

# Human traffickers targeting Indigenous females in London area, organizations Say

By Jim Windle

**LONDON, ON** – First Nations girls and young women in the London area are being specifically targeted for human trafficking according to Elayne Isaacs, former head of Atlohosa Native Family Healing Service in London Ontario.

She reports that First Nations girls in the London area, some as young as 13-years of age, are being befriended, recruited and groomed by handlers.

An independent umbrella group known as the Coalition Assisting Trafficked Individuals in London (CATI London), confirms that young Indigenous people in particular are being targeted.

The troubling fact that is London Police are unaware of this issue and report that they have come across no Indigenous victims in their investigations.

"That's not something we are seeing, from a boots-on-the-ground perspective," Const. Jim Pottruff told the London Free Press. "We aren't coming across an over-representation of (Indigenous victims). I don't know where they are getting that information."

London police have admitted that there is so much distrust of police by Indigenous people,

women especially, that in some cases, the victims do not self-identify as being Aboriginal.

The discrepancy between the statistics of Indigenous organizations and the mainstream police send a red flag to Aboriginal family service organizations and reserves in the London area, as well as urban Indigenous families.

CATI is asking agencies serving Indigenous women to complete a detailed questionnaire whenever they encounter a young Aboriginal victim of human trafficking.

According to Analise Trudell, Program Co-ordinator at the Sexual Assault Center of London, it is "incredibly important" that something be done since police seem to be unaware of the cases she and other Indigenous centres for women deal with every week.

Trudell, Isaacs and others have found that the girls and young men being trafficked for sex in many cases are too young

to even understand what is going on. They are duped into thinking the traffickers are their boy-friends when, in fact they are pimping them out.

In London alone there are 400 frontline workers who have been trained in recognizing the earmarks of human trafficking. Hotels along the 401 corridor seems to be a hotspot for pimps and both voluntary and forced sex trade workers.

Social media and online video games are sometimes being used to make initial contact where they befriend the victim and offer them a way to better life and an invitation to meet to talk about it.

A 2014 study by Public Safety Canada found Indigenous girls to be the prime targets due to colonialism, multi-generational effects of residential school abuses, and loss of identity under the Indian Act, family violence, racism, low self-esteem, poverty addiction and loss of culture.