



COMMUNITY  
SERVICES

see what's possible...

# Onyx Vancouver Coastal Annual Program Report 2021-22

---

## 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 (Gibson's, 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.

[www.plea.ca](http://www.plea.ca)

## Who we served...

Profile	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
# of cases	62	61	68	61	68	73
# of youth	60	59	65	59	67	72
% young women	97	95	94	87	88	87
% young men	2	3	3	12	9	7
% self-identified as transgender	1	2	3	1	3	6
% self-identified as Indigenous	45	36	29	33	33	36
Average age when cases were opened by case	15	15	15	15	16	16
Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	289 (N=53)	219 (N=33)	250 (N=39)	226 (N=35)	260 (N=39)	261 (N=43)

# of cases is greater than the # youth because two youth were re-referred.

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	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Average monthly caseload	23	30	27	28	25	33
# of referrals (25-50 is the target) by case	38	47	48	33	47	43
# of direct service hours	2254	3007	2248	2670	2006	2328
Average # of days wait for a worker (by opened cases, N= opened cases)	25 (N=36)	24 (N=33)	16 (N=42)	9 (N=33)	25 (N=39)	6 (N=40)

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

- 1. Sustain one OnyxWorks placement with capacity for two positions under Onyx Program funding. Allow for the continuing benefits of offering employment opportunities for participants under the employer-mentor framework.**

*One placement in the hospitality industry was maintained through Onyx funding. The placement had the capacity for two youth to gain meaningful employment. Several Onyx participants were able to have the opportunity to successfully complete the placement, and the possibility of more placements with a new location opening up in this business has been explored.*

- 2. Continue to have access to PLEA counselling services under the allocated fund and sustain this component for program participants as well as their families through additional funds or fee for service.**

*Support for families and participants of Onyx to the PLEA counselling program has been maintained through a Gender Based Violence fund successfully obtained by PLEA. This will allow continued ongoing support for families and youth who are being affected by sexual exploitation.*

- 3. Convert Onyx educational booklet into an external accessible guide to assist SEY workers across the Lower Mainland to educate youth on the topic of sexual exploitation.**

*Onyx education booklet has been shared with relevant community partners who work with exploited youth across the Lower Mainland. Components of this booklet are being used to educate and inform youth and workers on the issue.*

## Selected accomplishments...

1. The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT) designed a guide on healthy and unhealthy relationships to be distributed to community partners. The committee focused on raising awareness to youth, and those supporting youth, by helping start the conversation of what an exploitive relationship may look like. The committee identified that many members were struggling with having these conversations, and members determined a guide being useful. The booklets were distributed electronically, and a hard copy was provided as requested.
2. Onyx Program Manager participated in an interview on sexual exploitation and best practices working with exploited youth. The interview took place with Creative Society Project to participate at the International Online Conference “Global Crisis. We are human, and we want to live.” on May 7, 2022. This conference will reach more than 180 countries, and simultaneous be interpreted in 100 languages.
3. OnyxWorks received 5,000 for the next 3 years from the Diamond Foundation. This will allow youth to continue to receive training and job readiness skills, to gain employment. Youth will have FoodSafe and Serving it Right certificates, to support their possible placement with existing program employer mentor.

## Selected stories...

1. A 15-year-old youth was referred to the Onyx program due to concerns around exploitation. Youth engaged in the program for 20 months. Youth’s goals were to work on her family relationships, reduce substance use and form healthier relationships. Youth was open to many programs that were offered through her time in the program. Youth attended counselling, a substance use program, as well as the Onyx Works program. Youth was open to learning about healthy relationships, consent and establishing appropriate boundaries. Youth took part in many employment training programs through her time including Lash Technician training and a Hair Course. Youth gained many skills and completed her High School education. Through the program youth grew immensely and their confidence flourished. Youth is now currently employed, planning to attend hair school, and saving up money to get her own apartment.
2. An 18-year-old youth was referred to the onyx program after disclosing to their schoolteachers that they have been travelling to Victoria and Toronto and staying in luxury hotels. The youth had confirmed that they were being exploited and had been coerced into escorting. After the first meeting with the Onyx worker, the youth was not interested in the support the program had to offer, stating that her father paid for everything. However, the Onyx worker continued to gently remind the youth that they were available for them and over the course of 6 months, the youth began reaching out to YDW independently. The youth began to trust the Onyx worker, disclose their experiences to the worker, and began building confidence in themselves. Just prior to the young person ageing out of the Onyx program, they had exited their exploitative situation, gained employment training, secured a job in trades, and re-engaged in their high school education. After a few follow-up connections, the youth has begun saving money for an apartment and had nearly completed their diploma. This young person continues to reach out to the Onyx worker about their successes and is so proud of how much they have accomplished.

## Biggest challenges...

1. Ageing out of the Onyx program is always challenging for participants. In most cases where sexual exploitation concerns have been mitigated, the supports needed to support a victim of exploitation can be long term. The program recognises that although many youth technically age out, they may be developmentally younger in age, especially if they were recruited at a young age.
2. The program identified a growing trend of younger youth referred to the program. The growing trend is concerning due to the level of exploitation that has been experienced by these young youth. The program has responded by consulting with Onyx liaison and community supports, and if appropriate with the guardians of the younger youth.

## Our team...staffing<sup>1</sup>



## Our team...learning undertaken

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

- Gang Research, and Influences on BC Gangs
- Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training
- LGB2Q+ Diversity Training and Pronoun Training
- Centre for Child Protection Training
- Intersectionality's Indigenous Youth Face

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.

## Our team... relationships

1. The Onyx Program developed a partnership with a tattoo studio to help youth cover up unwanted tattoos. For some youth the removal of a tattoo offered closure and was of significance due to power and control experienced by some. This new relationship has opened the door for potential opportunities to also allow for placements for youth who have expressed interest in internships at tattoo parlours to put their artists skills to use.
2. The Onyx Program partnered with a local self-defence academy to provide classes for participants. Many youth were successful in completing this initiative and learned skills to help keep themselves safe. The instructor proved to be very youth focused.
3. Due to the significant exploitation concerns the community of Richmond is experiencing, the Onyx program provided information sessions and workshops to Richmond school district staff, and the community youth team. As a result, a new relationship was developed with an RCMP member who works on the high-risk youth team in Richmond. He is now the point of contact for Onyx and exploited youth in Richmond.

## Next year's goals...

1. Create relationships with beauty, and cosmetics technicians to provide training, and employment opportunities for youth aiming to be successful in the beauty industry. This is viable option for financial stability for participants.
2. Establish key contacts in all communities outside the Lower mainland that Onyx serves (i.e.: Bella Bella, Bella Coola, Mt. Currie) to secure safe supports for youth seeking Onyx supports.
3. Update Onyx referral form, and materials to be more user, and youth friendly for parents/guardians and youth who self-refer to the Onyx program.
4. Enhance relationship with Pacific Association of First Nations Women (PAFNW) to support program participants with opportunities to participate in drum circles, mentorship, and counselling.

## For more information...

Contact Camila Jimenez, Program Manager, at 604-764-0293 or email [cjimenez@plea.bc.ca](mailto:cjimenez@plea.bc.ca).