

“We need to find
our voices and say,
‘NO MORE.’”

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL EXPERIENTIAL WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE

DECEMBER 5 & 6, 2013



TASK FORCE ON
TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN CANADA

NOTE:

The contents of this
report may disturb or
upset some readers.

•
(But isn't that the first
step to action?)

This report summarizes the discussions at the National Experiential Women's Roundtable, hosted on December 5th and 6th, 2013 by the Canadian Women's Foundation Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

The Task Force is committed to respecting the privacy and security of the roundtable's 20 experiential participants. We are therefore not publishing their names. However, we want to acknowledge the significant contribution each of them has made to the Task Force's work, and thank them for sharing their experience and expertise.

Task Force members at the roundtable: Margot Franssen (Co-Chair), Sheila O'Brien (Co-Chair), Elder Mae Louise Campbell, Dr. Marie Delorme, Taunya Goguen, Pytor Hodgson, Lanna Many Grey Horses, Laurie MacKenzie, Mary Mowbray, Timea Nagy, Kim Pate, Kate Quinn

Canadian Women's Foundation staff at the roundtable: Mina Mawani, Maureen Adams, Sandra Diaz, Diane Redsky, Barb Gosse, Belinda McIvor, Deborah Sinclair, Joy Connolly

Lead facilitators: Pytor Hodgson and Dale Pearson, Three Things Consulting

Small circle facilitators: Lynzii Taibossigai, Zoey (Pricelys) Roy, Claire Bodkin, Jolene Stowell

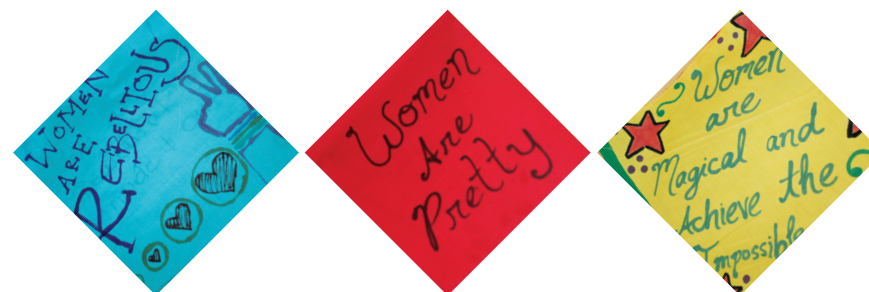
Interpreters: Ariane Vinet-Bonin and Laurence Fortin-Pellerin

Support to the roundtable participants: Elder Mae Louise Campbell and her daughter Jamie Goulet, Pytor Hodgson, Sandra Diaz, Deborah Sinclair, Diane Redsky

Special thanks to the Task Force Ambassadors and organizations who helped support the women coming to the roundtable.

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Twenty voices

On December 5th and 6th, 2013, women from across the country gathered to learn directly from the experience of women who were trafficked into and within Canada. The findings of this roundtable will inform the recommendations of the Canadian Women's Foundation's Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

THE VOICES:

Twenty women from across Canada – all trafficked as girls. They come from, or are now living in, Vancouver, Surrey, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, a small First Nations community, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Manitoulin, London, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Mexico, Nigeria and Hungary.

All the participants are now adults. All are on a healing journey that began at least three years ago, and in some cases twenty years ago or more. Many are now working to support and advocate for girls and women who are still being trafficked and sexually exploited.

THE LISTENERS:

Members of the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, and Canadian Women's Foundation staff.

THE FORUM:

The roundtable was designed to create a safe, supportive environment where each participant's expertise was valued, honoured and respected.

Participants gathered on December 5th with a pipe and smudge ceremony and introductory exercises. Participants also made the flags depicted throughout this report.

On December 6th, participants broke into four supported sharing circles. In three sequential sessions, participants described their experiences with exploitation and their recommendations for system change. Task Force members and Foundation staff created an outer circle for each of these small groups to listen and "have the backs" of the participants.

At the end of the day, the Task Force members and staff formed an inner circle to describe what they had learned, while participants formed a listening outer circle. The roundtable ended with all participants offering concluding comments, and joining in an honour song and traditional Aboriginal friendship dance.

THE REPORT:

Each sharing circle was assigned a Canadian Women's Foundation staff member to record the discussion as close to *verbatim* as possible. These notes, edited for brevity and to protect anonymity, form the contents of this report.

The Canadian Women's Foundation recognizes that 20 pages of quotes cannot do justice to a lifetime's experience. But they can open our eyes to what is happening in our country and tell us, in the words of women with direct knowledge, how we can move forward.

The Task Force and Foundation staff left the roundtable with a deep sense of responsibility to the women who shared their expertise with us. Their words will make disturbing reading for many: they disturbed us.

"I feel as if I've been run over by a train a few times. Suddenly I feel a very heavy responsibility as a member of this Task Force to do something profound, where we give voice and life to the horror of this. It's one thing to talk in the abstract, but to be in the room with these brave women makes this responsibility seem very, very heavy – but I'm glad we all have it."

Margot Franssen
Task Force Co-Chair

"It takes so much [to help], and it takes so little – perhaps just the intervention of one person. What does so much look like? And what does so little look like? That's our challenge."

Sheila O'Brien
Task Force Co-Chair

ONE EAGLE, 52 FEATHERS

One participant brought 52 feathers from a single eagle to give to participants at the roundtable. For many Aboriginal peoples, the eagle signifies vision, strength and courage. To receive an eagle's feather is to receive the highest sign of respect.

In a moving ceremony, participants came forward one by one to choose a feather to take home. All participants felt deeply honoured by this unexpected gift, and many found it one of the most powerful and unifying moments of the roundtable.



“If I wasn’t strong,
I would have died.”

THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPLOITATION

The roundtable was formed chiefly to gain expert advice for the Task Force’s recommendations on sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in Canada. During the day’s discussions, however, many participants shared their own experiences that preceded and followed their exploitation.

These stories provide a context for participants’ recommendations for system change, and deepened the Task Force’s understanding of sexual exploitation and trafficking’s impact on the lives of girls and women.

GIRLHOOD

Many participants described painful childhoods filled with abuse and loss. Others had happy girlhoods before they were trafficked. These quotes illustrate the range of experiences.

“I have really good parents who are still together. I had a family with good morals, and I always knew I was loved and that I belonged. It can happen to anyone from any kind of family.”

“The first time I was sexually abused I was five. If they had done something then, instead of blaming and shaming me, I would have known I had value. They said I seduced him. But a five-year old child cannot seduce. The church knew. They prayed for my family for adopting such a difficult child.”

“I was a runaway from a very dysfunctional family with an abusive, alcoholic, violent father. I saw him rape my mother on many occasions. People were exchanging sexual partners and I saw a lot of this in front of my eyes. My father told me I would amount to nothing. I left home at 13 and a half years of age. I had nowhere to go, no job and no contacts, so I ended up dancing in a club. I was first exploited at 13 and a half.”

“I was in a cookie cutter, middle class home.”

“I was recruited out of child welfare. I had been adopted and things were not going well so I was put into ‘care.’ I was sexually abused at the age of eight. I am native and no one liked natives where I lived in Thunder Bay, so I hid my identity. I was 11 years old when this happened and I was first exploited at age 12.”

“You hear so often that girls at risk come from the projects or broken homes . . . Lots of kids are from affluent areas. They’re just forgotten.”

ALONE AT 13

Participants were asked whether anything helped to slow down their trafficking, or almost prevented them from being trafficked. The answer from almost all participants was, “No.” Most described the experience of being entirely alone, with no-one they felt they could turn to, or no-one who would believe them.

Of the participants who named when they were first trafficked, the age ranged from 12 – 16, with 13 the most common age.

“Love. Family. Belonging. I did not know what was missing. I felt I wasn’t wanted so I left . . . My spirit was hurting, and running away was a survival instinct. No one took the time to listen.”

“I was in ‘care.’ I think the group home workers knew – they absolutely knew – but they let it be my choice. I was apprehended [by child welfare] when I was 12. I was trafficked around my 13th birthday.”

“No-one would listen to the abuse in our house, so why would they listen to what was happening now? Teachers and doctors missed the cues during the first 13 years of my life. Why would they listen now?”

“Sex should be something sacred – something you hold special to yourself. I believed that until I was raped. I didn’t know where to go. I told myself it didn’t happen. I just woke up and it was happening.”

THE BEGINNING OF EXPLOITATION

When they first hear about trafficking, many people ask, “How can this happen?” This is how it happened for participants.

“When I was in high school I had my first contact with the pimps. My parents had no idea – they were clueless. If I had known I may have stayed away from the mall and told my mom what was happening. Every teenager has things they don’t like about their parents. [My exploiters] found out what was tough about my life. They learned about my parents, my siblings and my school. They put it all together and used it. They told me how beautiful I was and they manipulated me. They are so good at it. . . . A lot of women are sent out to get girls for the men. Sometimes they put girls that are entrenched in group homes with girls that are at risk. The entrenched girls talk about how great their life is and how much money they have and make it look so glamorous.”

“My first sexual experience was bending over a computer with some man asking me to do sexual things. I was never taught what love was supposed to look like. By 13 when I met my pimp, the stage was set. It was easy. On all fronts there was a total lack of support from those around me.”

“For me it was an escape from an abusive household. I was 13. He was in his 30s. It was just an escape.”

“When I was first trafficked I was in a room with a bunch of girls and we had to take our clothes off and they decided how much we were worth. I thought I was going to be a model. I was then taken to Calgary and forced and watched.”

TRAFFICKED

Participants were not asked directly about the experience of being trafficked, but during the course of the day some chose to reveal stories from that period in their lives. We include these excerpts to help readers understand the impact of this experience.

“I was raped at 16 by a gang. Six of them raped me all night. I have lost all faith in men. They took away my power to have sexual pleasure. I was raped by many johns. The more they saw my vulnerability, the more they raped me and were more violent.”



REBUILDING LIVES

THE LONG
AFTERMATH

WORKING FOR
CHANGE

GROWING OLD

THE NEXT
GENERATION

THE WISHED-
FOR LIFE

THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPLOITATION...

“They beat me so badly. They used sticks in side of me, and put a hot curling iron, hot peppers and broken glass in my vagina. I was in pain. I was bleeding.”

“I was beaten and held in a hotel for 14 weeks. People watched as six large men dragged me down the street, and then turned their heads away. The cops laughed at me. The traffickers lit my parents’ house on fire and my mom almost died.”

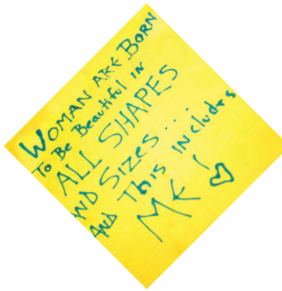
“They always talked about killing me – killing me, my sister or my dog. I was now becoming a huge liability to them. I was getting drunk and getting high and they were talking about killing me, and how my parents would have to search for their missing daughter.”

UNABLE TO EXIT

Many people have asked trafficked women, “Why didn’t you just leave?” Here’s why.

“It was the \$50,000 exit fee that stopped me from leaving. I knew they were always going to keep at me to pay the exit fee.”

“I was ashamed. . . . I used to think that the only group who could accept me was organized crime. . . . I tried ten times to exit, but didn’t get out until I was 29 years old.”



“We are faced with discrimination by service providers. They don’t want to work with ‘ho’s,’ so we don’t say who we are and don’t get the help we need.”

“I got my validation from men through my johns and pimp. What a fucked up way to find love.”

“I didn’t want to change. It’s all I wanted to do. Nobody could have made me change. . . My trafficker kept me away from people. I couldn’t talk to my sister or he would get mad. I always had to be with him.”

“How could I leave? There was nowhere to go.”

FINALLY EXITING

All participants had been able to exit exploitation. Some described long journeys; others pointed to a catalytic moment that enabled them to escape. Here are some examples.

“I thought my customers were my friends until one asked if he could have sex with my daughter. She was two years old. I didn’t want my daughter to be exploited. My daughter was my gift – she saved my life.”

“For me [the catalyst to exit] was fear. I had a lot of clients that were doing hard core with me. One was worse than the others. The last time, I went to hospital because my shoulder was broken. This was the end. It was too much. . . . I had seen things in the

criminal world that I shouldn’t have seen. I changed my name. Changed everything. I was always afraid they would recognize me and shoot me. I let myself become larger. I cut my hair. But I was alone. I didn’t have a place. I had no more family. Nothing.”

“I hit bottom. I was 75 pounds and suffering a total body breakdown and a severe drug addiction. There was a contract on my life from the gang. A john and drug dealer told me about the contract on my life and told me to run away. I ran home to my family.”

“Rage pushed me out – I hated clients, men, myself. . . . They stole everything from me. The only thing they can’t take is my rage. Fighting for change through my rage ... it’s kept me alive.”

“With the help of a translator, a security guard and a DJ, they helped me get out. But it could only happen because I was ready. Even a month before, I wouldn’t go because I was so scared. I fully believed they would kill my mum.”

“I was surrounded by a community of women who selflessly loved me back to health.”

“I thought I was going to die out there. I had no hope until I went to a camp and saw women who were mentors, and then they let me mentor. Without hope there is nothing. If you get one person to give you a glimmer of hope, that can be your future.”

REBUILDING LIVES

Many recommendations in the following pages come from participants' efforts to re-create a life after trafficking.

"When you exit you stand alone."

"While you are being exploited the world evolves without you. You have to go back into a new world when you exit, and you need new tools to do it."

"I needed to learn how to build a network - how to do those normal things. I needed to be taught what is actually normal."

"I was in the Downtown Eastside so I needed to get right out of the area . . . My escape as a kid was sports, so I started running to cope with depression, trauma, and withdrawal. Thank you God for giving me these legs to run, and this heart and lungs to let me run. Running is cheaper than therapy."

"I was pregnant and through it I was blessed. I gave up my daughter. She was raised by my aunt and uncle. She was told not to see her mother because she was a junkie and a whore. I needed information, education, knowledge, social justice and passion to arm me for advocacy."

"I was in jail for a couple of years. My son was in social services the whole time I was in jail. . . . I was charged with trafficking with my boyfriend. I pleaded guilty so my son could visit and I would get him back. I went to jail to get my child back."

"My strength was I was a nerd. I crave the news. I got a job as a journalist, and now I'm an advocate. I'm not polished but I can talk like I am."

"When I was exiting, I just grabbed any run-of-the-mill job. I didn't know how to behave in an office. . . . I discovered I enjoyed baking. I went to school and now I work in kitchens."

"We are fortunate in Winnipeg that we have a college at Red River College for girls who have been trafficked and it includes a lot of help with the healing process. It's the only program like that in Canada. . . . Without that opportunity I wouldn't have gone any further than a Grade 12."

THE LONG AFTERMATH

For many Task Force members, the most poignant lesson from the roundtable was the lasting impact of exploitation.

"It's one of the hardest things on the recovery journey - realizing this is going to be a journey for the rest of my life. I have surrendered to the fact that I will constantly have triggers, I will have better days, . . . but it's not going to end."

"I was tough out there. If I was raped I thought it was part of life. Relationships and having friends now are hard. Every little day things are hard. Even conversations with my mom and dad are hard."

"Hotels are not a safe place to go even now because of the memories." "I was afraid to come to [the conference centre] because I was afraid of being raped."

"I have a hard time putting these two things - my body and my brain - together. I don't know how to connect the two. It's hard to have a healthy sexual relationship. I have not learned how to connect my mind with my body yet. I am trying to learn how to be whole again - to connect my body with my brain and my soul. "

"You grow up hearing that sex is supposed to be between a man and woman in love. I never had that. I was sexually abused when I was 5. I don't understand the intimacy with sex. I disassociate myself. . . . I am married and I wish having sex was meaningful and loving, but it is just intercourse and it doesn't have any value to it. I don't understand how to get there because my body has been used and violated by so many men."

"It's difficult to settle down. I have moved 51 times in 10 years. I used to live out of plastic bags. I didn't know what it was to even pay rent. I was used to running. I was used to looking over my shoulder. I have challenges with uniforms - even bus drivers. I was nervous because of all of the brain washing."

"Fighting for change through my rage
- it's kept me alive."

THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPLOITATION...

“You need something to keep you busy and occupied. When you stop doing things you start thinking and it can come back to you. It’s an easy industry to slip back into as an adult. . . . It’s a life long struggle. It’s something you never forget. It’s always in the back of your mind.”

“I self-sabotage. I’m more comfortable in pain, because I know it so well. I’d like to have more happy days. . . . I wish so strongly I could shut the voices off. I’m told, ‘You’re so articulate. You’re so amazing.’ But if you don’t believe it, it doesn’t count.”

“To be able to sit in the uncomfortable place of happy! I know that I’m loved, that my kids love me, and that I’m doing a good job with them. But knowing and believing are two different things.”

“I often think that nobody loves me – that I’m not enough this or that. I don’t have a lot of friends and I think it’s because of what I am.”

“Every week I write a letter to myself to that little girl inside of me, and I tell that little girl the things I am proud of in her. That helps bring my spirit back and I keep standing.”

WORKING FOR CHANGE

Participants’ many recommendations for system change are in the following pages. Here are some of the reasons participants were personally motivated to act for change.

“I want to share, I want to make a difference, I don’t want to die without having made a difference.”

“The pain we lived through is the basis for driving system change.... We also need to work with the other women who haven’t been through this and want to help us.”

“If I wasn’t strong I would have died. It was that strength that helped me escape. All that strength has helped me to keep sober and to work with women in the Downtown Eastside to help them. I am burying clients constantly, but I still stay strong. If you don’t keep moving forward you can move back. I didn’t cry for 28 years. I was already resilient and strong, but now I’m ten times stronger.”



“My legacy will be my tenacity... I was strong and they could not break me. I want to be recognized for being a survivor – for being smart, for being a great mother. If I can save one little girl from a den of wolves, that will be my legacy.”

“I want to be remembered for fighting for what I believed in and that I was a helper for others that followed me. I never thought the ‘ho/junkie’ label would leave my forehead. The more you talk about it, the more the dirt comes off.”

“I don’t ever want to be seen as a victim. I am going to write a book about what led up to it, where it started, how I got out, and how I am a successful woman.”

“I have been out for 16 years and never once have I thought I am just going to give up. It’s just not an option. It’s such a desire for change on a fundamental level. I think these experiences are not just for nothing - there is a reason that this happened, you know!”

“First you’re the victim, and then you are the survivor, and then you are the warrior and then you are the teacher. We need to move past the survivor stage, even though we may still be surviving the feelings. . . . I want people to know I am not a survivor. I am a warrior. . . . Where is the action? When is it taking place? I am ready to go up to Parliament Hill.”

GROWING OLD

Some women were anticipating the challenges of growing older; others were already experiencing them.

“We need to help young people. We need to help children not to go where we went. But we also need to remember mature women of a ripe age. The child I once was was stolen from me, and needs to be nurtured.”

“There are no services for adult women. Older women return to the street, even after exiting for 10 or 15 years, because there isn’t enough support for a permanent exit. People say, ‘She’s been out for 10 years, she’s good.’ But it’s not the case. It’s not good for a long, long time.”

“They asked me, ‘What about a pardon?’ I said, ‘Give the pardon to a young girl. I’m useless.’ They said, ‘Never say that.’ So I’m getting a pardon, just for my dignity.”

“Create respectful palliative care, because we don’t have it. Toward the end of their lives our women should be given the utmost respect. Some of us don’t make it to senior citizens’ age. You turn 40, and they put you in a seniors’ home. You end up there because of your lifestyle, and they don’t treat you well, believe me.”

“Yes, it’s 20 years ago, but I still have problems with it. . . . Some people ask me to do things because they think I’m strong enough, but I’m not always. Don’t forget us survivors.”

THE NEXT GENERATION

Many participants had children. Some were proud of their work as mothers and proud of their children’s success. However, some worried the impact of their own exploitation will carry over into the next generation.

“We need resources for our kids. They see a lot more than we want to admit. They go through a lot more than other kids in their peer groups.”

“The floodgates opened when I had my daughter. Each time she reached a milestone – turned five and not molested. Turned 12 and not raped – I asked, ‘Why wasn’t my mother there for me at that age?’ Having a girl child, there is so much fear that what happened to me could happen to her.”

“My son – you never thought you could love someone so much – doesn’t know he’s a product of my exploiter. He’s into trouble – guns and gangs and selling crack. I’ve been re-victimized by him. He’s my only boy. It was a real struggle, and he’s lost. He’s never known his biological father, but he’s so much like his dad.”

“There’s a common adoption theme. I wasn’t adopted but my mother was. I’m affected by the way she was treated.”

“At eight years old, my daughter has a lot of cousins that are missing. She asked, ‘When I am 14 will I go missing or get killed?’ She has three cousins that have disappeared and she hears about it and sees it. It’s sad my daughter has to worry about that.”

THE WISHED-FOR LIFE

Some participants spoke about the life they wished they had – and the difference that would have made for them.

“I wanted to write, sing, dance, act. My passions – I felt them at a young age. They were shattered. The sexual parts of me were taken away. My dreams were taken away. I wished for love, not rejection.”

“I wished for another mother and a different family. My mother said she should have aborted me and my father said he should have put me in a home for the mentally retarded.”

“Everything negative that happened to me was because I was Native. I hated myself and I didn’t want to be an Indian.”

“One wish: to have heard the truth. To have been loved, and that other women would have told me the real truth about ‘the life.’”

“I wish I had not been surrendered and moved from a supportive foster home into child welfare.”

“I wish I could be happier. Having the past we do, it makes it hard to be fully alive. So much of the essence of who we are gets damaged. I want joy in being alive.”

“I wanted to write, sing, dance, act.”

“Between rage and despair
there is a place for action.”

TEN CANADA-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants were asked to propose system changes that could prevent trafficking, help girls and women escape exploitation, or could help exploited women rebuild their lives. They came forward with dozens of recommendations. They have been grouped here into ten calls for Canada-wide change. Specific recommendations for service sector reforms are in the following section.

1 SAY IT: NO-ONE CHOOSES TO BE TRAFFICKED!

“I came to a realization that all the years I was out there had nothing to do with me. I had my choices taken away from me. I was able to get rid of my shame by realizing that. I was taken away from my family. I was introduced to drugs so it would be easier to work and not have to feel anything. It was easier to stay high so I didn't have to feel.”

“They think it's the victim's fault - they believe it's a choice. It's a choice for a man to pay for that girl. From the first moment we are trafficked it's ingrained in us that this is who we are and what we were meant to be. There is no choice.”

“Street workers often act as if it [trafficking] was a choice. They all think like this. They call it harm reduction. But there is no way those children will exit if we keep telling them it's OK.”

2 STOP GLAMOURIZING EXPLOITATION

“When you have guys on videos telling boys it's cool having six bitches working for them - this is a system that needs to change.”

“Little boys are warped looking at warped images. How do you bridge that and show them healthy relationships?”

“Prostitution is glamorized. It's not Pretty Woman - that's not real.”

“I don't understand how Backpage can sell these girls on line.” “I don't understand how Amazon can sell Pimp Manuals.” “How can Canadian Pimp website stay on-line?”

“It's like what we do with cigarettes. They stopped advertising - stopped advertising smoking as a good thing.”

3 INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT TRAFFICKING

"I wish there was a program that would teach what human trafficking is. Human trafficking is selling a woman. If people don't buy it there is no trafficking. . . . The only program that would work is to start with our men. Create a program that will teach young men the truth and the reality. What are men doing there? . . . They should know better. This is not a life a 14 year old would choose. Educate those men and human trafficking would be less."

"I wish I would have been educated and heard, 'Watch out if a guy is saying these things. These are signs that this guy is turning into your pimp.' I am still calling this guy my boyfriend, so I guess education - more education - is really needed."

"The only programs are for lower class guys. They don't touch the upper class guys who want to buy young girls. . . . We need more prevention programs to teach girls at a young age the signs to watch for. I might have known they were grooming me if I had learned."

"It's a good thing that we teach the girls how not to get raped, but why don't we talk to boys about how not to rape. Who is there to tell them that this is not cool?"

4 ADDRESS DEMAND

"What can men do? Stop buying sex."

"We need to criminalize the demand and decriminalize the sold. Then men would be the ones in the revolving door in the Criminal Justice System until they stop buying sex."

"If they legalize prostitution -- which it looks like they will - we still need to hold men accountable . . . There is already a guy from the "Bunny Farm" in Nevada who has bought property in Barrie for "legal" brothels."

"I don't get it. Why do men do it? It's like a business. The business can shut down if you don't buy it. . . . I know men can help and men can put an end to this industry. If they want to, they can do it."

"We have to find our voices and say, NO MORE. . . . We've got to come up with beautiful words for fathers that say, 'Stop abusing your daughters.'"

"People need to stick together and hold these men accountable. If that doesn't change, there's no point in talking."

5 REFORM THE LAWS

"We need to get rid of criminal records and get pardons so we can work."

"Rub and tugs shouldn't be legalized. It's not allowed on the street, but there are places licensed to sell sex. Everyone knows this is happening."

"By-laws that allow businesses that are clearly fronts for trafficking just shouldn't be on the books. Why don't they crack down and enforce them properly?"

"Backpage.com can sell girls and these sites are still up. The justice, police and community know they are there and they do nothing about it. There is no stopping it. They don't care to stop it. They don't raid them or charge them or shut them down."

"I ran a john school. We were giving men on welfare breaks. If they have money for girls, they have money."

"I charged my john with rape and I successfully had him incarcerated for two years. That was a big push for me. It was always in the paper. Everyone said, 'How can you rape a working girl? How can you rape a hooker.' But NO is NO. . . . The whole idea of a hooker charging a john was completely outrageous. But the judge didn't see it that way."

Irreplaceable
Sacred
Rebellious
Wise
Pretty
Speaking the truth
Strong
Fighters

THOUGHTS ON THE SURVIVORS' ROUNDTABLE

Many participants hoped the roundtable itself would become a foundation for survivor-led co-ordination and advocacy. Here are some reflections on the roundtable experience.

"I've never felt so **not** alone in my life."

"Keep us in the loop. I've taken part in so many focus groups. The people have taken the notes disappear and you never hear back. When you have women come together at this scale, the accountability is there."

"People say, 'Come for your story, and we'll give you an honorarium.' And then next time they come by and say we want someone else because we've already heard your story. It's very similar to being on the street. A guy drives by and you wave and he says, 'Do you know a friend? Because I've already had you.'"

"I want to thank everyone at the Foundation for doing something brave that needed to be done. It released a lot of feelings and emotions. But now I'm going back into the world and have to build that shell back up again."

"This was great, and I'm very happy the Foundation brought us together. But I don't know what I can do with this after. Here I'm fine. I know you understand me. But after . . .?"

"I'm grateful for this experience. I feel such a strong sisterhood. I just wish we had more time with each other. . . . I will carry each of you with me forever."

TEN CANADA-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS...

6 SUPPORT SURVIVOR-LED INITIATIVES

"We need a 'Voices' Forum."

"We need a Survivors Summit. The people who need to attend are from child welfare, police, shelters, academia - they all need to hear the survivors' voices."

"Get survivors in schools, in hospitals, and in the courts. If there is a system interacting with a vulnerable young person, then survivors need to be accessible."

"I want to see survivors in administration - in management. Not a token survivor - someone who has progressed and is now the boss."

"I cannot explain this connection - oh my God I am not the only one. It's just like addiction support. I can look in their eyes and not have to explain my story. I know they understand. We need something like AA - a place where survivors can share, and when you have nowhere to go this could help."

"When I was working I felt alone. I still feel like I'm by myself. When I had negative feelings, I had nobody to call - nowhere to spill everything out. It would be really cool if there was a community of survivors that stayed in contact, and hung out, and you could talk about your shit. You can't talk to regular people, because they don't get it. They see us as strong people, but we're not."

"We are not only defined by our exploitation in the sex trade... We are not helpless victims. We want to work, to take action, to resist, to work in solidarity with other women. Don't organize survivors -- support us! We can organize ourselves. We are activists. I want to be known as a survivor activist."

"We're sitting around talking and talking about fixing the system. We need to break it down and rebuild it. The feminist movement wanted to change the system but it really hasn't happened. . . . Survivor voices are being led by non-survivor women of privilege. Fund survivors' services run by survivors only. Rather than re-integrate into the system, recreate the system."

7 RESPECT THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY

"The most important thing was reconnecting to my culture - who I was born to be - and reclaiming that. I found my birth family, and got my treaty card. It was the Aboriginal community that I turned to - the Friendship Centres, the places where I was told I couldn't go if I was drunk or high, but they still let me in."

"I lost hope that there was help out there. The only person I could trust was God and Jesus. I think my faith set me free."

"We should bring people from the northern communities south to teach us spirituality. It is an opportunity for the Aboriginal community to teach us - because things clearly haven't worked for us."

"The last day I ever used drugs I prayed for the first time. I wanted out for a long time and I was using and my daughter was at the top of the stairs. So I got on my hands and knees and I prayed. I haven't used since that day. All I did was pray. The partner I found and I go to church together. He was a pimp before. He changed his life too and found God. I didn't have faith then but I do now."

"We need more influencers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and counselors who are compassionate - who just pay some little bit of attention to the humanity and spirituality component."

"I work in ECE, and never in the curriculum has there been anything about nurturing the spirit. Now I get the chance to explore it because it's part of my healing. I'm just not going to shut up about it."

8 REMEMBER EXPLOITED BOYS

"It's not just women and girls. It's men and little boys too. And unfortunately they are not looked at as being trafficked as women are. The young boys are being abused just as much as women. It's too shameful and taboo for the boys and men to come out. It's not just a female problem. It angers me that we see it as only a women's problem."

"We need to include boys that have been trafficked. It's their issue too. We are telling our young men that what happens to them doesn't matter. I would love to see more advocating for boys and men that have been trafficked as it affects both sexes."

9 CO-ORDINATE NATIONALLY. FUND LOCALLY

"It's a big industry like the movie and entertainment and pop industry. It is a large industry with a lot of power and the government is afraid of it."

"I am still longing to understand the politics of this whole system. It's obviously a huge fricking problem and Canada is just brushing it under the rug. I want to understand and I want to learn more about things like this. I am wondering why there aren't more of these meetings. Why is it not accessible? Why is it exclusive? There needs to be more action."

"We need a national coordination centre to regulate and monitor and make sure the proper services are coordinated."

"The system should be designed so that everyone is working together. People with lived experience need to be part of the system."

"We need a TV commercial that goes across the country, with a number where women can call to say they are trafficked and get what they need."

"There is not a hotline to call to say I am in trouble. There are suicide lines and rape crisis lines but you need it for this too. If you are raped and go to the hospital, someone calls and checks up on you. If you are trafficked and go to the hospital then the hospital doesn't follow up on you. You need a hotline to call."

"We need a one-stop shop: housing, doctors, empowerment circles. All our lives we've been going here, there and everywhere."

"It's really important to finance grass-roots movements. We're always trying to centralize. For me, it's locally that things happen. I understand collaboration, but locally it's peer-to-peer, in the kitchen. Attacking pimps and johns -- that can be global. But for supporting survivors, it's a grass-roots movement."

"We need long-term funding. Don't fund programs for just one or two years. It's horrible. It would be better if we never got money. I've seen women who have come out of jail and, in two years, couldn't get their children. We sat in a circle and cried together, but it didn't help. We don't need professional people to know how to live. We need the trust of funders, without a bunch of rules tied to threats to cut your funding. Even if we only helped ten families, that's progress.. But if you give only two-year funding, we accomplish nothing."

10 GET ON WITH IT!

"This is happening at all levels, in the street and in fancy offices also. Let's do something. Let's *do* something."

"I see the work we did so long ago and I am happy it's acknowledged; we've built foundations for changes since then. What upsets me is that it should not have taken half my lifetime to see the changes. . . . I would like to see more happen at a faster pace. Why has this taken so long? It's not like we don't know this is happening. I don't want to be sitting here ten years from now asking 'why isn't this working? What needs to change?' We already have the answers. We all know this is happening, and we don't do anything and we don't investigate. We have the tools and technology. How hard would it be to call those numbers [on Backpage.com] and set up dates and bust the guys who sell these girls - we know half of these girls are under-age."

"We know the problem is not getting better. There are more children in foster care than we've ever had. We know the programming is not working. The programming needs to change to meet the needs. There's nothing for their children. We say family is important, but we need to work with the whole family. There's a lot of dysfunction out there - that black cloud has come over many people - and not just Aboriginal women. So many things have to be changed. "

"Between rage and despair
there is a place for action."

“Listen to someone who has been there”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICES

Participants drew on their own experiences to recommend dozens of changes in the service sector – schools, police, child welfare, mental health and addiction services, and so on – and to suggest new services that would benefit trafficked girls and women.

For the purposes of this report, these services have been grouped into three categories: prevention, intervention and rebuilding. In practice, however, many services provide multiple functions and are important at all stages of a trafficked woman’s life.

Prevention

SCHOOLS

Recommendations:

- Train teachers and school counsellors to spot the signs of abuse or sexual exploitation
- Recognize bad behavior as a signal that something is wrong. Explore alternatives to expulsion
- Develop referral options other than the child welfare system
- Build connections with survivor-led groups
- Develop curricula in three areas: 1) for junior grades, information on healthy relationships; 2) for middle-schools, information on the signs of luring and grooming; 3) for senior social justice classes, survivor-led information on trafficking

“I tried when I was eight to get help. I tried to kill myself at 12. But no-one did anything. Every child goes to school. If there was only one teacher who – just by my behaviour – saw something was wrong – who heard me and believed in me, it would have saved me.”

“Educate teachers about what they are seeing, where to go, and how to understand their own feelings. Even the body language of the teacher can tell you they’re not approachable.”

“When we [survivors] train school counsellors, we show them it’s OK to refer things to us when they can’t handle it. Let survivors show what we know how to do.”

“When kids are not doing well, they often go to school for the social aspect. We need to have teachers listen to kids – and they need to have different options other than calling the child welfare system.”

“I was expelled from high school. They knew there were problems in the home but no one reached out to help me. They just considered me a problem and so just removed me from school. This sped up rather than slowed down the [exploitation] process.”

“Teachers know when kids are at risk. Getting experiential women into the school system to let them know how you can be trafficked is the only way I can see a prevention strategy. . . . Leave resources out so kids can grab them at their own discretion when no one is looking. Also educate what abuse is. Many kids have been abused their whole lives they don’t realize it’s abuse because it’s all they know. What might be abuse or sexual assault in one home may feel like the norm in another home. Drop the text books and listen to someone who has been there and who knows the signs of what this could lead to.”

CHILD WELFARE

Recommendations:

- Restore confidence in the child welfare system
- Recognize youth need guidance and support to counteract luring
- Develop specific strategies for runaway youth
- Improve assessments for children entering 'care'
- Recognize foster homes and child welfare offices are a magnet for traffickers
- Support foster families and equip them to recognize the signs of trafficking
- Raise the age of eligibility for services to 21.

"When something happens to a child now, we call in child welfare services. But even child welfare services do not respond appropriately. Even the social workers need to realize that sometimes parents need help. They don't have confidence in the parents and the kids."

"There was no programming for youth who run away. The alcoholism and violence in the family was not dealt with. I had a really abusive mother – a survivor from residential schools. There was no help for her or us. I didn't get any attention, other than negative attention. I felt freedom when I initially ran away – but then got no help, and felt a lack of value as a person. The more men paid for me, the more I felt I was worth something."

"If my [child welfare] worker had sat down with me longer than a nano-second, we could have gotten somewhere. Or if she had asked me questions to get at the reasons behind my behavior. We put too much responsibility on the youth to navigate their own brokenness. We leave them open to predatory behaviour."

"There are predators waiting outside CAS [child welfare] facilities. What are the workers doing inside? Why aren't they aware of what's going on?"

"I was in a group home and they saw the signs because I started running away. I moved to Edmonton, was in a group home and did drugs. The people at the group home should have seen it but didn't. I met a girl in a group home who I thought was my friend, but wasn't."

"Women groom girls too. . . . Girls who are at risk are put in programs with girls who are already on the street, and they influence them."

"We need to treat our foster parents better. We need to value them so that they value our children. The system is so broken that no one is caring for the kids. We abandon kids far too young in the name of choice. We do not offer concrete programs or alternatives. We need to let them know they are not bad. We need to give them tools to deal with the abuse they have suffered or have seen. No one gave me tools to stand up to the men that were grooming me."

"The child protection system is one of the biggest jokes around. . . . We need to educate some of these child protection workers that they cannot play god. We need to listen to the children to learn what they need and work with them. It's about supporting them and not trying to run their lives. At the same time, I think the parents need more rights over their children so they can get their kids into treatment. They need treatment to learn how to be a kid, and education to help the kids heal and learn. I have such low faith in some of these systems. So many people who work in them mean to do good, but can't."

"The one program I went to is like a day-time john. You get money to attend. But as soon as you turn 18 all your support is taken away and they tell you 'If you have any more problems you can go get welfare.' A day-time john is something you do during the day to keep your group home and social worker happy."

"Child welfare needs to raise the age [for service eligibility] to 21. At 16, what do you know? I'm so sick of hearing that at 18 you're an adult. It's at 18 that you make the biggest mistakes."

FAMILY

Recommendations:

- Remember the role healthy families play in preventing trafficking
- Recognize the challenges of reunification after trafficking

"Remember: family is part of the system. They can play the most important role in one's life. If we don't include family as a big system there is no point."

"The family unit staying together would have slowed [my exploitation] process."

"If I had a supportive family, it would have made a difference. My mother wasn't supportive but they were separated. My dad still won't touch the issue that his daughter was a working girl. He would drive past me on the street. My family ex-communicated me for 10 years."

"This generation is suffering from the results of the 50s generation. Parents need more assistance to learn how to communicate with their kids. If women were coming from healthy families with fathers who cared, then their kids would never end up in 'care.'"

"You fear for your family. They make you feel like it's a choice you make. There is a lot of shame involved. I didn't want my little brother to know so I pushed him away to protect him and because of shame. You don't want people to help you."

"My Mother played a BIG role. She would go and march for Take Back the Night. We walked to the point in Thunder Bay where a woman's body was found. A strong family system is good. It enforces that there is a way out."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICES...

Intervention

POLICE

Recommendations:

- Listen. Recognize opportunities to prevent or stop trafficking
- Build strong relationships between youth and individual police officers they can trust
- Learn from successful policing models in other jurisdictions
- Recognize the strong link between drugs and trafficking
- Hire survivors to train officers
- End corruption

“Police and judges do not trust women. They do not listen to us when we report our pimps or when we are raped.”

“When I tried to run I was laughed at by the cops and told I probably deserved it. The people that could have made the biggest impact on me – the police – failed me. It’s disgusting how the police treat the youth. When a youth is raped and beat at a 50-year old man’s house, they look at the girl and say, ‘Why were you dressed like that?’ They should be asking, ‘Why does a 50-year old man have a 14-year old at his house?’”

“I was arrested with my predator, I was 15, and the police let me leave with him. It was a completely missed opportunity. Seeing this young girl with much older man – why didn’t they ask questions?”

“Why aren’t police out in the communities where they can help?”

“I was in detox and in emerg. The police were called several times but they said it was just a domestic.”

“I was arrested. The police officer said he would let me go if I did something for him – how do you say it in English? A blow job. He let me go after that.”

“On the street I saw little girls that were pimped. The pimp had got them into a strippers club. You saw clients paying the pimp, and then taking the girls. I was arrested for solicitation. They said, ‘If you want no trouble, become an informant. You’ll make more money than turning tricks.’ But it was more dangerous doing that. I told them about those little girls. They said, ‘It’s not our problem. A youth officer will take care of that. We’re just concerned about over-18s working on the street.’”

“If you want to find trafficking, look more closely at the drug trade.”

“If police said no to men buying sex, we wouldn’t have been such easy prey. Men know where group homes are, where the malls are, and know what a vulnerable girl looks like. They prey on that.”

“If I had a police officer come into my hotel room who could talk to me, and could tell me there is a way out and we’ll help you. . . . If there was a police officer with a formerly trafficked woman – I could trust them and I would go in a heartbeat.”

“StreetReach in Winnipeg and Thompson [Manitoba] tries to build the relationship between police and youth. They have assigned officers to work with high-risk victims. Youth say, ‘I’ve got my own cop.’ They begin to realize that some cops are good guys. Up north, the RCMP have modeled same thing. Youth are always running from the police, but now they have their own officer. The cops get a six-day training program, and you can see the light-bulbs go on. They see what they were doing wrong.”

“In Montreal, a team of survivors are training the police. . . . It doesn’t change all the police, but it changes some of them, and it’s empowering for the women. A female police officer works with each of the youth. It’s cute in a way – they want to make sure every girl is ok. It’s a bit paternalistic, but the youth like it and they are safe. The officer in charge is really with us.”

“In Toronto we have a sex crime team that somewhat ‘gets it.’ They’re more open to listening, and sitting and sharing space. You can see there is empathy. They do something with complaints.”

“We go into the police college to train police. You can see that when a social worker speaks [about trafficking], the audience is fidgeting. But when we play our documentary, or when I speak, they get it. It brings authenticity. They can’t say, that didn’t happen, because I’m sitting right there.”

“I never thought I would be training guns, gangs and vice units. A cop gave me a chance. If it were not for him, we wouldn’t be giving this training. I feel I’ve made him a better officer. Finally, someone is hearing.”

THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Recommendations:

- Consider an alternate court for trafficked women, similar to mental health or drug courts
- Recognize the opportunity to provide life-changing resources
- Facilitate pardons. Clear criminal records.

“The court system treats women badly. A women could have just been raped by a john and there she is: in the cell being re-victimized in the way she is put in the cell or the way she is searched. Then she is met by a judge from the old school. There needs to be something set up so that women could go to a different area, like the mental health courts. They need to be able to call survivors. They need to be asked questions like, ‘Can I help you?’”

Resilient

“The criminal system has no understanding of mental health issues. It is the same group of women – a revolving door of the same women in the trade. . . . The same group of women are keeping the system employed. It’s a cycle.

“I am fortunate that the people I met in jail and the worker I had were really cool – as was the support I had when I got out of jail to keep me in line for the first six months. . . . I wanted to change and I used the resources to help myself. The system failed me before, but later when I looked for resources they did help.”

“Criminal records – that’s a big blocker. I got a pardon because a guy heard me speak. That’s totally needed. How else can you rebuild your life? If you want to be a lawyer, how can you do it unless you clean your record?”

SHELTERS

Recommendations:

- Build the capacity of the shelter system to provide individual supports to trafficked women
- Consider specific shelters for women who are sexually exploited

“We need changes in the shelters. . . . I’d say to the workers, ‘Call the cops. I saw a four year old being beaten.’ They’d just say, ‘We don’t want to hear it. Eat something.

Go to bed. Shut up.’ They shelter you but they don’t listen to you. We need to be heard. It’s not just about a bar of soap and a housecoat.”

“In Toronto there are no shelters specifically for trafficked women. We need specific places for women that are still entrenched. There is a call center in Toronto that could provide assistance. Currently, the tone on the phone shows that people do not get it.”

“Some women’s shelters will only accept women exiting an abusive relationship. There is one shelter that takes everyone, but they do not talk to women. There needs to be more than a bed. Women who have been prostituted want to have a group just for them. There is a feeling that women in abusive relationships did not deserve what happened to them. This is not the feeling for women who have been prostituted. There is shaming and stigmatizing from other women.”

“Shelters need to remove barriers for women with alcohol and drug addictions.”

“There are many houses for women to stay but the workers do not talk to them. How do the women leave [exploitation] when no one asks questions? Workers need to listen and talk to the women and that takes time.”

“Today they are opening four beds for men and four beds for women in prostitution. You can stay for two weeks every six weeks. There’s no help – just eat, sleep and watch TV. There’s no help getting ID cards, or health care or housing. It’s just a place to rest before going back to the street.”

SAFE PLACES

Recommendations:

- Create and fund survivor-run “safe spaces” for both women who are entrenched and those who have exited
- Ensure they are open after hours
- Advertise them in hospitals, detoxes, police stations, public washrooms

“There needs to be somewhere you can go that is survivor-run. For a few weeks I was ready to leave but I couldn’t get away for even a few hours. I didn’t know there was anything in place to help me. Advertising it in the right places would help – emergency rooms, detoxes, the police.”

“Women need money and space. We need 24-hour places. Most agencies close at 5pm. My most vulnerable time is after 5pm. I need a safe space where I could be supported.”

“It is hard to stay at home alone. I need a place to go where I can be with others. It’s hardest in the mornings and evenings.”

“When I was trying to exit, what worked for me was having a place I could be myself and not get judged – where I could maybe waste time, but also would be out of trouble.”

“I’d like to see a place where girls could be safe. It could be a community centre, a home, a church – any indoor place. It would have couches and girls cursing and laughing together and not fighting over territory. There would be activities they could do together to build a community – books, board games, cooking lessons. . . . I notice at the food bank people are taking junk food – but not the real food – because they don’t know how to use it. I’d like to see a place where people could get a good meal and laugh and maybe leave with a recipe. There could be a soup day – I would volunteer to do it – that would give women a reason to go, even if they didn’t want to participate in conversation.”

“Safe spaces: this is a place where we could get the word out. It’s just like a referral centre. Schools, day cares, should have safe spaces for women and girls.”

“We need . . . 24-hour drop-in centres for sexually exploited young women and girls – and fill that environment with warrior women. Being open 24/7 is important. That lifestyle isn’t a 9-5 job. It’s more of a 24/7 job. If there were more centres like that across Canada it would make a difference – centres with experiential women, who have made it and have become teachers and can help.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICES...

Rebuilding

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Recommendations:

- Recognize the crucial role income support, subsidized child care and university tuition have in rebuilding lives
- Advocate to bring provincially-funded benefits up to the highest levels available in Canada
- Support and fund organizations that provide employment supports and provide short-term funds not available through government programs.

“I tried a few times to get out but poverty – having to feed kids – brought me back in. Until we have a guaranteed income, or adequate social assistance rates, we’re going to have this problem.”

“The welfare system makes you jump through hoops to get assistance. Exploitation and prostitution becomes the solution to poverty. The system keeps women just treading above water.”

“I went to the OW (social assistance) office and I told this man everything. He had a cheque in my hand immediately. That system didn’t fail me – that story needs to be told. I still know him and I want to tell him how that \$700 changed my life.”

“There are not many services for exiting. Pay rent for a year to help women exit.”

“I want to pay off these girls’ student loans. How do you tell OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) she gave her money to a pimp?” From another woman in a jurisdiction that offers free tuition: “It’s good we are able to go to school without a huge student loan and now we are able to help others.”

“Start a solidarity fund to pay for things that will help women exit and that no one else funds – rent, getting a dog, getting a pardon.”

“Women need jobs. I’m going to have a real paycheque and live my passions, so that I can live and breathe.... I want to work.”

“Not having child care holds you back. And job skills training is needed to get you on your path and keep you there. We also need supports in the workplace. You can’t go from prostitution to employment in one single step. You need enormous faith to build a future for yourself and your family. Not having money is an enormous barrier. Having money builds a way out.”

“I didn’t have child care support or medication, and had to move into a shelter that wouldn’t help my daughter. The welfare system wouldn’t help. They don’t help people at all, especially women. When that happened I knew I could just go work one night and pay my rent. But I knew I wasn’t mentally and physically able to do it.”

“Women on welfare who want to get a life going – they have to resort to a system that does not work for them. There needs to be an organization that offers job skills training to help women support their families, offering child care at the same time.”

“These women with children don’t have the proper nutrition. They’re just going to food banks. They need nutrition for cognitive development. They’re just stuck. They need help – especially child care – so they can build a future for their children.”

“Every job I work lasts three months. It’s the three-month probation rule. They can fire me for no reason. There should be a system for women who have been or still are exploited to find a legitimate job and be supported while working. El takes eight weeks to respond. If you have no money that whole time, what do you do? You turn to risky behaviour, especially if you have children.”

SUPPORTIVE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Recommendations:

- Create supportive housing for exploited girls. Do not make exiting a condition of moving in.
- Offer opportunities to “graduate” and move to independent affordable housing.
- Advocate for changes to social housing waiting lists

“A dream of mine is to open a building with different stages of support. The ground floor would be the harm reduction floor, where girls could come even if they are still in the life. Every floor up, there would be less support. The top floor would be for those with lived experience. But they could come down to the ground floor to be mentors. It would be a place where you don’t need to worry about rent for a year. And I’d like it to be funded with non-government money, please. I want to run it as it should be run, not be told how to run it.”

“I am at a home now – but it is actually like a real home. It has couches and everything. My worker at this house goes above and beyond for me every day. They help me do so much, including making friends, helping me with my PTSD and helping me look after myself.”

“To get [subsidized] housing in Toronto, you need to prove that you are in a domestic violence situation and still living with your abuser. There is nothing else.”

The givers of life

“Breaking Free in Minnesota offers girls supportive housing who can then graduate to living on their own, and then on to their own apartments in their community. They are doing something right. They have the leadership there.”

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Recommendations:

- Recognize the long-term nature of healing
- Fund long-term counseling
- Provide survivor-led training to mental health professionals
- End discrimination against survivors

“People are quick to diagnose with a label instead of listening. They want to fix everything with a pill. It takes long-term counseling to deal with what we’ve been through. The mental health system needs to be educated by survivors about what our mental health needs are.”

“The mental health system damages kids with labels. When I was adopted I was labeled as brain damaged. Maybe that’s why my foster parents took advantage of me. This abuse continued throughout the system with doctors and psychologists. It is the same revolving door of women with mental health issues.”

“When people find out about your life they treat you like garbage... and no help is provided once they realize you were doing tricks. Harm reduction strategies such as giving condoms, syringes and crack pipes are not substantial help.”

“My counselor says, ‘Just move forward.’ My psychiatrist just gives me a prescription. . . . I said, ‘You know what? This is not going to help me.’ I’m so angry and I’m so emotional. We really need help. We need to educate doctors with all those degrees. I was shocked when the counselor said, ‘Just move forward.’ What are you talking about? . . . You don’t know about human trafficking – it’s not just selling. We’re not just Kleenex. We’re human. We’re women.”

“Twelve sessions offered under Victim Services is not enough. I wish there was counseling available nationally for survivors that was long-term, built right into mental health services.”

“Services are needed right away for women wanting to get clean. They can’t just be for two weeks – it takes longer than that. Otherwise you are just making women better enough to go back on the street.”

“Doing counseling is the best thing that has ever helped me . . . If it can happen to other people that would be great. I think counseling is what’s needed. A regular psychologist might judge me. I wanted someone who understood what I went through.”

“You need support with addictions to stay out of the game. That is the key.”

“The worst part is after you are trafficked, when you are free and you don’t get support. The memories are the strongest part. When you are no longer in danger, your body is ready to start feeling but doesn’t know how to readjust.”

“Counseling should be in the health system. It should be just like when you see a doctor when you are sick. There should not be a time limit on your healing. It takes a lifetime of counseling to deal with this. . . . It costs \$95/hour. It’s a lot of money but the government should include it in the health system so if you need help you will get it.”

“I have a Grade 6 education. How do you even go back to school at my age? It’s about having long-term counseling as I move through the stages in my life. I have great friends, but there’s something to be said for a counselor – a place to be honest without judgment. When I say to my friends, ‘I feel like a failure,’ they try to buoy me up rather than get to the bottom of it.”

“In Toronto we’ve started a survivors’ group, modeled on AA, that is a safe place for women to talk. December and January are the hardest time of year. People are broke in January and services are closed. Triggers are everywhere.”

“I had a really awesome nurse practitioner who was always there for me. My son goes to the same place and that was a really big support. . . . Just having somebody reach out and be there to listen to you. My son’s school offered a social worker and she worked with us for six years and that was good. Now I have a counselor who is a big help.”

SOCIAL WORKERS

Recommendations:

- Re-ignite empathy
- End discrimination against trafficked women
- Expose social workers to survivors’ experiences
- Recognize the value of both experiential and non-experiential expertise

“You need someone who has a good ear and compassion, and no judgment. People say about a worker, ‘She’s never been there.’ But she doesn’t need to have been there. A lot of women can have compassion. I can feel what another woman went through – that feeling of living the same thing. I can feel compassion also from women who have not been there.”

“If they know you have a background, they won’t give you support services. Girls can’t disclose.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICES...

“I had a social worker who would not sit on my couch in case there was male ejaculate there. Now this social worker is the manager of social work.”

“You need to weed out the workers who are just doing it because it’s work. And you need to have survivors as part of the staff.”

“Social workers and police become desensitized. This can’t be allowed to happen in this field. Maybe every six months they need to meet with a group like this [the roundtable] so they can hear from survivors.”

“Interveners and social workers need to listen. They want to think for us. There is a need for training along the lines of the les Survivantes training for police.”

“Community social services are already overloaded. Trafficked women’s needs are better met by working with survivors.”

“There needs to be more training for front line workers. Front line workers must have a lot of empathy and be trained by experiential workers.”

“Sexual abuse counseling failed for me. Even though I had the counseling, no one told my Mom, nor did they follow up with me. They never said that there is a duty to report the abuse. It was a big fail.”

PEER WORKERS/ PEER SUPPORT

Recommendations:

- Support survivor-led organizations
- Create many opportunities for peer support: in the justice system, in shelters, counseling and social services
- Recognize peers also need support to continue to help others

“I wish there was a place where there are friends who will love you no matter what – where you can build relationships and a community. I know a girl on the fence, deciding whether to leave or stay. I’m there for her if she needs to talk; I’ll come on a dime. But I’m not telling her what to do. Hopefully she leaves. If only girls had a place to go where they weren’t judged, or where what they say will not come back to bite them.”

“I need to hear from other girls that have been in prostitution because they know what I’m talking about. Systems are very compartmentalized. I am one person but I need to talk about many things. Girls who have been through this understand.”

“The people running [Jane school] invited me to be a speaker. Helping other girls to get out helped me stay out.”

“I was rough around the edges. I didn’t know how to behave. What made the difference was a community of women, who loved me and gave me a new perspective by seeing their lives.”

“I’m now most comfortable in my own community. From a young age I saw things differently. I had empathy for people who were outcasts. This is my community – where I can go as a survivor and give back. I can be real and raw. . . . I go home every day humbled.”

“We come from a place of understanding. We share that commonality of what happened. It doesn’t matter what your background is – our pain is the same. It’s the type of support that is unspoken.”

“There needs to be more advocacy for survivor-led services like hotlines. I want to go to school, but what for? To get a piece of paper for something I’m expert in? We **ARE** the experts. We should be employed for this.”

“I was at a home called Little Sisters for sexually exploited young girls. Seeing the stories of women who came from that hard life – seeing that they got through it – I knew I was going to as well. I greatly appreciate that.”

“It made a huge difference having someone who had ‘been there and done that’ using my language – not university and text book language. If you haven’t been trafficked you have no way to have the knowledge. It can’t come from textbooks. Having experiential workers working with women who are entrenched is the most powerful support. Therapists and police officers can’t help and can’t understand.”

“Only hire experiential people once they are finished their healing first. . . . Youth are put on a pedestal to tell their story, and given no support. Once their story isn’t new any more they’re cast out. . . . As important as it is to have experiential people working, there needs to be a balance of those who are ready and healed.”

“We need to make sure experiential women who are workers are healthy and have counseling – without waiting on a waiting list or having to search so hard for counseling – so they can be strong and help others. Those years on the street mess you up and you get screwed in the head.”

“Even though we don’t necessarily believe it, we’re told by professionals how powerful you are. Then you relapse or have a bad week. Where do you go? I love the work I do, but I find it incredibly triggering. You’re earning minimal wages as it is. If you are having a hard time, you’re afraid you’ll be forced to take a leave but you’re not paid for that.”

Survivors

A better place

The Lord above I praise,
In Oh! So many ways
When thoughts of yesterdays
Seem now in such a haze.

These ladies that were sold
There is so much untold.
Let us be blunt and bold
And see how things unfold.

Our souls they did not capture
For within us lies a treasure.
Once a dark place, once a prison
The sun now shines, the fog has risen.

Beneath the rage and pain
A new seed grows again
We now dance in the rain
We're boarding a new train.

I know now when I weep
I am strong, I am not weak.
In my dreams he can't sneak
And so I lay me down to sleep.

He's given me a choice
And later on a voice.
To share with you my sister
My tears, my joy, my daughter.

This human bond I feel
It's not fake, it's for real
We've travelled the same road
Surviving, so I'm told.

Today with you I shared
With no emotions spared
I am alone no longer
Already, I am stronger.

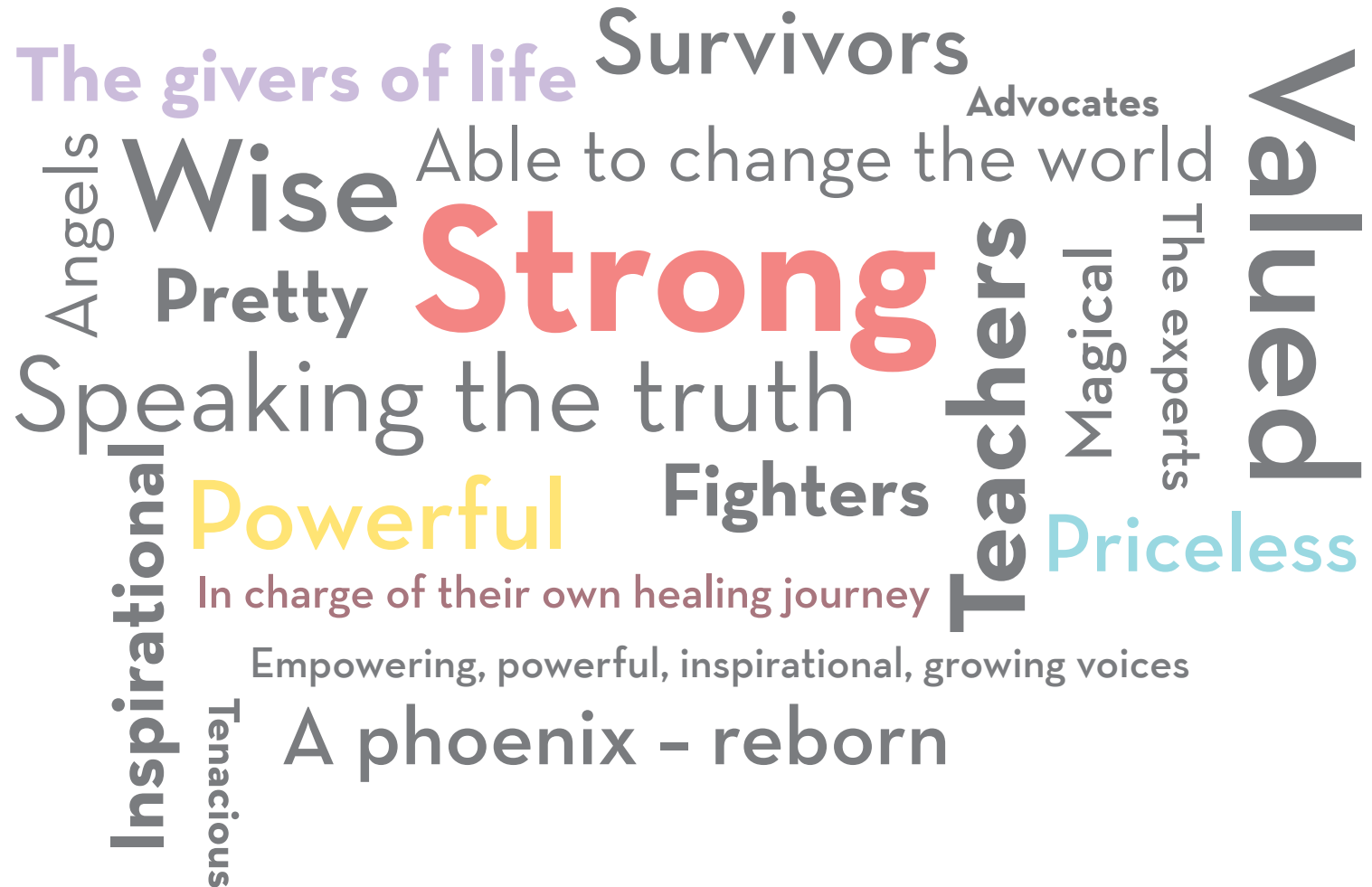
United we will go on
To face this journey that seems so long
There is no right there is no wrong
For this is where we belong.

From a survivor written during the roundtable

“Women are . . .

During the opening exercise, participants were asked to complete the sentence, “Women are _____, and that includes me.”

Some participants found it hard to speak the words “and that includes me” with confidence. By the end of the roundtable, they didn’t need to say it. Everyone could see it was true.





Resilient

Irreplaceable

Rebellious

Sacred

Masters of creation

Each others' keepers

Still alive

Beautiful

Intelligent

Courageous

Important - and our voices are strong together

A voice to be heard

Able to achieve the impossible

**Born to be beautiful
in all shapes and sizes**

The answer

Awesome

Clever Problem solvers

My sisters

Human beings and should be treated like human beings

An invincible

wisdom-keepers

Unstoppable

sisterhood

... and that includes me."



**TASK FORCE ON
TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN CANADA**

For more information please visit www.canadianwomen.org/trafficking

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