did them favours by localizing it, making it about one person. And that's not just Pickton but you hear about it all over, in different countries: when one person is caught that's what you see, the face of the issue. And the people that work in it or in the know are going to realize that that's a very small part of a very large problem. But for the general population, they see this and go, “Well, things are better.” And if you don't know better, what else are you going to think? Tragedy, but out of the tragedy, something has been done. The whole point of the Inquiry is yeah, a bad guy caught, but at what cost, what happened, what could we do...? Sure, one less predator on the street, but let's not forget about all the other predators and the general lack of health and safety for sex workers. (support worker)*
- *When we ask what it would take for people to participate in the “straight world”, in terms of getting stable housing and employment, there is so much to recovery and redefinition that needs to take place. There have to be longer term solutions. Even for people who are high-functioning and working, welfare rates are completely inadequate to tide someone over for rent, if they happen to lose their income in the short term. (support worker)*
- *This is not just about how cops see women, but the whole political and social will about ending violence against women. I know no Aboriginal women who are pro-prostitution. They are the ones that are most affected. We've limited our and their imaginations, those of poor*

Aboriginal women, of what they can have and be and do. I would like to see that horizon open up with funding. We need a living wage and we need to raise the welfare rates so women don't have to be prostituted; we need universal childcare; we need robust exit services for women. (support worker)

- *Cops aren't social workers, but they need to employ other strategies that are more harm reduction-based, because protection is part of their mandate for everyone. A public show of support of sex workers could be powerful. If public institutions come to the defence of sex workers and collaborate in a meaningful and resourced way toward anti-violence, it could go a long way towards changing broader attitudes in society. As it is, people commit violence against sex workers because they think they can get away with it, because they have gotten away with it. ...*

Really the problem of attitudinal bias against sex workers extends beyond law enforcement to all service providers, including Victims Services, income assistance and health care workers. Attitudes need to change across the board.

Stakeholders need to provide a continuum of services, based on various trajectories for people within the industry: for example, exiting, transitioning from one kind of sex work to safer sex work, and so on. There has to be a variety of different paths and models, but there also needs to be better communication between personnel at different institutions and agencies. The police and community services should have the ability to move people from one location to another when they are wanting to transition and are at risk, the way they do with other organized crime and drug situations. And we need to have experiential professionals to help people navigate through the various organizations and ministries: police, health care, with income assistance, housing, and so on. So we need a multi-agency strategic plan, working at many levels. We need to be able to take people from detox to recovery and then on to the service provision they need, and not get stuck on the first step of getting them to detox, because there are no beds available and you can't get back in touch with the person when one opens up. We need to make the road smooth to help people who don't want to be in sex work to get out.

Politicians need to stop playing with people's lives. Don't institute a subcommittee to review the law, get feedback that the laws needs repealing, and then do nothing. I personally facilitated dialogue with sex workers and politicians over the years (mayors, MLAs) and at the in camera session of the Parliamentary Subcommittee. Some members of

parliament were overcome with emotion as they heard stories from sex workers. I looked in the eyes of sex workers and told them that because they shared their experiences things were going to change. I was made a liar. It was demoralizing to read the subcommittee report and humiliating to face sex workers to tell them that I was sorry, nothing will be done, an election is upon us and no one will take this matter up as a campaign issue. (support worker)

Homelessness

The lack of housing options is a problem throughout the DTES, and a particular problem for those who are street-engaged.

- *Another problem is just the pervasive homelessness. There isn't anywhere for so many women to live. There aren't enough women's centers or housing for us.*
- *Women need more places to go that they can take their dates. During a recent lockdown at this shelter [because of overcrowding], women's beds were empty because they were working till 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. and couldn't get back into the building. They need a safe space to take dates 24/7, supervised with support staff. They have to have people they can go to that they trust.*
- *BC Housing sticks us in these buildings and you have no choice. You can live there or live on the street. It seems like they want to confine lower income people to the DTES. I was offered the choice between the Dunsmuir and the Drake. The Dunsmuir was really old and dirty, so I chose the Drake. Now I'm living in a mental health building. I have one friend who has been on the BC Housing list for 11 years waiting to get a place, and staying in shelters in the meantime.*
- *[At this shelter], we continue to be criticized for issues around women's safety. It is a situation in which it is hard for the support workers to know all the time where everyone is and be able to check in on them. We are criticized by women's groups because our space is seen as unsafe. We're also criticized for allowing you, the Commission, to come here. ... We have to engage in constant emotional and behavioural management to see that everyone gets along in this small, shared space, and that we all find ways to navigate. So we have become chronically reactive. And we don't necessarily get to the people who don't come to us to seek out services. So that does make it possible for someone to live here for three months and not end up talking to a community worker, because they have not chosen to do so.*

What we are really offering is a cheaper version of supported housing. There a lot of misconceptions about what supported housing really is in BC. I attended one meeting where an official dealing with homelessness asked about the supports available in some of the housing in the DTES. It's often assumed that there will be meals, health services and other supports, like there are in a congregate care model of homecare for developmentally challenged people. In fact, that's rarely the case. Most buildings that are called "supported housing" just have staff that monitor the door and let people in or out, but don't offer any other services. When Carnegie Outreach and BC Housing did a survey about placing people in alternate housing, they found that many people choose to stay here because it's safer and it's supervised 24 hours a day. There's always a shift manager on, there are paramedics and first aid available, and the residents get meals here. So we are offering the lowest cost supported housing around.

Lots of people who have been here a while don't want to rehouse, even when they have opportunities to do so. And they may have good reasons for that. For example, most people think of having their own house or their own room as a place where they can have their own freedoms. But much of the women's housing doesn't allow women to bring men in or have them sleep over, even their own adult sons. So it's not an environment in which they have any sense of control over. There are just rules that have to be followed, and they can be very inflexible. (support worker)

Drug addiction

Participants made reference to drug addiction and the belief that many of those in the sex trade were addicts who "self-medicated" in order to cope with experiences of trauma, leading to a cycle of increasing addiction.

- *There was a guy on the bad date list for a while who had a murder/rape kit in his trunk. This was reported and still girls were getting into his car. They are putting themselves at risk for the amount they need to get a fix.*
- *The ongoing violence against women is continuing. Women who are assaulted don't want to report it. They have to use more drugs to forget what happened, and that means they have to turn more tricks.*
- *As it is, there is no real solidarity between women. Crack is causing sociopathy. People who are alcoholics or heroin addicts will wake up and remember what they did and feel remorse. You get up physically sick, and it keeps you down for a few days so you have time to think. But crack*

addicts can't seem physically to get enough, and they don't care about anything except their next fix.

- *Down here the women don't even make any money. They will blow you for the change in your pocket, because of the drug epidemic. They will get in a car for \$10 with anyone. It's just not safe.*
- *We need more safe supervised injection sites. Insite can be really busy. And women don't complain when they are abused. They just take more drugs to get through it, which is ironic, because most of the women down here doing sex work are doing it for the drugs.*
- *Drug addiction and mental health also continue to be barriers to reporting violence. A lot of people use drugs after incidents of violence, to get through, and that means the details get lost. They can have problems articulating what happened, which affects reporting, and makes interpretation of the incident more complicated. But maybe a bigger problem is credibility. There is always a problem of whether sex workers are credible when giving evidence. They are not believed. So there needs to be a change, both in terms of the resources and support available to them through the process, and also in terms of the attitudes people have towards sex workers and users and their testimony.*

You also have to remember that for some people who are addicts, when they are not using, they're experiencing withdrawal. They need to be using just a little to maintain their level of normal. And that may affect their consent and ability to make a decision to proceed with charges or not. So how do you go forward with that? First we need to facilitate steps the person can take towards immediate wellness, and then when that person is in a better space, they can consider the decision of whether to charge the perpetrator or not. And that can also affect how to use the information acquired. Should it be used as evidence, to charge someone? Or can it just be used as information, to have on record, should something else happen, or to fill in gaps with other information received? (support worker)

Mental Health

Mental health issues are another pervasive problem for the DTES, particularly for those who have experienced trauma. Participants discussed the dangers of living alongside those with untreated or poorly managed mental health issues; the prevalence of mental health issues among those who had suffered sexual abuse, many of them in the sex trade; the discriminatory attitudes of some health care providers; and the lack of treatment options.

- *Even in our apartments and drop-in centres, we don't feel safe. We can't feel safe anywhere, because so many people with mental illnesses have been dumped in the DTES, and put out of psych wards, and not only do we not know how to deal with them and it's uncomfortable around them, we are the ones who have to deal with their hygiene issues and figure out how to act with them. And they can be frightening. There are no facilities for them and they're all down here.*
- *Generally speaking, ... now it's less likely that the cops are going to be making inappropriate or insensitive comments about [for example] mental illness. It's actually paramedics and other personnel who are more likely to do that. We've had situations where people have had health issues or manic episodes that required admission to St. Paul's and the paramedics recognize the person as a "frequent flyer" and refuse to transport them on the grounds that they're just trying to get to the hospital to vandalize the hand sanitizers [which contain alcohol] or something like that. They say some pretty insensitive things. (support worker)*
- *I didn't realize until I went to an all women's trauma and abuse centre. It helped me heal my spirit and voice. All the stuff I was carrying from childhood; I was carrying someone else's negativity and hurt. That's why I was out there, I was wounded, in the dark, in "mud" I call it. I don't have to put myself in abusive situations, be out there. To know that I can be my own person.*
- *When I was a community advocate, I worked with some of the best poverty law lawyers... all of whom were really well organized.... They taught us how to use the GAIN Act and to get health services that women needed under the "life threatening" illness clause. We could get women help. Now, there's no access to psychiatric services for women exhibiting complex PTSD. Instead of providing comprehensive treatment and working on recovery through cognitive therapies, the health system just wants to manage behaviours, often through pharmacological programs. Women often want support, not goal-oriented therapy that is designed to make them more manageable. This just isn't available to them. The health care system is set up to respond to Access 1 major mental health disorders, like schizophrenia and mood disorders that will respond well to pharmacological intervention. It's not set up to deal with sexual abuse survivors. (support worker)*
- *With respect to women here, there is a general tendency for people to define themselves through their pasts, for example, through their sexual abuse history and resulting PTSD, and use that as a way to define their*

relationships to the world. That experience of trauma or abuse shouldn't become a way of managing one's experiences or presenting to the world, but it often becomes that. It defines people and they get stuck in that. (support worker)

- *Changing the police alone would never be enough. We need a comprehensive solution that addresses issues of mental health, housing, poverty and addiction in the DTES. The police have advocated for an integrated, comprehensive approach to mental illness. They don't want to be social workers either. They are dealing with a situation that police should not deal with. And generally speaking, the police approach is to label people as criminals. So we need to make improvements to the whole system. Changes just to the police won't fix it. There needs to be access to mental health services, and at present, there just isn't. There is no capacity in the system at the moment. This is particularly true for the most marginalized in the neighbourhood at the moment. It's like they are just waiting for all of them to die. So many police resources are being put to non-police work. There is a lack of strategy: we can all try harder, but the system is broken. The conversation about what would help the most marginalized is not happening. (support worker)*
- *We need more healing circles, more trauma programs and treatment, for single moms and women having babies to do their healing journeys so they are not passing on their intergenerational abuse. It is all how a person is raised. It takes a village. To make a caring, kind child, it takes parents, families. Caregivers – what do they need? Healing circles, smudging, trauma and abuse counselling and treatment centres. I didn't understand that I was reliving the cycles of addiction and abuses. Now that I know, I can take steps to stop my children from going through those things.*

Child apprehensions

Several participants alluded to the negative effect of child apprehensions on women's wellbeing and their determination to live more healthily.

- *One of the biggest problems with regard to the legal system and women that I see is legal aid cuts. Some of the most difficult things are the hearings with MCFD where children are taken into the Ministry's care. The bar is set so high that it just makes women give up. I watched one woman who was Cree and addicted go unrepresented through a proceeding where she was going to have her child taken into care and one of the issues involved whether it was appropriate to feed a child under 12 months of age an egg yolk. This woman was there for three days and on the stand a lot. She walked in proud and ready to fight the case. She*

dressed up for court. By the end of cross-examination on the second day, she was defeated. What they were asking her about was actually a traditional practice taught to her by her grandmother, part of her traditional knowledge, and although they cross-examined her about it, and she answered the questions over and over again, she felt in the end that she wasn't able to say that it was part of her traditional knowledge to explain why she did it. She just gave up. The last day she came into court in a mini-skirt. I could see she was done by the end of the second day. I didn't even expect her to come back. (support worker)

- *I still have close friends who have been in the business for 20 years, and I think the reason they haven't been able to get out is they are dealing with such serious trauma, from what they have been through and also from child apprehensions. It's just too hard to heal from. They carry that with them. Most of the women working in the DTES have lost a child, either through apprehension or having family take the child away. So that has to be a way to manage that trauma and cope with that. It's different when you've had kids. They never forgive themselves. In Ontario, they have a place that women can go for healing and treatment when they've had that kind of trauma, and it could be a model for here. Now, if someone here wanted to go there, they would have to prove that none of the services here are suitable, which is hard. Peardon House has counselling, but it doesn't have clinical services to deal with sexual abuse and PTSD. Those things are just too much to deal with by someone trained in addiction counselling. They require intensive treatment, and longer treatment – six months, not one. After one month, you are just beginning to establish rapport with someone. These are very deep wounds, and they take a long time to heal.*

Conclusion

Despite the variety of viewpoints put forth by community members and support workers on the changes needed to improve reporting of incidents of violence against women and those in the sex trade, there were clear trends in participants' comments and recommendations. Participants felt that because of negative past interactions, they could not trust the police to respond quickly and appropriately in emergency situations. Some feared violence or mistreatment from the police, while others said that police responses were inadequate and at times dismissive. Participants believed that the police questioned their credibility when they did try to report incidents, and that they were judgmental of those in the sex trade and condoned violence against them. They expressed the desire to be treated with greater respect, compassion and understanding. Participants suggested that a restorative justice approach that would bring police and community members together to acknowledge and discuss their differences could help to build a better foundation from which to repair the damage that had been done.

Many participants suggested concrete steps could be taken to rebuild or initiate relationships between police and community members. Support workers who were engaged in ongoing collaborative programs involving police noted that positive changes were occurring. They identified the need for a special unit of police devoted to the sex trade with a mandate to develop relationships within the community in addition to engaging in enforcement tasks. Participants also supported the creation of funded liaison worker positions staffed by experiential people to work alongside police. They suggested that a more independent, efficient and public complaints procedure for incidents of police misconduct and abuse of authority would greatly enhance community confidence in the police as a force established to serve and protect.

Participants envisioned many new harm-reduction strategies to increase the safety of those in the sex trade and expressed concern over diminishing resources allocated to community organizations already engaged in this kind of programming. They recognized that many of the social conditions that put women and those in the sex trade at risk in the DTES would persist regardless of any changes to policing, unless more political will and resources were devoted to enacting systemic changes. In this respect, participants cited poverty and problems of inadequate housing and treatment options for mental health issues and addiction. At the root of these issues, participants spoke of the need eliminate the social stigma against those in the sex trade and to shed greater light on their lives as human beings.

SECTION 3 - CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations consolidate and synthesize the suggestions made by participants in Section 2. It should be noted they do not reflect the views or recommendations of the Study Commission or the author of the DTES Consultation Program report.

No attempt has been made to research whether existing programs encompass the recommendations. In some cases, it is possible that the recommendations given mirror programs in development or already in place.

Not all participants advocated for all the recommendations made. On the contrary, some recommendations conflicted with each other. We have aimed to fairly represent all the recommendations that were put forward by participants and have not attempted to prioritize, evaluate or harmonize the various recommendations gathered. However, in order to eliminate repetition, we have condensed similar suggestions. The recommendations below are organized again around dominant themes, roughly in the same order as the participant contributions in Section 2.

Initiating a Restorative Justice Process

- Employ restorative justice measures to improve the relationship between police and community members. Hold meetings with the community regarding the disappearances and deaths of women in the DTES.

For police and policing

- Establish a dedicated unit within the VPD for addressing violence against those in the sex trade, staffed by officers like the Sex Industry Liaison Officer and experiential persons who are familiar with the community, in sufficient number to allow personnel to play an active role in the community and respond to reports.
- Alternately, or additionally, establish and fund a number of community advocate positions to be staffed by experiential persons working as liaisons between the police and the community.
- Provide appropriate training for police on issues affecting the wellness and safety of those in the sex trade, with consideration of homelessness, addiction and mental illness. Training should be given by experiential persons or support workers from community organizations.
- Institute a training program for operators answering 911 and non-emergency calls, including sensitivity training and sexual assault response training, to make operators more supportive and responsive

- Establish a set of protocols for responding to incidents in the DTES, particularly incidents of violence against those in the sex trade.
- Establish a protocol similar to the Amber Alert, whereby when a sex trade worker goes missing, police can respond immediately and issue public announcements.
- Increase the number of women patrol officers and the number of foot patrols.
- Establish a system whereby police officers stationed in the DTES volunteer at community organizations as a part of their training.
- Build better relationships through increased familiarity between those in the sex trade and police; encourage foot patrols to keep records of those in the sex trade, separate from and not relating to criminal records.
- Institute procedures providing police discretion to waive enforcement of outstanding charges against those reporting incidents of violence, and make this policy known to community members.
- Adopt a uniform policy on policing and the sex trade to guide enforcement at all levels within the police force, and ensure that it is adhered to by all officers.
- Ensure that officers who abuse their authority are disciplined and that those making complaints are aware of the process and the resolution.
- Clarify policies around enforcement of existing laws regarding the sex trade and drug possession.
- Develop programs to increase legal literacy in the community.
- Increase efforts to charge drug traffickers and pimps for crimes of violence.
- Recognize that until adequate protections can be offered to those who are the victims of violence, fear of retribution will always be an obstacle to reporting.

For improving the safety and wellbeing of those in the sex trade

- Fund specific positions for experiential and community advocates to act as liaisons and assist those in the sex trade when they engage with the police.
- Establish a street safety patrol system, so that it is apparent there is a security system at work, particularly on “strolls” or areas where the sex trade is active.
- Improve lighting in areas where the sex trade is active; stop pushing those in the sex trade into areas that are remote and poorly lit.

- Expand the existing MAP Van services and provide more vehicles specifically devoted to safety and reporting of crimes.
- Make the existing Red Light Alerts more effective:
 - Update Red Light Alerts more frequently, and encourage sex trade workers to report all bad dates.
 - Have police hand out Red Light Alerts.
 - Put the Red Light Alerts online, possibly in a database format.
 - Set up a system whereby Red Light Alerts can be emailed or sent out in mass text messages.
 - Issue Red Light Alerts for bad dates reported by male and transgendered sex trade workers and indoor workers.
 - Have a regular segment on television publicizing information in the Red Light Alerts, or include Red Light Alert information in Crime Stoppers public service announcements.
- Start a program to distribute signalling devices containing a GPS locator that could be worn as jewellery or in clothing to those in the sex trade, so that they can activate the device and notify the police that they are in trouble.
- Distribute more recycled phones enabled for 911 calls.
- Place emergency phones, or more pay phones enabled for 911 calls, in the DTES.
- Establish a 24-hour women only drop-in centre in the DTES.
- Establish drop-in centres that serve the needs of men and transgendered people in the sex trade.
- Create a database to which those in the sex trade can voluntarily submit such identifying information as names and pictures, with known contacts, to assist in the event that they are believed to be missing.
- Continue to provide support for existing multi-stakeholder programs such as Living in Community, devoted to creating coordinated community and law enforcement responses to the sex trade.
- Fund more support programs for those in the sex trade, including both harm reduction and exit programs.

For improving the safety and wellbeing of street-engaged youth

- Establish programs that recognize the special needs and vulnerabilities of youth in the sex trade; provide counselling for those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, including in foster care.
- Provide realistic and appropriate housing, income support and training programs for youth as an alternative to the sex trade.
- Establish housing for youth outside of areas with a high incidence of drug use and street level violence, recognizing that a zero-tolerance policy with regard to the sex trade engagement and drug use may not be realistic for street-engaged youth transitioning out.
- Improve the screening of foster care families to reduce the incidence of child abuse in care; provide better supports to low income families to reduce the number of child apprehensions.

Social and institutional policy and program recommendations

- Enhance programs to deal with mental health issues in the DTES.
- Develop mental health programs specifically to address PTSD and sexual trauma for DTES residents, particularly those in the sex trade.
- Develop special counselling programs for women coping with child apprehensions as a result of street engagement.
- Develop and fund more drug treatment programs and open more drug and alcohol detoxification beds for women.
- Open more safe injection sites.
- Create more low-barrier low-income housing, particularly for women, with particular attention to the needs of women currently living in emergency housing.
- Increase welfare rates and develop better social assistance programs to give those in the sex trade other options for economic support.