



York Region Anti-Human Trafficking Committee Final Report June 2015

I. Introduction

I.1 Project Background

The York Region Anti-Human Trafficking Committee (YRAHTC) was established in 2012. In 2013, the Women's Support Network of York Region (WSN), the lead agency, received funding from Status of Women Canada to engage the local community and implement actions to address human trafficking over a two-year period. This report builds upon work previously documented in the original Evaluation Report and the Interim Report.

I.2 Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation are to provide the YRAHTC with information about the success or challenges of approaches to organizing and building the YRAHTC into an

independent entity which can function on its own; to suggest strategies and to provide recommendations that will assist the YRAHTC in moving forward as a stand-alone entity, and to increase and strengthen the ability of the YRAHTC and its member agencies and organizations to support victims of Human Trafficking (HT), educate the public, and make progress toward eliminating Human Trafficking in York Region.

I.3 Methodology and Approach

In the final stage of evaluation YRAHTC members were asked to respond to the same online survey questions used to assess a variety of indicators pertaining to the effective functioning of the YRAHTC. The results of this survey were then compared to the original responses.

Based on the results of the online survey, the attendance at a YRAHTC meeting, and further research, a more in-depth survey was created to follow up on pertinent issues and concerns. In addition, many key questions from the original one-on-one interviews were added for the purpose of comparison. Seven active YRAHTC members who had been with the committee for over a year were interviewed individually in this stage

2. Evaluation Details and Results

Most of the structural and functional concerns articulated in the original online survey and in the original one-on-one interviews have been completely or for the most part resolved. This includes issues with locating space for meetings, knowing where to access project documents, understanding the roles of committee members and subcommittees, new member orientation, and being kept up-to-date on project deliverables.

The concerns of survey and interview participants are now more focused on how the YRAHTC should move forward and what the committee's primary objectives should become.

Education

The main focus of the YRAHTC according to most respondents should be education. Education of the public as to the prevalence of Human Trafficking (HT) in York Region, bolstered by locally relevant statistics was the primary concern. This was followed by

assisting the public in understanding the complexities of HT, recognizing HT when it occurs, and knowing where to refer victims and those at risk.

Respondents also believed that it was important that the YRAHTC actively engage and educate parents as to the ways in which their own children could be vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation. Parents were believed to be in a crucial position to be able to observe not only what was happening in their own children's lives, but also in the lives of their classmates and friends.

Further, respondents acknowledged the importance of educating the public, and parents specifically, as to the ways in which they could get involved in ending HT whether that be by volunteering, donating money, or involving their local schools and other educational bodies in activities or interventions.

The conveyances for this education were multifarious. Social media campaigns were deemed to be accessible to youth and to a broad sector of the population, as well as an inexpensive and easily buildable platform. Advertising campaigns at bus stops, in the mainstream media and through door-to-door flyers were seen as additional, but more expensive options.

Respondents also expressed the view that these widespread forms of education should be supported by conferences, and awareness-raising exhibits at local events. These types of educational interactions allow members of the public to ask questions and promote involvement and the establishment of connections.

Specific education needs to be tailored and implemented for tattoo artists, construction companies, hairdressers, financial institutions and other community businesses and services which may encounter HT.

Education directly through the public school curriculum is of paramount importance but not something that can be easily achieved in a short space of time. However, beginning this education at a young age is crucial to reaching youth before they encounter situations that put them at risk.

As part of all educational endeavours, respondents noted the need to eradicate the stigma associated with HT for the purposes of sexual exploitation. While most were unsure exactly how to accomplish this, integrating HT survivors into trainings when possible was seen as one way of facilitating the personal connection and an understanding of the reasons behind victims' exploitation.

Connecting Victims, Services and Resources Seamlessly

The second most important function of the YRAHTC was determined to be the connection of victims and those at risk of exploitation with the most suitable services

and resources, as well as connecting service providers with information and the proper channels and services for referrals and support. The service mapping currently underway is seen to be a large part of this system and this, along with the regular meetings of the YRAHTC and accompanying events, are perceived as the solution to what has been a huge gap in service delivery in the past.

Training

While respondents felt it would be ideal if all staff at all member agencies were fully trained to deal with HT, many considered it impractical. However, they did believe that every member agency should have some staff members who are fully trained, while all staff should be able to, at the minimum, identify and appropriately refer any cases of HT they encountered.

One ongoing training strategy suggested by several respondents involved Lunch and Learn sessions that were focused on particular topics such as “Identification of Trafficking Victims” and advertised to YRAHTC members. This would keep members engaged and abreast of new topics and interventions, and would serve to reinforce previous training.

Communication

Communication between members and among subcommittees has been notably improved. Most respondents feel that with the completion of the website and service mapping they will have access to all contact information of members and subcommittees, project documents and committee updates. A few suggested that it would be helpful to have regular updates from the YRAHTC and its subcommittees sent out as email notices as well as being posted to the website. One respondent felt that having these updates summarized in point form would make keeping track of all YRAHTC activities easier.

The Role of Survivors of Human Trafficking

The role of survivors was seen as crucial to the continued development of appropriate strategies for combatting HT, and for connecting with the public.

Many felt that the best way to recruit more survivors would be through service providers working with them. Respondents recognized not only the importance of the contribution that survivors could make, but also their vulnerability. Working through service providers familiar with the survivor’s situation would make it more likely that they would have supports in place and have achieved a level of healing that would assure they were ready for the responsibilities of working with the YRAHTC. Additionally they felt that paying them for their time would show not only appreciation but, as one

respondent put it “an understanding that HT has negatively affected their financial status and earning power.”

An additional caveat mentioned was the importance of approach techniques when reaching out to survivors. “We wouldn’t want them to feel that they have to be on the committee to get supports.”

Additions to the YRAHTC

Considering the two bodies missing from the YRAHTC, Ontario Works (OW) and York Region Housing, respondents suggested that the best way to get them onboard would be to create a very detailed plan, similar to a business plan, outlining the importance of these bodies to the YRAHTC and the benefits being a part of the YRAHTC would bring to each body. The YRAHTC would then identify its member or members best situated to approach them to discuss their participation.

One respondent felt that there should be marketing and communication experts on the YRAHTC in order to improve its sustainability and effectiveness.

Expansion of Mandate

Many respondents proposed that the mandate of the YRAHTC be expanded to include other forms of Human Trafficking, most commonly labour exploitation and forced marriage. It was felt that expansion of the mandate would better serve the residents of York Region and would cover those situations where a victim was caught in more than one form of HT or transferred between forms. It was further noted that failure to include other forms of HT within the mandate would put youth, immigrants, and other residents of York Region at risk of exploitation in systems other than HT for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and would allow traffickers to further manipulate victims.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Recommendations for the YRAHTC

- 1) The completion of the website and service map is crucial for the effective functioning of the YRAHTC. It would be helpful to have one designated individual able to respond to all website-related issues and to make sure updates are posted in a timely manner. This individual should work in close association with the YRAHTC member responsible for meeting and information communication within the YRAHTC so that emails scheduling meetings, promoting the YRAHTC's work in the community or notifying them of changes in project documents, are done in conjunction with the same information being updated on the website.
- 2) Meeting dates for the YRAHTC should be set at least six months in advance, including the location and time. This will facilitate the attendance of members who need to schedule their work hours in order to accommodate meetings.
- 3) Fundraising should become part of subcommittee responsibilities. Without ongoing funding, financial support for particular strategies such as advertising will need to be sought from other sources.
- 4) Each member agency should commit a set number of hours that their employee(s) will devote to YRAHTC meetings, functions and other business. This will assist in the planning and allocation of member hours to various projects within the YRAHTC.
- 5) Institute regular Lunch and Learns, or similar initiatives. These should be short – an hour or less – learning sessions which provide participants with updates on new services or interventions, or deal with core training on HT. Keeping members engaged and allowing for ongoing training, especially with new members, reinforces previous training, educates all members and ensures that topics associated with HT are kept uppermost in members' minds
- 6) It is vital that the YRAHTC apply GBA+ to all their work moving forward. Without a gender-based analysis, key components of the work will be less effective and may fail to address the needs and concerns of the exploited population. In understanding and addressing sexual exploitation, it is necessary to understand the position of women and girls within society, the social conditioning that differs from that of males, the biases, stigma and misogyny that are directed at women and girls related to their sexuality which are often diametrically opposed to that directed at males. Without this in depth analysis, any attempts to prevent sexual exploitation or to assist victims will not ameliorate their situation and may even further victimize and harm them.

- 7) In keeping with the application of GBA+ to the work of the YRAHTC, it is important to understand and apply an intersectional analysis to the work as well. Aboriginal women and girls make up more than half of all girls and women trafficked for sexual exploitation throughout Canada while making up less than five percent of the population. Meeting their particular needs for prevention, assistance and supports cannot be achieved with GBA alone. There are a number of studies and resources available to assist in the integration of specific strategies to assist aboriginal women and girls within the work of the YRAHTC. These should be considered essential consultation documents for all future work.
- 8) Expand the mandate of the YRAHTC to include all forms of HT. Recognizing all forms of HT is necessary in order to assist those who are exploited in other forms within York Region. It is also necessary to fully assist those who are sexually exploited. There are occasions where forced marriage survivors escape the forced marriage only to be entrapped in sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. In other cases, victims are exploited in more than one form of HT at the same time and any practical exit strategy needs to address all forms of exploitation in order to be efficacious. In expanding the mandate it is necessary to include the expertise of service providers working with other populations of exploited persons.

3.2 Recommendations for Evaluation

A number of respondents suggested that the YRAHTC continue to employ external evaluators to measure the progress of the YRAHTC and its initiatives. One respondent suggested the specific employment of an Enterprise Analyst & Architect to perform an architectural capability assessment of the YRAHTC's future work and structural capacity. External evaluation, while useful, is also costly and would require the acquisition of further funding.

However, many respondents felt that the YRAHTC could continue to conduct internal evaluations of its initiatives by measuring such aspects of the work as feedback from member agencies as to the number of HT victims with whom they worked, number of referrals to other agencies per client, number of events organized by the YRAHTC, number of people attending such events and the amount and type of materials created for distribution.

Without further funding, the former option is not viable. However, evaluating the work of the YRAHTC in some manner is essential for the committee to remain active and to conduct useful work. It is therefore recommended that the YRAHTC designate one individual to the task of evaluation development and recording. Since this is an unpaid position, it is important to keep it simple and easily accessible. It would involve creating assessment tools with some input from an evaluator to be used specifically for 1) events, 2) YRAHTC meetings, 3) subcommittee meetings, and 4) an online evaluation for community members. Consistently distributing and tabulating the results of such internal evaluations would be one way of continually keeping abreast of needs and gaps in both internal structural issues and in assessing how well the YRAHTC is meeting the needs of the community.

4. Conclusion

The YRAHTC has made tremendous headway over the evaluation period in transitioning to a stand-alone entity and in resolving many of the issues related to its functioning outlined in earlier evaluations. However, whenever a group moves from the structural support of a funded program to an unfunded model with less direct accountability to a particular agency, much of the success will depend upon the commitment and continued activity of its members. The sound basis formed during this project provides the structure and orientation needed for ongoing building and maintenance. The continued development and engagement of individual members and member agencies will determine the longevity and success of the project.

5. References