



COMMUNITY
SERVICES

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Onyx Vancouver Coastal Annual Program Report 2019-20

About us

Onyx provides voluntary, confidential, support services to youth under the age of 19 who identify themselves, or are identified by others as being sexually exploited. Our objective is to assist these youth to leave the sexually exploitive situation they are in, create a safer life, and ultimately leave the service system

Our workers respond with immediate support to the youth who contact us. We work with them to address their safety issues, and access the concrete and practical assistance that they need. These may include health services, a safe place to live, detox or treatment for substance misuse, and one-to-one support.

Onyx works from a strengths-based approach. Youth are encouraged to participate in an assessment of their needs, and the development of a service plan, including a safety plan. We utilize all available resources and, if existing resources are not accessible when we need them, we have some capacity to create or purchase these. We connect youth with a network of community and support services, assist them to exit their situation and provide follow up support to create a safer future.

Onyx services are available and delivered in Vancouver, Richmond, the North Shore, the Sea-to-Sky communities (Squamish, Whistler, Pemberton, Mount Currie), the Sunshine Coast (Gibsons, Sechelt, Powell River) and the Central Coast (Bella Bella, Bella Coola).

Young people may access our services on their own, through MCFD, other youth serving agencies, school, the police, or via other organizations. Priority is given to youth who are in immediate danger, are pregnant, who lack basic needs or who have been referred to us by MCFD. Youth are actively encouraged to reconnect with Onyx at any time.

PLEA has been providing Onyx services since March 2006.

Who we served...

Profile	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
# of cases	68	61	68	73	80	77
# of youth	65	59	67	72	78	73
% young women	94	87	88	87	91	93
% young men	3	12	9	7	1	3
% self-identified as transgender	3	1	3	6	8	4
% self-identified as Indigenous	29	33	33	36	35	33
Average age when cases were opened by case	15	15	16	16	16	16

www.plea.ca

Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	250 (N=39)	226 (N=35)	260 (N=39)	261 (N=43)	233 (N=47)	246 (N=45)
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of cases is greater than the # youth because one youth was re-referred.

We saw an increase in the number of youth and cases this year. The average age remains consistent to last year, which again reflects the need for services at an earlier age and early intervention.

How we did...service delivery

Service delivery	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Average monthly caseload	27	28	25	33	36	32
# of referrals (25-50 is the target) by case	48	33	47	43	52	45
# of direct service hours	2248	2670	2006	2328	2629	2203
Average # of days wait for a worker (by opened cases, N= opened cases)	16 (N=42)	9 (N=33)	25 (N=39)	6 (N=40)	5 (N=48)	9 (N=49)

There was a slight decrease in the number of direct service hours this year due to gaps in service as a result of staffing changes.

How we did...against last year's goals

- i. *To promote and seek out municipal and federal grants and funding in order to sustain the program's lifespan and continue to offer employment opportunities for Onyx program participants under the employer-mentor framework*

OnyxWorks applied for new funding through the Ministry of Justice to continue the program. We are waiting to hear if the application was successful.

- ii. *Reconnect and build relationships with specific community partners working on the issue of sexual exploitation and providing outreach services, particularly Directions Youth Services and UNYA (Urban Native Youth Association) outreach teams.*

Onyx staff continue to participate in community meetings, liaising with all outreach workers working with vulnerable populations. A sexual exploitation workshop was provided to Directions staff. Content included warning signs, and what to be aware of when supporting a youth being exploited. A representative from UNYA has been consistently active on the Vancouver Community Action this past year. The representative has taken part in larger education initiatives, alongside Onyx staff, to raise awareness about the issue of sexual exploitation.

- iii. *Implement a clinical counselling component for our program participants to debrief from a therapeutic and trauma-informed lens in order to process trauma experiences pertaining to sexual violence/exploitation.*

A clinical counsellor was hired by PLEA to work with youth and families in the Vancouver Coastal region, but currently Onyx participants are unable to access this service. A mental health clinician was contracted to provide extra support to Onyx staff over a six month period. Sessions provided for staff focused on working with resistant participants, and those who were really entrenched in sexual exploitation.

- iv. *Collaborate and inform the newly acquired Children of the Street programs to increase their programs capacity to provide educational and prevention awareness addressing systemic issues pertaining to gender based violence happening more frequently and earlier on in adolescence. This would help Onyx establish better connections within various schools and community, allowing for more appropriate referrals, as well as ensure that education is happening earlier on rather than as a response with Onyx interventions.*

Onyx staff provided training for Children of the Street staff on the particular types of exploitation youth were facing. This provided new presenters and facilitators with insight into what trends and strategies exploiters are presently using to exploit youth. Providing education specific to gender based violence was not within the scope of capabilities within the program to address this year. A component of exploitation, and how it relates to gender, is being explored in Children of the Street's Youth Art Engagement curriculum.

- v. *Continue to establish relationships and increase our capacity with: programming that serves younger youth ages 10-15 and their support networks; Indigenous communities and professional partnerships; LGBTIQ2S supports and resources to reflect the evolving, non-binary and gender fluid identities of folks we serve.*

Qmunity and UNYA staff are active partners of the Onyx Program and we have collaborated on initiatives throughout the year. With regards to programming for a younger demographic, we continue to accept referrals when appropriate, and with the approval of the MCFD gatekeeper. We are continuing to modify our resources to better serve this population.

- vi. *Develop in-house training resources. The first will be an educational work booklet for program participants specific to the issue of sexual exploitation addressing: age of consent/protection laws, power dynamics, and online safety. The second will be an information guide pertaining to sexual violence and sexual assaults supports and resources.*

The in house training resource is in continued development. It was determined that this resource should be predominately electronic rather in booklet form.

The information guide pertaining to sexual violence and sexual assaults was completed and distributed to staff for reference. New resources will be added to this guide when appropriate.

Selected accomplishments...

- i. The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT) held its awareness event on March 10th, 2020 at Strathcona Community Centre for parents and adults working with youth. VCAT had the pleasure of hosting HERTime and the SaferSpace workshop, presented by PLEA's very own Courtney Liem. Detectives, Anisha Parhar and Sandy Avelar from HerTime, provided insight into females in gangs, and participants heard from their guest speaker who shared her own personal experience of being involved in gangs. Courtney educated the group on online exploitation, and highlighted popular apps and social media that youth are accessing and being targeted on. Elder Bruce Robinson from UNYA started off the evening with a prayer and song to welcome participants. Resources were provided to participants, along with goodie bags to take home.
- ii. Onyx was invited to participate in the 2nd Annual Practitioner's Symposium. The symposium was devoted to exploring linkages between situation tables and other more specialized hubs in BC. Its objective was to determine how different hub models can work in alignment with each other, and ensure optimal service provision for vulnerable individuals. The program was asked to speak to Community Action Teams across BC that are dedicated to preventing the sexual exploitation of children and youth. More than 200 attendees attended this event at the Vancouver Convention Centre, including law enforcement, government agencies, and service providers.
- iii. Onyx was asked to participate in research conducted by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. The goal of the research was to better understand and build awareness about the issues experienced in high-incidence human trafficking corridors. Its purpose was to generate knowledge that can be used to inform service delivery, public policy development and police interventions. The research will highlight trends and issues, along with opportunities on how to improve services for victims of human trafficking, who are being trafficked throughout BC and Canada.

- iv. Existing employer-mentors were secured for OnyxWorks in Vancouver. Businesses such as Gatley Lifestyle Store, JQ Clothing, Pony Salon, Acorn Restaurant and Arbour continue to be strong employer-mentors that have had really good relationships with our participants. Participants also seem to enjoy working with these employers a lot. Participants were connected with these employers based on their interest in that industry. One participant, who is a vegetarian, was very interested in gaining serving assisting experience, but found it difficult to secure employment due to his lack of work experience in the field. This participant was set up at a local popular vegetarian restaurant. So far it's been great feedback from both employer-mentor and youth.

Selected stories...

- i. A 16-year old youth was referred to the program for exchanging sex for substances. This youth was dealing with a lot of anxiety and depression from a previous traumatic incident, and was turning to drugs to cope. In addition to supporting the youth through past trauma, the worker was able to work with the youth to create safety plans to ensure their safety, on and offline. Through education on exploitation, healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as consent, this youth was able to grasp an understanding of what was happening to them and reach out for services. The worker was also able to connect this youth to a drug and alcohol counsellor. Together, they engaged in many prosocial activities, including boxing. The youth is extremely mindful and has a lot of future goals, including getting a Bachelor's Degree and starting their own business.
- ii. One youth was referred to Onyx two months before her nineteenth birthday. At this time, the young person was being discharged from a treatment centre and was engaging in exploitative behaviours online. The youth had expressed a desire to stop these behaviours but articulated that it was difficult as it was something they were dependant on. The worker supported the young person in navigating the logistics of taking down their content online and had several conversations with the youth pertaining to consent, resources, and the laws in place to protect them. The young person was enrolled in an employment program and was supported in staying motivated to complete the course. The Youth Development Worker assisted the young person to budget and grocery shopp on a small budget. This young person is extremely artistic and also finds confidence in skateboarding. They were supported to access several different free art workshops that they are still connected to today.
- iii. A 17 year old youth was referred to the program over concerns that they were being exploited in the community and at indoor venues. There were also concerns that the youth was being exploited for drugs. Throughout their time in service, this youth was supported to connect with a mental health clinician, and their substance misuse was greatly reduced. This youth really loved dance and wanted to be connected to employment. The worker connected this youth to a popular dance studio where they were able to actively participate in dancing, thus providing them with a positive outlet and new friends. The OnyxWorks Program provided this youth with training that focused on work readiness and finding employment. After much support their goal to finish school and graduate is on track to be accomplished this year. ,

Biggest challenges...

- i. One of the challenges that we are beginning to face is the growing number of younger children that are being sexually exploited, or are at risk of being exploited. When working with a younger demographic, the way we can have conversations in regards to education and having them really understand what exploitation looks like and what it is, does have to change; you have to take a different approach in what you say and how you say it.

- ii. The program experienced some staff turnover this year, which resulted in gaps in service. The team worked hard to transition youth to newly hired workers and to minimise any disruption to service delivery.
- iii. This year, several youth were faced with funding challenges when trying to get into private universities before the age of 19. These youth were unable to find adequate funding through grants and scholarships and could not access supports for University through MCFD until they turned 19. Several youth also had difficulties accessing our employment due to their entrenched lifestyles. .

Our team...staffing¹



Based on a need for services a contracted worker was put in place in the Sunshine Coast to deliver services.

Our team...learning undertaken

The Onyx team participated in a variety of educational workshops, courses and learning opportunities pertaining to the issues of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Training undertaken included:

- Human Trafficking in a Pandemic Webinar;
- Human Trafficking Training online through the Government of British Columbia;
- Monthly Anti-Trafficking Grantee Webinars with OnyxWorks funders (Canadian Women's Foundation);

¹ # of individuals as opposed to FTEs as per March 31st, 2019

- Mandt Training; Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training;
- Trauma-Informed Practices;
- VPD “Her Time”: Female Anti-Gang Program;
- Webinar on Pride and the Workplace;
- SFU Cybercrime course, Online Safety and Exploitation training;
- Conflict De-escalation;
- Eating disorder training from Looking Glass;
- Restorative Justice and Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training;
- Resilience and Wellness training;
- Several workshop provided by PLEA’s Children of the Street Program, including, Redefining Masculinity; It Can Happen to Anyone SaferSpace; and Taking Care Of Ourselves and Others;

In partnership with our OnyxWorks Program, Onyx staff attended a variety of events and workshops (including Food Safe, WHIMIS training, and Serving It Right) with their youth. These training sessions gave participants the opportunities to grow their pre-employment capacities. Additionally, Onyx hosted an in-house workshop, facilitated by a financial advisor from Plumtree Wealth, to assist youth with their taxes.

Our team... relationships

- The Onyx Program has enhanced its partnership with the Counter Exploitation Unit (CEU) this year. The CEU provided youth workers with training that focused on their services. They also explained how staff can refer to, and work collaboratively with, the unit, thus increasing supports for exploited youth. The CEU also offered to meet with the Onyx Program’s Manager to discuss a human trafficking initiative they are working on, which would feature the Onyx Program as a service that youth can reach out to for support. This initiative continues to be in the development stages.
- The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT), chaired by Onyx/PLEA, established relationships with the Vancouver Police Department’s female anti-gang program HERTime. This relationship has been seen as a positive approach to support female youth in the Onyx program who are associated with gangs.
- The OnyxWorks Program continues to make new connections with employers to specifically address the employment interests of youth. A new employer-mentor in North Vancouver has experience working with vulnerable populations. Two new Vancouver employers came on board in August. One, an employer at a clothing store in Yaletown, was ideal for a particular participant living downtown and not able to rely on transit to get to work. The other business was perfect for a participant with an interest in make up and developing customer services skills.

Next year’s goals...

- Secure OnyxWorks funding in order to sustain the program and continue to offer employment opportunities for Onyx program participants under the employer-mentor framework. Additionally, to provide alternatives for employment and an income to those youth affected through the COVID crisis.
- To increase the number of referrals from outside agencies by enhancing community development.
- To identify new trends on the issue of sexual exploitation in the communities that Onyx serves
- To participate in educational trainings/workshops by Indigenous agencies/ communities in order to enhance cultural programming and support in the Onyx program
- Increase education and prevention strategies for youth in Onyx who are being exploited online. This is in response to a steady stream of referrals reflective of this form of exploitation.

For more information...

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