

Engaging with Aboriginal Communities

Why

It is important to educate ourselves and our communities about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada in order to effectively build partnerships and lasting relationships for change.

There is a wide diversity of Aboriginal communities in British Columbia, and each community is unique. Any work to address the unique vulnerabilities of Aboriginal girls and women to human trafficking and sexual exploitation must be guided by Aboriginal community members.

The historical effects of the *Indian Act* and policies to eradicate the traditional customs, language and culture of Canada's Aboriginal people have had a devastating impact. In particular, the Indian Residential School system, which forced Aboriginal children away from their families and communities, had a profoundly negative influence on Indigenous communities in Canada. The resulting loss of culture and language caused by colonization and racism has resulted in widespread poverty, fractured families, sexual abuse of Aboriginal children, and high rates of violence against Aboriginal women. For Aboriginal youth, the lack of connection to their culture has been identified as a clear risk factor for violence. These impacts make Aboriginal women and youth vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

You can learn more about this issue by taking OCTIP's online training *Human Trafficking: Canada is Not Immune* and reviewing the other resources listed below.

How

“Many solutions have been created by government bodies, outside “experts,” or other professionals that simply do not work for First Nations people. Success and healing must not be measured by outside standards but by each community’s own definition of wellness, within the context of their own culture and history. One key component of building a stronger future for Aboriginal people is creating solutions that work at a local level, developing the self-determination of individuals and communities.”
(Hunt, 2011, p. 12¹)

Strengthening cultural identity, including ties to the land, family, community, elders and traditional practices, language and customs, may enhance resilience against traffickers. Ideas for steps you and your community can take include:

- **Understand the importance of taking a holistic approach that involves including community, family, elders, and youth** in working with Aboriginal communities.

¹ Hunt, Sarah. (2011). *Restoring the Honouring Circle: Taking a Stand against Youth and Sexual Exploitation*. Vancouver: Justice Institute of British Columbia.

How →

- **Learn more about local First Nations, Aboriginal community members, elders and others** to understand the historical and present day circumstances of this community.
- **Recognize that the damage done by colonization, the *Indian Act*, and residential school abuse has had a lasting negative impact on First Nations.** It is due to this history that many First Nations communities are at different stages in the process of reconnecting and reclaiming their traditions/cultures, languages and teachings.
- **Build a long lasting relationship with local First Nations.** A meaningful and respectful relationship will enhance the ability to address issues of sexual exploitation and human trafficking together.
- **Participate in local community events with First Nations, elders, youth, and Aboriginal community members** to learn more about existing cultural practices, teachings, ceremonies, customs, traditional food and language. Strengthened ties within and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can help to prevent and combat human trafficking and exploitation in your community.

What →

These resources can help you in engaging with Aboriginal communities:

**TAKING ACTION:
A Circle of Connectedness**

“The importance of identity is particularly true for Aboriginal children’s healthy development since community and belonging are such important parts of their cultures’ belief systems. In recent years, Aboriginal leaders have been striving to enhance children’s sense of belonging. Some have called this a *circle of connectedness*. The circle is a sacred symbol in all Aboriginal cultures. An emblem of wholeness, unity and infinity, it represents the cycles of life and the meaning of the universe. The circle of connectedness sees the child at the center, surrounded by his or her parents, who are in turn surrounded by their community.”

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/ahsunc-papacun/aboriginal-autochtones-eng.php>

- **Human Trafficking: Canada is Not Immune:**
Online Training: Module 2, *OCTIP Information Sheet—Working Effectively with Aboriginal People*
<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/octiptraining/index.html>
- **Restoring the Honouring Circle: Taking a Stand against Sexual Exploitation: An information, prevention, and capacity building manual for rural communities in British Columbia**
(pg. 30-40, 43- 51, 56, 78, 92-93, 100-104, 108, 113, 119-121, 122, 124)
<http://www.jibc.ca/sites/default/files/research/pdf/Restoring-Honouring-Circle-Manual.pdf>

Reflecting

1. What do I know about Aboriginal people in my community? What do I need to learn?
2. How can I learn about some of the traditional practices and teachings of Aboriginal people in my community? What are the present-day circumstances of Aboriginal people in my community?
3. Where do I gain knowledge and understanding about historical and present day circumstances of Aboriginal people in my community?
4. What steps and protocols do I need to follow when reaching out to Aboriginal community members, First Nations, and others in my community to engage them in this work?
5. What are key risk factors for human trafficking and exploitation in my community?
6. Who are most vulnerable? Why?
7. What strengths does my community offer? Can these strengths be used to build resilience in youth to prevent human trafficking and exploitation from happening?
8. What protective factors can be strengthened, including ties to schools, elders, or a community leader?
9. Can you identify programming that offers youth positive experiences and exposure to adult mentors? For example are there recreational, social, and cultural events that provide safe spaces for Aboriginal youth in your community?

The following list of projects received a BC Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking in BC Aboriginal communities:

TAKING ACTION: Strengthening Cultural Connections— Aboriginal Women’s Healing Conference

This project will gather 25-30 vulnerable Aboriginal women and youth in the West Kootenay/Boundary region for a three-day conference that will provide participants with an opportunity to experience traditional healing, cultural connection, and connections to community through experiencing a traditional drum making ceremony and traditional healing circles.

TAKING ACTION:
Protecting our Women

This project focuses on preventing sexual exploitation and human trafficking by supporting Aboriginal women of all ages in the transition from rural to urban environments. Through weekly workshops, the project will support development of pro-social connections, enhance life skills, share positive practices for health and wellbeing including traditional practices, and increase awareness of risks and how to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the transition to an urban environment. Examples of activities include: drum circles, sewing traditional regalia, stress management and coping skills, safety planning, and developing local resource lists.

TAKING ACTION:
Kwikwetlem Women’s Talking Circle

A talking circle is used in Aboriginal communities as a respectful and meaningful way to open communication with others. Kwikwetlem’s women’s talking circle will be a vehicle to bring together and empower aboriginal youth and women vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This project will include 15 sessions focused on respect and self-worth using traditional teachings and activities to prevent sexual exploitation.

TAKING ACTION:
Giving Voice to Young Women

This is a two-day event at the K’omoks First Nation’s longhouse for 75-80 young women to address cultural protocols, participating in traditional dance of transformation, and sharing each other’s life experiences. The event will include group activities to address identity, self-awareness, importance of family and community, and cultural and spiritual strength in order to prevent sexual exploitation.

TAKING ACTION:
Girl Power

Funding will support a leadership building project for women and girls focused on rediscovering traditional sites and practices of the Boston Bar First Nations in order to bring women together in pride and solidarity. The group will address the disconnect from traditional practices to empower aboriginal girls and women by building positive self-image and promoting self-acceptance in order to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking.