

SISTER OUTSIDERS

what you won't hear inside the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Issue # 6 December 17, 2012

WHAT'S NOT IN OPPAL'S REPORT

Shutting out women's groups from the Missing Women Inquiry eliminated feminist analysis and frontline knowledge of: violence against women including prostitution; the state's responsibility in creating women's poverty and therefore to their vulnerability to violent men; and the systemic failures of the criminal justice system to protect all women from all forms of male violence.

The economic power that men as a class have over women as a class is mirrored in the relationship between individual men and individual women. Most men have more money than their wives. Most women can't earn enough on their own to provide for the basic needs of their kids. Many abusive men withhold financial support of their children to punish their wives when they dare to leave. Too often she will return to an abusive husband or will be forced to stay with him because what she gets from welfare is far from enough for her and her children. Under successive neoliberal governments, the welfare system has proven to be a tyrannical machine that manages and controls the poor while refusing to provide for their most basic needs.

Women are driven to prostitution and stay trapped in prostitution because of poverty. Prostitution is a form of male violence and it is not coincidental that so many johns commit other acts of violence against prostituted women. Paying for the use of her body dehumanizes her, reduces her to a commodity, to an object that he can use in whatever way he wishes to. By refusing to alleviate women's poverty, the state is directly responsible for women's vulnerability to prostitution and other forms of male violence.

Though the heart of the Missing Women Inquiry was police indifference to the lives of prostituted women there was no reference to the fact that police fail to respond to all forms of male violence against women including wife battering and rape. And we know that many women are incested, raped and beaten before they are prostituted.

A roundtable conversation among front-line anti-violence workers held this month at the Montreal Massacre Memorial concluded that there is little or no justice in the criminal justice system for women who are victims of male violence. More often than not police don't arrest battering men. Police falsely inform women that it's up to her and not the police whether or not her case goes forward. Or police may even arrest the woman for attempting to defend herself. In violence against women cases, the police do not conduct a thorough investigation yet quickly decide there's not enough evidence to bring the case forward. Often the Crown will stay proceedings or drop charges without explanation.

The police refused for years to uphold prostitution laws against men. They've not arrested johns and pimps for communication or for being found in a bawdy house or for living off the avails of prostitution. This version of policing does little to prevent men from sexually exploiting and profiting from women's bodies. At the end of the day most violent men will never face a judge and will not be held accountable by the criminal justice system.

Violence against women is an expression and reinforcement of women's inequality. Individual men are committing this violence but it's the state's responsibility to prevent women's vulnerability to men's violence and to stop violent men from attacking women.

The Missing Women Inquiry – in its process and in its outcome – made the crucial mistake of excluding equality seeking women's groups. In doing so, the inquiry undermines and interferes with the feminist fight for the security, equality, and liberty of all women.

Hilla Kerner
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

UNDERSTANDING NWAC'S POSITION ON PROSTITUTION

Native Women's Association of Canada – Press Release, November 2012

NWAC's position is that prostitution exploits and increases the inequality of Aboriginal women and girls on the basis of their gender, race, age, disability and poverty.

NWAC has passed a resolution that supports the abolition of prostitution. This means that our goal is to **end the prostitution of women and girls** through legal and public policy measures that recognize the state's obligations to (i) provide for basic needs and (ii) to protect women and girls from male violence.

We want to stop the buying and pimping of our women. We want to stop the sale of human bodies. We want women to be free from the poverty and abuse that targets them for prostitution, and to stop being blamed for their prostitution.

Prostitution is a particular concern for Aboriginal women.

Prostitution is not a traditional activity of Aboriginal women. The state has tried to disconnect Aboriginal women from our communities, our children, our families, our traditional roles, our language, and our culture. These incidents all contribute to the disconnection Aboriginal women experience from their own bodies and sexuality that is inflicted on them through prostitution.

Aboriginal women are grossly overrepresented in prostitution and among the women who have been murdered in prostitution. It is not helpful to divide women in prostitution into those who "choose" and those who are "forced" into prostitution. In most cases, Aboriginal women are recruited for prostitution as girls and/or feel they have no other option due to poverty and abuse. It is the sex industry that encourages women to view prostitution as their chosen identity.

NWAC stands with women in prostitution to demand that the state respect the Aboriginal, treaty and international human rights of Aboriginal peoples to live lives free from violence, poverty and to meet their physical, cultural and spiritual needs.

Legalizing buyers and pimps would not help Aboriginal women who are in prostitution right now.

When people speak about legalizing prostitution, they often mix together decriminalizing the women who are prostituted and decriminalizing the men who buy and pimp them. **It is wrong to criminalize Aboriginal women who are being prostituted.** This only further punishes women for their poverty and exploitation. It also contributes to the high numbers of Aboriginal women in prison and the separation of Aboriginal women from their children. **NWAC supports the decriminalization of women who are prostituted.**

It will not help Aboriginal women in prostitution to also decriminalize the men who buy and sell them. Johns and pimps routinely inflict physical and sexual violence and control on Aboriginal women in prostitution in all locations, whether indoors or not. They cause real harms to Aboriginal women and girls by exploiting their poverty, addictions, and add to their histories of abuse.

They maintain the system of prostitution and profit from it. **NWAC supports the criminalization of the purchase of sex. We also support criminalizing those who profit from the prostitution of women and girls.**

Supporters of decriminalizing johns and pimps claim that women will be safer if they are prostituted in legalized brothels and massage parlours. We know that Aboriginal women will mostly remain on the street because racism and poverty selects them for the most exploitative forms of prostitution, wherever they occur. But the more important point is that **brothels and massage parlours are not acceptable spaces for Aboriginal women and girls.** The state has pushed Aboriginal women from one institution to another – residential schools, foster homes, group homes, and prisons, to name a few. NWAC refuses to accept brothels as the new official institution for Aboriginal women and girls and **we refuse to accept that prostitution is the solution to addressing women's poverty.**

How can we end prostitution?

The prostitution of women and girls is not just an issue for women in prostitution. It is not an issue of morality. It is an issue for all women who support equality. As long as Aboriginal women and girls are bought and sold in prostitution, Aboriginal women will never have equality.

NWAC is a member of the Women's Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution. The Women's Coalition has intervened in the court case of *R. v. Bedford* to make these arguments. The Women's Coalition supports the Nordic Model of prostitution policy which uses public education to discourage prostitution; criminalizes pimping and purchase of sex; and provides real alternatives to prostitution for women.

Key Points

1. Aboriginal women and girls need to be respected and valued. We want men to stop buying women and girls in prostitution. We want to stop the sale of human bodies.
2. The state should oppose the commercialization of women's bodies. We want laws that criminalize the buying of sex and the profiting from the prostitution of women and girls.
3. Aboriginal women and girls should not be punished for their own exploitation or lack of options. We support the decriminalization of women in prostitution.
4. Violence against women is serious offense and should not be tolerated. We support the criminalization of the purchase of sex and of those who profit from the prostitution of women and girls.
5. Aboriginal women and girls deserve lives free from poverty and violence. The state must empower and respect Aboriginal peoples to provide for their communities.
6. The movement to end prostitution is not a moral campaign. It is rooted in the equality and human rights protection of women who want something better for women and girls than to be stuck in prostitution and subjected to emotional, physical, and spiritual violence.

Summer Rain Bentham
Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter

VRRWS created life-sized silhouettes representing 115 callers to our crisis line in a one month period. Displayed this month at the Vancouver Public Library for the Montréal Massacre Memorial, each silhouette speaks to the violence that women and girls have experienced at the hands of men.

Each year 1400 women call our rape crisis line to expose male violence against women and the state's failure to respond adequately, if at all. More than 70% of women chose not to report to police. Of those, the Crown prosecutes less than 2% and, of those, less than 1% results in a conviction. In our one month sample, only 17 of the 115 women who called us had any police involvement and, of those, only one man was ever charged and convicted. This left women to find other ways to expose the men and hold them accountable for their sexist violence.

**Together we must fight to end
male violence against women.
No woman is free until all of us are free!**

CALLS TO ACTION



Each silhouette is a call to action. They expose men's violence against women and girls and reveal and reinforce women's resistance to men's violence.

shut out ... but not shut up

SISTER OUTSIDERS IS PRODUCED ON BEHALF OF THE VRRWS COLLECTIVE

Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter
24 hour crisis line: 604-872-8212 • www.rapereleifshelter.bc.ca



LOOKING FOR HOPE: DIARY OF A MISSING WOMAN'S DAUGHTER

I never thought that one day I would have to make a missing persons poster. I never thought I would have to go through the Downtown Eastside handing them out. I never thought that I would have to call the police for help – and I always assumed that if I did, they would respond in a way that was protective of me and my loved ones. And then my mom went missing, and everything I thought was turned upside down.

She went missing in 2004. We were estranged for many years. When I did look for her, I couldn't find her. Despite the Vancouver Police Department telling the Missing Women's Inquiry that they had improved their ways when it came to missing Aboriginal women, they did nothing for me in 2012. The VPD simply told me to conduct my own exhaustive search and then, if I didn't find her, they might be willing to file a missing person's report.

But I had no investigative experience nor did I ever think that I may have to conduct this kind of search. I started reaching out to anyone and everyone I could think of that might be able to help. I created a missing persons poster and handed it out in Vancouver's DTES. I started an online campaign to find my mom. I kept this journal of my search.

Autumn Friesen, T'Sou-ke Nation

MY SEARCH

(I refer to my mother simply as "Hope" to protect her identity.)

I saw my mom on Granville Street in Vancouver sometime in the winter of 2003. She had struggled with addiction since the mid-1980s and had spent a lot of time in the DTES and New Westminister. She had been living off and on the streets for decades and experienced all that surviving in those circumstances entails. She has been off and on the methadone program and welfare. She was likely prostituted.

2005-2011

Occasionally looked for my mom in the phone book and online - no trace of her.

2011

Called Vancouver and New Westminister shelters. Facebook messages to see if any distant relatives/friends had heard about mom (or grandmother) or have information. No one has heard anything for years. My grandmother doesn't likely have contact with her - their relationship was very broken and contact was infrequent and sporadic at best.

November 2011

Contacted by a high school friend of mom's named Linda. She was worried that my mom was missing and asked if I knew her whereabouts.

December 2011

Spoke with Linda again. She said that my mom fit the profile of the women who have been going missing from the DTES and that I might want to think about adding her name to the list.

Mid-February 2012

Called VPD to make a missing persons report. They told me to do as much of a search as I can, exhaust all my other options, and then call them back if I don't find her. They suggested I call the Salvation Army Family Tracing service. They also said this is a New Westminister issue because my mother was last known to be there – this did not make sense as she was living in the DTES too. Called New Westminister Police and left a message.

Feb. 22, 2012

Called Salvation Army Family Tracing Services, left a message, wondering if they'd made any progress (I had filed an application for them to search for mom).

March 22, 2012

Called New Westminister Police. An officer said he would file a "compassion to locate" report or something to that effect and another officer would call me back soon. He said he would not file a missing person report. Constable Malcolm called me back and told me that my mom's last interaction with police was in New Westminister in 2004. Rick Lavallee First Nations Community Policing Office, left a message. Called Sister Watch, Constable Malcolm, left a message.

March 30, 2012

Called and left another message for Constable Lavallee. Called Vancouver Coastal Health to see if mom's been on the methadone program. They referred me to Addiction Services and Mental Health. Called Addiction Services, they referred me back to Coastal Health. Called Coastal Health, they referred me to Addiction Services. Addiction Services told me there's nothing they can do, no information they can give me, and to call Coastal health again. Called Coastal Health again, they suggested I contact Vital Statistics to request a death certificate search. Called Vital Statistics, they won't tell me anything but for a fee of \$27.00 they can do a records search for a death certificate, but they only search a 3 year period. I'm going to exhaust all other possibilities before doing this search, the least hopeful option. Called Fraser Health, they referred me to Mental Health in New Westminister. Called Mental Health in New West,

MISSING

IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT HOPE [REDACTED]
CALL THE POLICE AT 604-525-5411 OR EMAIL
HOPE [REDACTED]@HOTMAIL.COM

(AKA HOPE [REDACTED])

Last Seen: New Westminister or DTES
Missing since: August 2004
Age: 48
Sex: Female
Height: approx 5'5"
Weight: approx 140 pounds
Build: medium build
Eyes: green eyes with thick dark eyebrows
Hair: Dark brown, medium-long length
Race: First Nations/Caucasian
Skin: fair skin with [REDACTED] and right sides of her lower cheeks and [REDACTED]
Tattoo's: [REDACTED] her upper arm, [REDACTED] and a tattoo [REDACTED]

She is a mother, daughter, sister, auntie, cousin, friend, and she is loved. Please help us find her.



HOPE [REDACTED]

[www.facebook.com/Hope\[REDACTED\]IsMissing](http://www.facebook.com/Hope[REDACTED]IsMissing)
email: hope [REDACTED]@hotmail.com

left a message. Spoke with Salvation Army Tracing Service. She wasn't able to find evidence of my mom after December 2003. She believes my mom is in the DTES, but she has no proof.

Late March 2012

Spoke with my aunt. She hasn't heard anything about my mom's whereabouts in years. She told me that she doesn't have my grandmother's phone number...Haven't spoken directly with my grandmother for approximately 10 years.

April 8, 2012

Created "Hope__ Is Missing" page on Facebook, Created a Missing Person poster for my mom. Created hope_ismissing@hotmail.com.

April 11, 2012

Called and left a message for Constable Wilson, at New Westminister Police requesting an update. Emailed poster to Salvation Army Family Tracing service. Dropped off poster to Vancouver Women's Health Collective and Insite. Showed the poster to a few people on the street on Hastings, a woman on the street said she recognized her but didn't know when she saw her last, not recently. Stopped by Atria to get a new list of shelters to contact.

April 15, 2012

Constable Wilson returned my call. He had been unsuccessful in his "quick search" for my mom. He looked at the national criminal database but there is no trace of her having any trouble with the law after August 2004. He wasn't able to get any information from Social Services due to privacy issues. He tells me that the police file will say that the fingerprints are no longer "active" when someone dies. Hers are still listed as active. Messages of support have been pouring in on the Facebook page.

April 16, 2012

Called Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter. Spoke with Louisa Russell. She makes an appointment to see me to help me speak with the police to file a missing person report.

April 17, 2012

Called the Ministry of Social Development – they cannot give me any information due to privacy issues. They take my contact information and my

mom's details and will pass on my message if she is receiving assistance from them. Called First Nations Community Policing Office, left another message. Called New West Mental Health and left a message with them to pass on to my mom if they come into contact with her. They can't give me information for privacy reasons.

April 18, 2012

Spoke to Constable Lavallee and he advised me to call the VPD and ask again to file a missing persons report. An officer on patrol will come and take a statement from me. He told me to ask for file number and Constable Lavallee can check into it using the file number.

April 24, 2012

Face to face appointment with Louisa and her shift partner at Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter. I tell them everything that I have tried so far. She tells me she has called the Sister Watch Tip Line the day before and asked the Operator if, in the case of a missing woman, it was possible to set up an appointment in advance to have a VPD statement taken instead of calling 911 and waiting for an officer - it's so hard to have to talk about all of this and I had already had so much of a run around. The Sister Watch operator said no, that is not what they do, and that this line was for sex workers. Louisa called the VPD's E-Comm Manager to find out what Sister Watch does because, like me, she thought that they had trained officers to help with missing women and that the Operator was unhelpful. The manager called back and said she supported what Operator had said and done. Louisa insisted that she

wanted help setting up a statement so the manager arranged for Sergeant Kuniss to call her. He did and apologized for the run around and said he could send an officer to come and take my statement.

So on the day I went to Rape Relief a VPD officer, Constable Gooderham, took my statement at the transition house so that I could tell my story in an environment where I felt supported. Giving my statement with the support of advocates got me a much better response than when I first tried to contact the VPD alone several months previously. Constable Gooderham was nice enough but he did not seem too hopeful about finding my mother. He said "you know she was a working girl right?" He didn't actually know how to go about adding someone to the Missing Persons List or how to find out if she was a Jane Doe in a morgue. He said he would have to get back to me on this. But, finally, I had an incident number 12-60916. I was satisfied that a missing person's report was finally accepted and that some semblance of a search would take place though I still wasn't that hopeful that they would look very hard. But Constable Gooderham contacted the New Westminister Police where she was last known to be living and asked what they had done to investigate the case. I got a call from the New West Police telling me that I could just call Income Assistance and ask them to leave a message for her. I did that immediately.

As it turns out my mom was living in the Lower Mainland and was on disability. She received my message when she went to pick up her disability cheque and she called me the same day and we got together a couple days later. It was great to give her a huge hug after so many years. I was both overjoyed and outraged! Why had the police made me look for her for so long when all it took was one simple phone call!? How could they let this go on while police were grandstanding that things have improved in the Missing Women Inquiry? Why did I have to imagine such wretched endings for my mother when she was alive and well? I can't express the relief I felt to hear her voice after so many years. I only wish that this could have happened sooner. It could have, if the police had responded better, or at all, to my initial call.

shut out ... but not shut up