

## It's time to talk about sex trade

**Katherine Dalusong is writing today's column as a guest of CMHA, on behalf of the SHOP Educational Committee.**

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It can be a

harmless chat.

It can be a friend on Facebook.

It can be a meeting at the mall.

It can be someone she just met or a family friend.

Any of these situations is a possible way a youth can be recruited into prostitution.

The average age of entry in the sex trade in British Columbia is 14, but it can happen at any age.

It happened to Diane Sowden, founder of Children of the Street Society.

"My daughter was a straight-A student and bored," said Sowden.

Her daughter was only 13 when she was recruited into the sex trade.

By the time she was 14, she was pregnant.

Last month, Sowden gave a presentation about sexual exploitation of youth, with the collaboration of the ASK Wellness Centre.

She talked of how she began her crusade to educate parents and children of the real danger of recruitment into the sex trade.

Out of her own experience and the lack of support, she created the Children of the Street Society to educate the public on prevention of sexual exploitation.

As she talked about her daughter, she put a picture of her from Grade 8, the last year she completed school.

There is nothing that sets her apart any other girl.

She came from a good family, attended a good school and was a bright girl with a bright future.

She was recruited after she began to party with an older crowd she thought matched her maturity.

At those parties, she was exposed to alcohol and drugs.

“She became addicted to crack cocaine,” said Sowden.

“All the drugs that she thought were free were not. She accumulated a \$4,000 debt.”

This is the common progression into entry into the sex trade.

Sowden’s daughter experienced the three stages of recruitment — lure, trust and payback.

At 28, her daughter is addicted to heroin and recently gave birth to her fifth child.

Four of the five children were born drug-affected.

Sowden’s goal for the society is stated in its mission:

“We take a proactive approach through public awareness and education to prevent sexual exploitation of children and youth, while also offering support to families, since 1995.”

During her presentation, Sowden said people “can’t put a blind eye to the issue.

I was made to feel ashamed and that my daughter shouldn’t be in the community because she would contaminate it.”

Through the Social and Health Options for Persons in the Sex Trade program (SHOP) with the Ask Wellness Centre, Sowden’s message has the opportunity to educate many schools across Kamloops.

SHOP will launch presentations and workshops throughout schools during the first week of April.

It is made possible through community support, such as the downtown Coast Canadian Inn, which has contributed toward lodging.

Funding contributions for the confirmed presentations in more than nine local schools are still needed.

For more information on the presentation, contact Heidi Starr, SHOP co-ordinator at 250-376-7558, extension 233.