



Poco youth learn to recognize and resist sexual exploitation

Poco youth learn to recognize and resist sexual exploitation Sexual exploitation and human trafficking is an issue that cuts across all demographic and geographic boundaries. Port Coquitlam is no stranger to this phenomenon but thanks to a \$4,375 grant from the PoCo Community Foundation, more than 750 local elementary and middle school students are now aware of the issue, making it less likely that they will be victimized. The money was used by Children of the Street Society (COS) to run 25 workshops at Port Coquitlam schools in 2015/16. Facilitators were young adults who are able to make

Connections that a traditional authority figure like a police officer might not. In the sessions, youth learn about, and how to prevent, sexual exploitation. Children and youth can be exploited by adult males or females, says the Society's foundation and executive director Diane Sowden, including gang members, online predators and their own peers. Technology has led to young people being much more accessible and thus more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking than ever before.

According to The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, one in five youth, aged 10 to 17, have reported being sexually solicited online and 75% of them did not tell a parent. But they do talk to their friends and peers and so the workshops delivered by COS have a ripple effect, spreading beyond the classroom. Education is key, Sowden says, adding that because of technology, the opportunity to victimize youth is in every child's bedroom. With education we can empower youth to prevent it happening in the first place.

Taking Care of Ourselves, Taking Care of Others (TCO²) is the only prevention education program on sexual exploitation and human trafficking in BC. On average, TCO² delivers about 650 workshops a year to more than 26,000 children and youth in BC.

For information, go to www.childrenofthestreet.com