



COMMUNITY
SERVICES

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Onyx Vancouver Coastal Annual Program Report 2022-23

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

Who we served...

Profile	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
# of cases	48	62	61	68	61
# of youth	48	60	59	65	59
% young women	85	97	95	94	87
% young men	6	2	3	3	12
% self-identified as transgender	8	1	2	3	1
% self-identified as Indigenous	31	45	36	29	33
Average age when cases were opened by case	15	15	15	15	15
Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	203 (N=36)	289 (N=53)	219 (N=33)	250 (N=39)	226 (N=35)

The average age remains consistent compared to last year, which again reflects the need for services at an earlier age and early intervention.

How we did...service delivery

Service delivery	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Average monthly caseload	20	23	30	27	28
# of referrals (25-50 is the target) by case	46	38	47	48	33
# of direct service hours	1719	2254	3007	2248	2670
Average # of days wait for a worker (by opened cases, N= opened cases)	8 (N=39)	25 (N=36)	24 (N=33)	16 (N=42)	9 (N=33)

How we did...against last 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 a viable option for financial stability for participants.**

This goal was not achieved due to the absence of dedicated personnel to develop employer mentor relationships through OnyxWorks. A couple of youth had the opportunity to receive employment opportunities. One youth received a job offer at a salon. Onyx was able to support a variety of youth with equipment to further train or start their own lash business.

- 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.**

Onyx staff will be travelling to Squamish to present on the Onyx program with Children of the Street program staff in June 2023. The trip will also encompass connection with community supports to speak about the program and its services. Information on the Onyx program was facilitated in the Sunshine Coast in April 2023 to parents virtually and in person. New contacts for these communities have been established.

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.

The Onyx referral form and materials, such as the healthy and unhealthy relationships booklet was updated to include QR codes making it more accessible to youth. The program did this on a trial basis and found that for many youth referring themselves or friends this was more accessible. It was determined purchasing a QR for the program would be beneficial. The new QR code will be added to the program brochure and materials as a permanent addition.

4. Enhance relationship with Pacific Association of First Nations Women (PAFNW) to support program participants with opportunities to participant in drum circles, mentorship, and counselling.

Although no ongoing relationship was established with PAFNW, this resource can be accessed by any participant should they find it to be a fit for their needs. The program therefore focused on furthering its relationship with PLEA knowledge keeper. A program participant wanting to know more about his Indigenous roots met with knowledge keeper and their worker to explore more about their culture, heritage, and to build additional cultural supports. The youth reports this connection being useful and intends to build on this relationship. This connection will be further explored with other participants open to this connection and support

Selected accomplishments...

1. The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT) hosted its 18th annual awareness week initiative during the provinces "Stop Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week ". The event titled "Building Capacity to support Sexually Exploited Youth "was held at Covenant House Vancouver and was attended by 60 service providers from youth serving organizations and support services across the lower mainland. Participants were provided with a take home worksheet to support them in building capacity in their own organizations. They were also equipped with a toolkit to assist in supporting victims of exploitation, and a healthy and unhealthy relationship booklet to help start the conversation on exploitation. PLEA'S Children of The Street program covered sexual exploitation 101, Covenant House staff spoke regarding their Anti-Trafficking Project, and PLEA'S Onyx program presented about how to provide direct services for exploited youth, effective ways to support victims, and key collaborations necessary when supporting trafficked and exploited youth. Lastly, all participants had the opportunity to connect and get to know each other by working through a case study in an interactive way that helped all start thinking about how they could implement what was learned throughout the day in their own work. PLEA's knowledge keeper Charles Lafferty provided the opening for our event and Friendship Centre Catering provided a boxed lunch for all. This marked VCAT's first in-person event since the pandemic marking a successful initiative in building capacity.
2. Onyx participated in a variety of community development initiatives. Staff welcomed a new Anti-trafficking workshop designed by Covenant house which was presented to staff for the purpose of consultation on its relevance, and best practices for supporting sexually exploited youth. Staff participated in a survey designed for youth workers to contribute to the Engaging Community: Human Trafficking Project by Justice Education Society. Justice for Girls staff joined an Onyx team meeting to establish collaborating on circumstances when participants are in need of additional support in relation to violence, poverty, discrimination or human rights advocacy.
3. OnyxWorks met with Diamond Foundations funder representative Carolina Miranda who interviewed Onyx staff on the successes of the OnyxWorks program, its needs, barriers and participants. Staff were commended for their achievements providing creative employment to support vulnerable youth in becoming financially stable. The Diamond Foundation provided \$5000 of funding for Onyxworks.

Selected stories...

1. Sharlene was referred to the program due to exploitation concerns with her partner. When Sharlene began the program, she was housed at a group home however did not feel comfortable there. The youth was therefore staying out in the community in an exploitative relationship. The youth identified many goals she wanted to complete with the support of the program. Sharlene gained employment experience through the Onyx Works program and secured full-time employment after the mentorship program. Sharlene was able to get independent living in a placement which created more safety and security in her life. Through the program, Sharlene was supported in reconnecting with her culture, receiving her status card, BCID, bank account and passport. Sharlene was open to exploring her relationship and has done a lot of reflection regarding relationships with others and her relationship with herself. Sharlene is now living independently, employed full-time, gained confidence, and has shown immense growth.
2. Skylar was referred to Onyx after disclosing that they were meeting with an older male. Shortly after being connected to the Onyx program Skylar started seeing a second older male in Richmond. Through the program Skylar was educated on healthy relationships and encouraged to develop their own boundaries. A couple months into the program Skylar ended both relationships with the older males. Skylar has engaged in extracurricular activities such as basketball, the drama club, and art. Skylar has also started to explore their Indigenous heritage and will be connecting with PLEA Knowledge Keeper Charles Lafferty. Skylar has also been supported with exploring their gender identity.

*Names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality

Biggest challenges...

1. The program struggled with staffing due to workers being on leave and a senior worker's resignation. In anticipation of the absence of staffing an extra worker was put in place to assist the program and successfully transitioned into the program as a regular full-time staff. Unfortunately, the disruption in service meant many participants experienced a turnover in staffing and referrals to the program were maintained on the waitlist for longer than expected.
2. The OnyxWorks program was not able to expand in communities where youth were most in need of employment. Without a dedicated worker attached to this component of the Onyx program, no new placements were established. The pool of participants employment ready was lower than normal due to limitations in adding new participants to the program due to staffing.

Our team...staffing¹



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:

- Guns and Gangs Conference
- San'yas Cultural Training
- Illuminate-Salvation Army -Shift Survivor led training
- Anti-Trafficking Training- Covenant House
- Domestic Violence in the Workplace
- Diane Sowden- Children of the Street Founder
- Public Safety Canada Webinar Series: Combatting Online Child Sexual Exploitation
- Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation 2022 Online Global Summit
- Addressing the Root Causes of Human Trafficking in Youth Webinar
- The Art of Leadership for Women

Our team... relationships

1. The Onyx Program re-established relationships with Salvation Army's Illuminate program's new staff to share information relevant to both programs. Specifically engaging on the topic for youth transitioning into adulthood and collaboration on upcoming community presentations within the capacity of the Onyx program and in collaboration with Children of the Street programming.
2. The Onyx program staff were asked to sit on a Coalition-Style Situation Table for Anti-Human Trafficking. The goal is to have a positive impact on the individuals Onyx support. This table stems from a larger impact Anti Trafficking Committee hosted by Covenant House attended by Program Manager through the lens of prevention at Children of the Street. The partnership has been instrumental in capacity building within the Vancouver Community Action team having 2 committee members who sit on the PLEA/Onyx committee through Covenant House.
3. Meetings are being held regularly this year with Yankee 20 and Onyx staff. The result being a more in-depth knowledge of risks in community regarding Onyx participants. A review of caseloads, knowledge sharing and troubleshooting areas of response to better support Onyx and its staff.

Next year's goals...

1. Establish a regular full-time position for the OnyxWorks program to create employment opportunities and mentorship in supporting victims of sexual exploitation through the Onyx program.
2. To establish the ability to utilize beds within the UTurn Program to act as an emergency placement bed for crisis situations when they have additional availability.
3. Program Manager to facilitate workshops for First Responders and Vancouver's Ambassador program staff to raise awareness about the sexual exploitation of youth.
4. Recruit new committee members to Vancouver Community Action Team representing youth serving organizations that have a vested interest in the topic of sexual exploitation and raising awareness.

For more information...

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