

Forsaken: Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry City of Vancouver Response

Report Reference
City of Vancouver Council
January 2013



Presentation Outline

- I. Missing & Murdered Women
- II. Inquiry Background & Overview of Recommendations
- III. Specific Recommendations directed to City of Vancouver & Current Status
- IV. Next Steps

I. Missing & Murdered Women

- DTES home for majority of missing/murdered women
- Majority involved in survival sex trade and disproportionate number Aboriginal women
- Common experiences: Poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, health inequities, drug dependency
- Many entered into sex work prior to age 18; raised in foster care system; history of sexual exploitation/abuse



Reference: Forsaken: the Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry pp 78-97 Volume I

II. Inquiry Recommendations

- 63 recommendations ; 53 directed to Provincial criminal justice system and police
- 5 recommendations directed to Province of BC - designed to address safety of vulnerable urban women and Aboriginal women:
 - 24 hour drop in programs for women in sex trade
 - Aboriginal youth safety pilot project to support rural- urban transitions
 - More safe houses on & off reserve, run by Aboriginal women's organizations
 - More counseling programs on reserve, run by Aboriginal women's organizations
 - Research and actions to prevent entry into and support exit out of survival sex trade

III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver

1. All entities with responsibilities under the proposed Living in Community Action Plan (2007) commit to priority actions
2. Create & fund two community based liaison positions with experience in sex trade using a transparent process
3. CoV and VPD take proactive measures to reduce numbers of court warrants issued for minor offences



III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

1. Living in Community (LIC) Action Plan

- 2007 Report on Sex Trade and Sexual Exploitation funded through Vancouver Agreement: led by Collingwood Neighborhood House in partnership with COV, VPD, VCH and various other stakeholders and community groups
- 27 actions: 12 directed to COV and currently 10 are underway by COV Task Force
- 2011: Council created Task Force and subsequent action plan to address sex trade and sexual exploitation in Vancouver

III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

- Task Force established as part of Healthy City Strategy
- Includes Provincial Government; women, youth & Aboriginal groups; sex work organizations and experiential persons; researchers; CoV and VPD
- September 2011: Council adopted report & action plan to address negative effects of sex work in neighborhoods across the city through:
 - Prevention programs
 - Safety initiatives
 - Enforcement efforts

III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

Actions:

1. Social grants for sex worker safety & youth prevention: increased by 32% since 2010
2. Neighborhood safety & violence prevention:
 - DTES Women's Safety Project (2011) funding partnership with Ministry of Justice, led by Battered Women's Support Services, WISH & DTES Women's Centre
 - Living in Community SAFE Project (2011, 2012) shared funding with Vancouver Foundation and led by Living in Community Committee
3. Child & Youth Sexual Exploitation Prevention Awareness Week (2011, 2012) with Province and community groups
4. VPD guidelines developed in consultation with community to be more responsive and respectful of sex workers (2012)

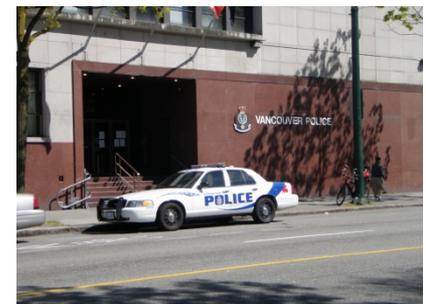
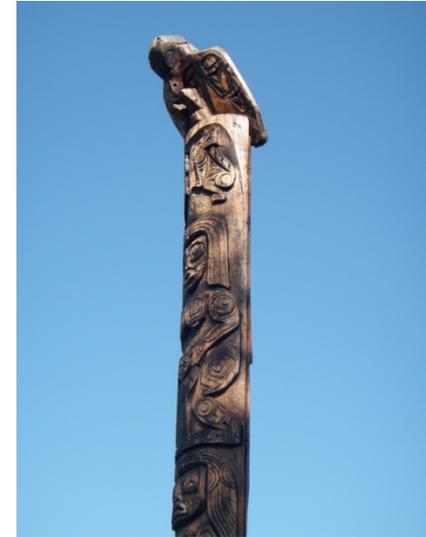
III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

Actions (cont'd):

5. Sister Watch - VPD program to ensure safety of DTES vulnerable women
6. Training front line staff (CoV, VCH, VPD) to address bias in relation to sex workers & enhance referrals to services: partnership with Living in Community - pilot spring 2013
7. Increase safe and secure housing options via CoV's Housing & Homelessness Strategy
8. Research on best practice in supports for exiting sex trade workers
9. Options for increasing online outreach for youth & after hours services: identifying best practices and a funding strategy
10. CoV business license review (to ensure responsible business practices and neighborhood safety where sex work may occur)



III. Coordination Across CoV Initiatives



III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

2. Create & fund two community based liaison positions
 - Intent: to prevent violence, reduce vulnerability, improve communication & relationships between police, community and CoV
 - Input being sought from Task Force and community members to ensure intent of recommendations are being met
 - Implementation June 2013

III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

3. Take proactive measures with VPD to reduce numbers of court warrants issued for minor offences (such as jay walking, urination in public, illegal vending)
Intent: to ensure vulnerable women who may have outstanding offences aren't deterred from reporting violence to police

Work to date on this recommendation:

- City staff, City Prosecutor and senior VPD officers reviewing all tickets, warrants and prosecutions
- Decision to delay any changes to maximum fines which relate to bylaws impacting homeless and other vulnerable groups under new Vancouver Charter provisions
- Ongoing efforts to ensure more constructive approaches to address issues which result in by-law infractions in DTES

III. Specific Recommendations: City of Vancouver (Cont'd)

3. (cont'd)

- Key facts related to by-law offences referenced in Missing Women Inquiry Report:
 - Tickets for bylaw offences referenced are all issued by VPD
 - Women constitute less than 2% of all persons charged with by-law offences
 - Maximum penalty is a fine - jail sentence is not possible for these infractions (note: Inquiry referenced concerns that women with multiple infractions were going to jail)
 - VPD 2009 ticketing “blitz” resulted in:
 - Establishment of a City “Informal Diversion Program” for those unable to pay ticket
 - Implementation of a research study and specific changes in regard to pedestrian safety and frequency of jay-walking
 - Work underway on enhancing availability of public toilets
 - Establishment by City of a DTES neighborhood-run street market
 - Preliminary data shows charges over past 4 years for street vending have steadily decreased (2008 - 339; 2011 - 161)

IV. Next Steps

- Progress report to Council June 2013 on work of City Task Force on Sex Trade and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation to include Inquiry recommendations

