

Youth, Girls, and Gangs

2015 Community Report: Prevention and Public Engagement



COMBINED FORCES SPECIAL ENFORCEMENT UNIT - BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Youth: A definition.

“Youth” is an ever evolving term, and definitions of what a youth is vary greatly. It no longer fits traditional limits and boundaries, and therefore cannot be restricted or defined by something like an age range. The old adage that kids grow up too fast applies here, when we talk about youth and gangs. Unfortunate experiences can force a youth into life situations they are not old enough nor mature enough to fully understand, and this can alter the growing up process.

According to Dr. Kevin Douglas, a professor of Psychology at Simon Fraser University, behavioural factors have a major impact on determining what youth is versus what an adult is. Traditionally, the ages between 12 and 17 are considered, and widely accepted as, adolescence or youth. In British Columbia, legal definitions suggest that it is at the age of 18 that one enters adulthood; not only is this the voting age, but it is also what the Canada Criminal Code identifies as the legal age one can be tried as an adult in court. However, Dr. Douglas considers the ages 18 to 25 as transitional. Age is a number and there is nothing simplistic about the definition of adult. This is why there are children today who are eight or

nine years old behaving as though they are in their mid-teens, while there are 24-year olds whose behaviour would be deemed juvenile. While easy enough to say kids are growing up too fast, that does not necessarily translate into maturing at the same rate.

Children are overexposed to everything now. Technology keeps us constantly connected. They are seeing things and they are doing things, and they are behaving in ways beyond their years.

“We did everything adults would do. What went wrong?”

William Golding, Lord of the Flies

They are a product of their environment. However, there is no way to censor what they see, hear, or read, and are exposed to. And it is impossible to insulate all children. There is easy access to sex, drugs, and violence easy because society is saturated by it. This however, can be detrimental to the development of children today. Kids are seeing things and doing things because they can but they are not mature enough to understand the consequences of their actions and the repercussions that stem from those behaviours.

The overexposure to sex, drugs, and violence, glorified by mass media, will either cause people to become immune to it, or overwhelm and consume the way they think and factor into their everyday decision-making based on this consumerism. That lack of sophisticated judgement making leaves them vulnerable to what they are being told is an ideal way to live. Impressionable youth are not always mature enough to know how to distinguish between what is right and wrong, and these are the individuals who are vulnerable to being lured into gang life.

The stereotypical view of gang life, and what might be the big draw to those who want to participate in it, is the mythic ideals of sex, drugs, and violence. It is like a never-ending cycle. The drug trade, and the subsequent wealth that drives it, translates into the myth of dating pretty girls, wearing fancy clothes, driving expensive cars, and attending lavish parties. But a very real by-product of the drug trade is the violence. There is always someone who wants what you have and will kill to take it. If a youth views this as a life he wants to be a part of, the experiences will change who he is and who he becomes, if he has the chance to live through it; but on the onset, those consequences are rarely weighed.

Kids are growing up at a rapid rate that far surpasses the maturity of their age because of external factors that cannot be controlled. The allure of sex, drugs, and violence is the crux of gang life.

There are so many anecdotes to support this. In one well publicized instance, two young men in grade 12 in Abbotsford were gunned down. They were not high level drug lords. They were two kids who wanted to be able to pay for a limousine to get to prom. Teachers in B.C. are reporting children as young as nine-years old, on elementary school playgrounds, asking eleven-year olds who they can talk to about selling some drugs.

In recent years there has been extensive research conducted to determine why kids are lured into gangs, yet in spite of the research, no province-wide initiative has been established that focuses exclusively on providing youth with an outlet. There is no one rehabilitation program that will ease the transition out of gangs.

According to Dr. Douglas, the research all determines that youth need to build enduring relationships with role models, perhaps because they come from homes that do not provide them with security or positive role model behaviour. Everything from the ubiquitous End Gang Life initiative to the partnership with the Kwantlen Polytechnic University AT-CURA Project to create **Youth and Gangs: A Parent Resource** booklets, the **End Gang Life: Myths and Realities** video modules, to the countless school talks and community forums and events around British Columbia, prevention is an important part in deterring youth from joining gangs; and one of the best ways to prevent it from happening is to educate parents and kids on the realities of gang life. All these endeavours are in effort to arm the public with as much knowledge as possible in order to prepare them for how to deal with youth before they get involved with organized crime, and gangs. It's all in an effort to keep communities safe.

And though there is no provincial initiative in British Columbia, yet, to help vulnerable and at-risk youth transition out of a criminal or gang lifestyle, there are examples in communities. One such program is the Surrey Wraparound project. Now with provincial and federal backing, the Surrey Wrap Project will have a heightened profile and enhanced capacity to deal with at-risk youth in the community, since the success stories for youth coming out of the initiative are numerous.

Right now, youth are being lured into a lifestyle that they think will afford them fancy clothes, shiny cars, girls, wild parties. The other side of that - that which pays for the life - is the drug trade. It is both lucrative and costly at the same time. The youth who are being tempted by the myths of the gang lifestyle and being introduced to the trade in roles such as dial-a-doping, are getting younger and younger.

How do we keep our children from growing up too fast?

By understanding that the concept of youth is constantly changing.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

The Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia continues to make significant headway in the efforts to fight organized crime and curtail gang activity. Success has been achieved through a multi-pronged approach including enforcement, education and disruption. The results demonstrate the commitment and dedication of

the nearly 400 officers and civilians who make

up the CFSEU-BC along with all of our police, academic, and community partners who we work with every day.

There have been many successes this past year. The CFSEU-BC worked side by side with both the Surrey RCMP and Delta Police Department to suppress and diminish a violent gang conflict. Street level drug traffickers brazenly

shot at each other from moving vehicles and engaged in gun battles on our roads putting the community at risk. There were over thirty recorded incidents since the spring of 2015. The collaboration and information sharing between the partner agencies curbed the level of violence.

After a four year-long investigation, arrests were made and charges laid in regards to the attacks on staff and students of the Justice Institute of British Columbia. This was a multi-jurisdictional, joint-forces investigation involving police departments throughout B.C. resulting in the arrests of two men, including the alleged orchestrator of the attacks. The investigation continues and further arrests will be made. This successful outcome illustrates the dedication, perseverance and tenacity our investigators and support staff displayed in support of a complex and challenging investigation.

Working in collaboration with the Edmonton Police Service and the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team, as well as the RCMP and Vancouver Police Department, another successful CFSEU-BC led investigation resulted in the arrest of two prolific, violent and dangerous offenders from Edmonton. These men committed extremely violent and reprehensible crimes while in the Lower Mainland of B.C. and Alberta in 2014, including a number of murders, attempted murders, and violent home invasions, involving the torture and mutilation of victims. The brazen and transient nature of this crime group heightened the risk to public safety and required a joint forces initiative. It was through effective collaboration, communication and teamwork with our multi-jurisdictional partners that saw the threat eliminated in each of the respective communities.

Our operational successes are bolstered by our prevention measures. The CFSEU-BC End Gang Life initiative continues to evolve and thrive while making inroads with gangsters, those families affected by gang violence, and the general public. Products produced under the End Gang Life banner are diverse, thought provoking and spark honest dialogue. The CFSEU-BC cannot combat gang crime alone. We have worked closely and in true partnership with our many partner agencies as well as our communities across the province and country. This has enabled us to succeed in our overall mandate of combating gang violence and enhancing public safety.

Kevin Hackett, CFSEU-BC Chief Officer



“The more I packaged, the more money I got paid... I never stopped to think about the repercussions because I wasn’t selling it...I convinced myself I wasn’t the one who was hurting anyone.”



girls and gangs

The persistence of the sun streaming in from the gaps between the blinds rouse me from my drug-induced sleep. My face and body damp, I pull the tank top away from skin and raise myself up on my elbows. I fell asleep on the floor in front of the couch. Still groggy from the OxyContin that perpetually subsists in my system I search my mind for the last thing I can remember.

It was well after midnight and I was in his bed when the lights from the security system that

the floor. I gathered my belongings and went home. I had class at Capilano College, but I wasn't going to be able to get through the day. In spite of being out cold for the majority of the night, I was tired and exhausted and didn't have any ability to concentrate. I no longer had the ability to concentrate on anything. Plus I had missed so many classes and assignments this semester that I wasn't even sure why I was still registered. I climbed into my bed at my parents' home. My mother and father had already left for

“My long term relationship with organized crime”

lined the driveway and all around his home woke us. A precaution with his lifestyle. My lifestyle. He scrambled over me, pinning me to the bed, reaching for something in the bedside table drawer on my side. It's where he kept his gun. My heart was racing. I never slept here. I spent nights with him. But I could never sleep here. He rushed out the bedroom door to the living room, and I followed.

“Get the f--k down!” he screamed.

I fell to the floor on my back in front of the couch, wedged between it and the coffee table. My mind was racing and my heart was pounding. There was a bottle of prescription drugs on the table. He opened the door, gun hidden behind his back. He stepped outside and shut the door so I never saw who he was talking to. I could hear their muffled shouting. It was about money, that much I was certain, it always is. I reached for the bottled and twisted the cap off, I swallowed two of the blue pills without water and waited until the fear subsided, until I was numb again.

When I woke in the morning, he was gone. The relationship didn't last.

Groggy, I scrambled to find my clothing all over

work. They don't know my routine. I spend the night at his place and then I come home to sleep during the day.

Once upon a time, I was a kid in East Van. I was perfectly comfortable, loved, and taken care of. We were a family of five, with loving parents and a protective older brother, as well as a younger one.

My girl friend's older brother introduced us to that lifestyle. That's how we got started. Ha, I don't even know where she is now. Hiding? The brother, he committed suicide. There are few ways out.

We were young, partying. The alcohol flowed, everyone taking hits from a joint. We were so cool. The guys were cute, and they paid for everything. This is how it should be, or so I thought.

That's how I met Jake and Terry. They were great. The nicest guys, who were so loving and considerate. And so much fun. I adored these guys. We were instant friends. In your early 20s, it's easy to make friends, and I was looking for a new group and sense of belonging. We had the same sense of humour. They were total sweethearts. And like kids in their 20s in Vancouver, but with a lot of money,

we were regulars on Granville Street. I loved walking into a club with them and their crew - my crew - wherever we felt like going, Friday and Saturday nights. Bottle service, vodka and gin. The guys paid for everything. This is how you party. We were always surrounded by people, who wanted to be like us. We were so cool. We thought we were so cool.

Then they put me to work. It wasn't hard to persuade me, they didn't have to twist my arm. I was willing, I wanted my own money. I saw how everyone responded to the money. It meant power. I wanted the power and respect - or what I was naive enough to believe was power and advantage - that I saw Jake and Terry command just by flashing their money.

My friend and I wanted to backpack around Asia. I certainly wasn't going to pay for that by waitressing.

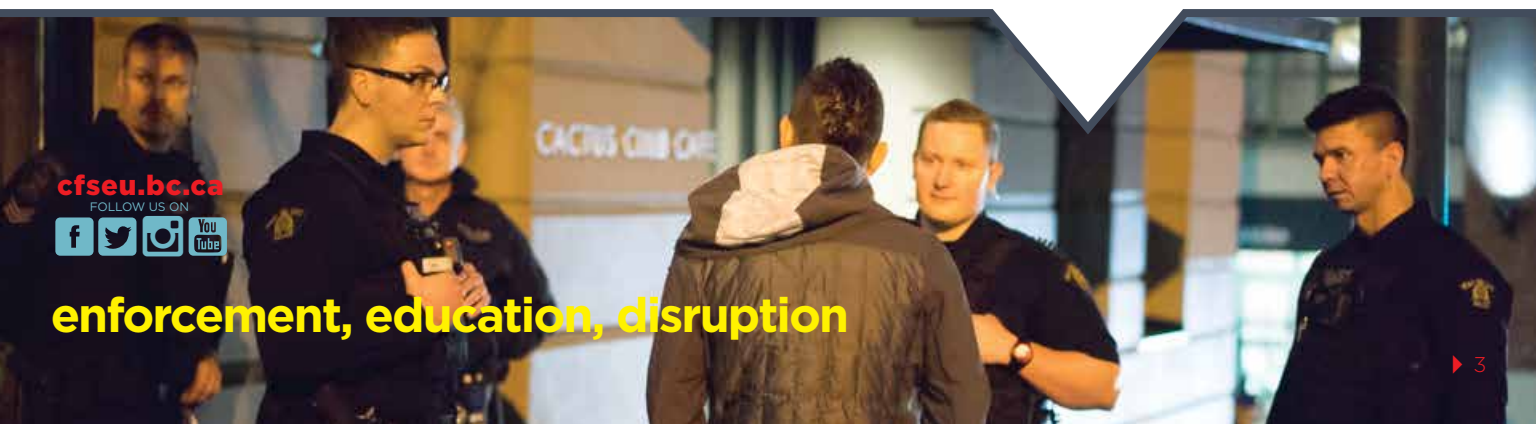
Bagging pills and packaging kilos of coke. The more I packaged, the more money I got paid. I never stopped to think about the repercussions of what I was doing because I wasn't selling it. I never saw where it really went. I acted completely oblivious. I convinced myself I wasn't the one who was hurting anyone.

I eventually stopped working for Jake and Terry. We maintained the friendship, of course. But I had earned what I needed, and had put away a little bit of money to pay for school next September. I was taking Social Work courses.

I had always wanted to be a social worker or a counselor, ever since I was little. I really wanted to work with at-risk kids or those with addiction.

My friend and I went to Asia in the summer of 2009. I think we stayed two or three months. From Vietnam to Cambodia, Bali to Boracay we visited temples, ate delicious food, we drank cheap beer, partied on the most beautiful beaches, and stayed in hostels with other backpackers.

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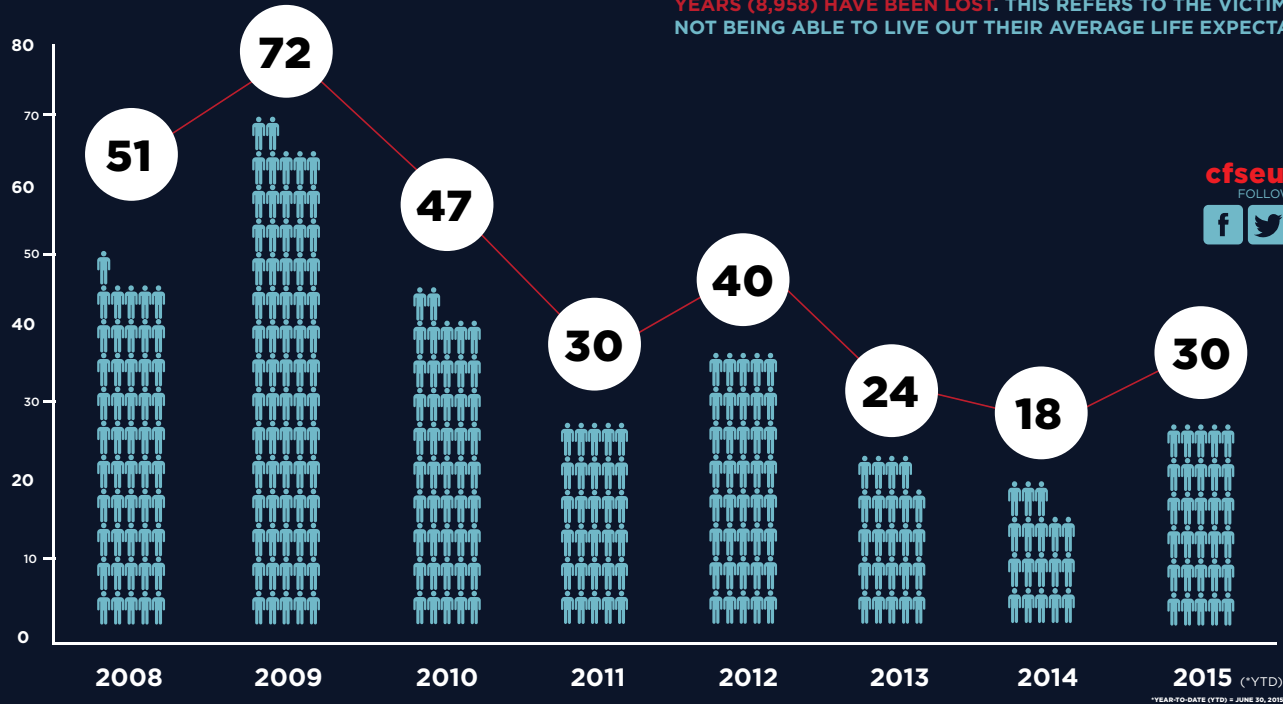
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enforcement, education, disruption

AFTER EXAMINING 344 GANG-RELATED HOMICIDES AND ATTEMPTED HOMICIDES BETWEEN JANUARY 1, 2006 - JUNE 30, 2015, CFSEU-BC ANALYSTS DISCOVERED THE FOLLOWING:

- ⚙️ A GANG-RELATED HOMICIDE OR ATTEMPTED HOMICIDE OCCURS **EVERY 10 DAYS ON AVERAGE.**
- ⚙️ THERE HAVE BEEN **35 MASS GANG SHOOTINGS RESULTING IN 85 VICTIMS.** THIS REFERS TO ANY SINGLE GANG INCIDENT INVOLVING MULTIPLE VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE IN A SINGLE LOCATION AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME.
- ⚙️ **FIFTEEN FEMALES** HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF GANG VIOLENCE.
- ⚙️ **TEN YEARS AGO, THE AVERAGE AGE OF A GANG VICTIM WAS 30 YEARS OLD; IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2015, THE AVERAGE AGE OF A VICTIM IS 25 YEARS OLD. THE YOUNGEST VICTIM WAS 15 YEARS OLD, WHILE THE OLDEST WAS 66.**
- ⚙️ **OF THE TOTAL 172 GANG HOMICIDE VICTIMS, NEARLY 9,000 YEARS (8,958) HAVE BEEN LOST. THIS REFERS TO THE VICTIMS NOT BEING ABLE TO LIVE OUT THEIR AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY.**



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GANG-RELATED HOMICIDES AND ATTEMPTED HOMICIDES IN BC

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It was November. It was cold outside. The rain was hitting against my windows, it was coming down in a slant, it sounded more like banging than tapping, and I looked out to the backyard. A smattering of gold and brown, once crunchy leaves, were wet. My memory isn't always the most clear. I got the call from my friend who I went to Asia with. I think it was a Tuesday. Jake and Terry were dead. I was at home when I got the call but I hadn't turned on the TV that afternoon so I wasn't aware of anything unusual about that day; it was a fairly unremarkable day. This is a day now seared in my memory. It might have been any other day to some. Regular, nothing any of significance. But to some of us, we lost good friends to senseless violence and tragedy. My heart was thudding in my chest. But other than that, I was numb. I was emotionless. I searched my medicine cabinet for a prescription bottle I knew was in there.

Two Saturdays before. We had a rented a movie, ordered pizza and been hanging out at Terry's Richmond apartment. There was a group of us. We had tons of wine and beer, and it was just a

cozy night in with good friends and lots of laughs. I can't even remember what movie we watched. I had been sitting on the floor, back against the couch, sitting at their feet. Now I was envisioning them. Lying on the ground, that was damp from the rain. Lying at my feet. Their lifeless bodies surrounded by pools of blood. My friend had said their killers had taken them to Colebrook Road in Surrey. That's literally where gangster dreams go to die. Jake was probably wearing his favourite T-shirt, hair falling in his face, and Terry... I wonder if they were allowed to have put on sweatshirts. It was cold outside. I wondered if they knew what was going to happen to them. They were taken from the gym just near Terry's apartment. The guys liked to work out there. Jake and Terry. I feel like they were inseparable. Indistinguishable. Jake and Terry. Maybe it was just in my mind. I still hadn't turned on the news at this point so chalk it up to an over active imagination.

The days that followed were, in a word, bizarre. This was my first experience with death, with a close, personal connection. But the media made it such a salacious version of the reality. We cried. We hugged. We talked about what happened and we speculated about who was involved and why.

Somebody would fall apart. We were frightened. Looking over our shoulders. Did they know who we were? Did they know my name? We drank a lot. We took the drugs that numbed the pain and made us forget.

Jake's funeral was intimate. I'm being nice. But let's face it. He didn't have a lot of friends. Nobody showed up for him. Oh, this lifestyle gives you plenty of associates to party with. The people you party with are not your friends. He wasn't close to many people. How could you be? Who would want to be close to that? And who could you trust? This lifestyle is fraught with paranoia. The money, cars, clothes, parties, and girls really quickly distance themselves from the grim reality. Trust me when I say your life is s--t if all you're working for, and subsequently risking your life for, is a pool party in Vegas.

His parents chose to have an open casket. They were making a point. For the handful of us who were there. We were all interconnected, brought together by a similar lifestyle. We had all partied together at some point or other. The bullet hole in his head was still prominent. The stitches and makeup weren't going to make a difference. It was a bullet through the head. He was black and blue. The money was nice.

“As a girl, I knew I flew under the radar. I did this for three years. But I never got caught. This just reaffirmed that I was invincible. Untouchable.”

“You f--king piece of s--t, b--h!” he screamed. “Where the f--k were you? What were you doing? I called you three times, you little wh--e, you didn’t answer. You are a worthless piece of s--t. You have a job to do. If you can’t do it, get out. You’ll never find any work again, you useless b--h.”

I was just getting my hair done. The last time I made the mistake of answering his call while getting my hair done, the entire salon could hear him screaming. It was humiliating.

I looked him directly in the eye. He hit me across the face with the back of his hand and I stumbled. Tears stung my eyes, but I was not going to let them spill out.

I thought I was over the life. I had seen it at its worst. I quit. Walked away. And then got pulled right back in. You forget about the abuse. Pretty and shiny things will lure you back. Alcohol and drugs will make you forget.

In over my head is what I was. So far up a futile food chain. Survival of the fittest. Keep climbing or die.

So I did until I was firmly ensconced at the top, my place in the hierarchy secure. But it wasn’t. It never is. This isn’t a life that comes with security in any sense of the word.

He always controlled what I did. I was a dispensable piece in his game. I was never going to win.

I thought I was out. There was definitely a period when reality affected me. I was living downtown, I was waitressing, I was really living again. The money wasn’t as easy, there wasn’t a lot, but it was legitimately earned.

I pulled my coat tighter, and slung my purse on my shoulder before getting off the flight. This trip left me feeling uneasy. I texted a friend to say I had a bad feeling, looking for reassurance. I was really lucky to even be on this flight. It was one week before Easter. I flew to Montreal, on a buddy pass, to make a drop off for him. A “buddy pass” gave me a priority less than stand-by. There was really no guarantee as to whether I was getting on any flight. I managed to buy it off some guy, some baggage handler, who worked for the airline. I wasn’t wasting any money flying across Canada. It was risky, I realize, but we hadn’t encountered a lot of trouble up until then. But this was close to Easter, the airports were busy and flights were oversold. I had to take five-hundred thousand dollars worth of drugs with me. That’s a lot of cocaine. I guess domestic flights don’t go through as rigorous a screening process.

My job had me flying all over the country with suitcases full of thousands of dollars. I was home in Vancouver maybe two days out of the month. As

a girl, I knew I flew under the radar. I did this for three years. But I never got caught. This just reaffirmed that I was invincible. Untouchable.

I came off the plane in Montreal dazed and confused from drinking myself to sleep on the flight. Those little bottles of wine are potent when paired with prescription pills. I headed to the baggage claim area when I noticed a very official looking guy hanging around. There were not a lot of people in the airport, and only bags from my flight circling around one carousel. I tried to remain calm. I don’t know if it was the paranoia and skittishness from the drug induced haze I was still in, but to me he

outside the hotel. Uneasiness envelops me. I’m in the bushes to the right side of the building. I’m being scratched by the shrubs, but I’m concealed. It’s really comical in retrospect, but the paranoia will get you. Thankfully, no other guests saw me. What if the bag didn’t come today and it is police officers coming to arrest me? I just want to go home. The bag doesn’t come. There’s a trepidation that’s settling in my stomach. This dull ache inside of me, that has me constantly feeling anxious and nauseated. I call the airline and a screaming match ensues. I’m stuck. I can’t do my job. I don’t actually know what the consequences will be for me. Suddenly any confidence and assurance I ever felt

“You forget about the abuse. Pretty and shiny things will lure you back. Alcohol and drugs will make you forget.”

was an undercover police officer. My main fear was always that I was being followed by cops everywhere I went. I thought I heard a dog barking in the background somewhere and I was sure they had found my bag.

I want to text him to tell him about the police officer and my nervousness. But my phone battery has now completely died. I’m alone without any recourse. I’m afraid this officer knows what I do, what I’m waiting for, why I was there, and that I would be arrested. Eventually all the other passengers have taken their bags and are gone. I’m alone. The man I thought was an undercover police officer is gone. I go to the counter to inquire about my bag. Barely maintaining my composure, I’m on the verge of hysterics. Worse than losing the drugs is the possibility of jail. You would think I would be afraid of the gang literally killing me, but I wasn’t. They weren’t going to harm me. Someone tells me my bag accidentally ended up on a flight to Edmonton and will arrive tomorrow and be delivered to my hotel in Montreal. I demand my bag. I start to get angry. I tell them I refuse to leave the airport without my suitcase. I still had to make the drop off. I was going to be trapped in Montreal if I didn’t get a hold of that bag. Eventually I concede defeat. I want to text him to say I needed a lawyer, not knowing if I’ll be returning back to Vancouver at this point. I assumed he would provide me the best one. It’s in his interest to keep my mouth shut.

I get a hotel near the airport. I shut off all my phones. I didn’t want to be reached. I get high, pop some pills, and wash it down with a tonic of alcohol. In the morning, I wait

dissipated. It was now that it occurred to me my life was on the line. Plus there are people in the city of Montreal who are expecting these drugs, and they certainly don’t care about my welfare. I’m terrified I am on the hook for five-hundred thousand dollars. People have paid with their lives for a lot less. What are they going to do to me? What is he going to do to me? It was another two, maybe three days, before the bag arrived. I stayed sedated with what pills I had brought with me and the alcohol I bought at a nearby liquor store. I didn’t want to venture far from my hotel. The airline covered my costs. This has never happened to me before. And I was trapped in Montreal because there was no way I could return to Vancouver without recovering my bag. I was trapped in this life. The bag arrives, escorted by airline staff, it’s Wednesday. The drugs are all there. Untouched. I never stop shaking.

I was constantly worried about going to jail. I feared being arrested and having to explain myself to my parents and brothers. I don’t know if I thought I’d cause them pain, or make them feel shame. Selfishly, I only thought of myself and how uncomfortable having that conversation might be. It rarely occurred to me I could be killed. I don’t know why I felt my life was so special. Even when I was paranoid about being arrested, I never really thought about the consequences of what I was doing. These are guys who weren’t afraid to pull a trigger to assert their dominance over a territory.

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These are guys who tax for a lot less and will take away a lot more if they don't like you. For me, I was safe in the hierarchy. Losing that sum of money and drugs was just the cost of doing business.

He texted again, now that the bag was secure. He wanted me to come home to Vancouver and then go back to Montreal, and then maybe Ottawa. It was Easter. I had a family who would notice my absence. I shut off my phones. I didn't bother turning them on for over a week. I would have to pay for this disobedience. It doesn't matter. That money was always theirs.

The money isn't mine. It doesn't belong to anyone. It's an elaborate scam. These guys running the show, they know what they're doing. Hence the high taxes. You can leave, but it'll cost you. \$5000

“This is how gangs typically operate: they latch on to whatever the vulnerability and exploit it until an individual is doing exactly what the gang wants.”

dollars; \$10,000 dollars. Even though I thought I earned that money it was never mine. If I didn't answer my phone, I had to pay. If I wasn't available to run drugs, I had to pay. What was I really earning? What was I saving? You don't have savings in this trade. You party. You drink, you buy drugs. There is no guarantee of life beyond 30, so you don't plan. I lost my 20s. An entire decade wasted. I didn't live. I was already dead. And when I got out, I didn't have a penny of my own. I didn't have friends who loved and supported me. I don't have a nice car today, and I rent in Surrey.

My punishment for the Montreal trip was to take some money to Calgary. By Greyhound bus. I was “duffeling” it. Glamorous. It was 12 or 15 hours on a cramped, and stale smelling bus, with stained seats. The people along for the ride looked unsavoury. All I had to do was take the money to Calgary and get the drugs he sent me to pick up. Two guys would be meeting me at the bus depot. I pulled my hood over my head, slunk down, and closed my eyes willing the ride to go by faster.

When I arrived, it was dark, there was still a biting chill in the air. I didn't have a coat with me so hopefully this deal wouldn't go on long. I make eye contact with a large, hulking, guy with buzzed hair. He was with a shorter, dark haired guy. They walk outside to the parking lot and towards a vehicle in the back. I follow. They want to count the cash and I can see they've got the drugs I was there to pick up.

I open up the bag and someone hits me in the back. The smaller guy. I fall face first on to the cold, damp pavement. Then they kick me twice, three times, in the side, in the stomach, once in the head with heavy boots. They take the money, I don't get the drugs. They drive off. I lay there, curled up, trying to catch my breath and process. No one would have found me till the morning maybe. It was late and dark, and I was tucked in the back of the parking lot. My lip is bloody from falling and hitting my chin, I bit myself. My face is bruised and scratched. My head is pounding. I get up, I have to clean myself up for the bus ride home.

Does the punishment fit the crime?

I needed out so badly. I was spiraling. I was living with my older brother, leaving the house in the morning to go to a “job” only to return shortly after he left for work in order to feed my drug and alcohol problem and then sleep all day. I was scared all

the time. I was anxious. Could they kill me? Would I go to jail? I was in deep. I was sick. I had no idea what I was doing with myself. I was just numbing the pain. Trying to forget who I was.

I'm trying. I attend group therapy and meetings. Trying to get my life back. I foresee years of therapy ahead to deal with the post traumatic stress disorder. I heard the stories of others who were in a similar place in their lives. I want to talk to kids, young boys, and especially young girls. This is not a life they want. This is not a life that comes with hope or a future. I still look over my shoulder. Though I think I'm getting better. If I think a car has been driving behind me for a little too long, I still pull over and write down the license plate number. There is no glamour. There is no excitement. The rush isn't real. That's the reality. You lie to yourself, and you lie to those who genuinely love you. It always ends the same way. Cold, alone, lonely, friendless. Those \$300 dollar jeans are worthless if you've got one foot in the grave. I feel like I've endured some exceptional moments. I've had unbelievable experiences that I can barely recount. The experiences are entirely surreal. But I would give them all back. They aren't good memories. I don't have friends. Not real friends. I don't have a diploma or a degree. I didn't get to go to university. I don't have a career. I made major mistakes. If I can discourage one person, it'll make a huge difference.

You cannot be a part of that lifestyle and stay

sober. The drugs are too easy to access. The fear that envelops your existence is not worth anything.

There are days now when I want back in. It would be easy. I will never see that kind of money again, and I used to be able to make more money in one day than I would in months now, maybe years. It's an easy job. I forget though, what it was like. I've forgotten too many times before but this time, I won't. It's like going back to an abusive boyfriend. It's like going back to the job with no growth or potential. It's like going back to dead.

I was young, I was stupid, and I would caution any kid against this. Don't waste that time in your life. What I lived through, I didn't come out unscathed. I came out damaged, with wounds that'll never heal, and emotional scars that will linger forever. I just came out alive.

I'm paying debts. I will always pay both financial and emotional debts. And no one will give a s--t when you're gone.

There is a complex subculture to gangs and it is the involvement of women. It is so multi-faceted; there are many roles a woman can play in a gang. Usually we think “girlfriend,” but that in itself has many different meanings. There's the bona fide, or “official” girlfriend, there are side-pieces, there are flings, and there are the mothers of gangsters' children, and there are even wives. Then there are strippers and escorts who also part of this life that money buys. There are also female gang members. It is a complicated life and most girls are naive to the horrors.

It is difficult to say if it is a lack of self-worth, self-identity, self-esteem, the need for a sense of belonging, or a weak resolve; and it is probably a combination of a number of these things. These women end up being taken advantage of and abused. They are used, not only for sex, but also manipulated to do things that make them inextricably linked to the drug trade. They are belittled, made to feel shame, and dehumanized. A lot of the time they feel worthless.

Some of the strongest women around fall into the trap. Something in their past, their childhood, or their home life is not quite idyllic, and they're looking for attention. This is how gangs typically operate: they latch on to whatever the vulnerability and exploit it until an individual is doing exactly what the gang wants. And others are just so unbelievably naïve that having lived an entirely sheltered life and upbringing, they exist within the context of a relationship, passive and subordinate to the more domineering partner.

These woman, highly intelligent, beautiful girls from good homes, but clearly lacking any self-awareness, need to know they can walk away. ■

You're fast asleep. A sound rouses you. It's a knock on the front door. Your bleary eyes search for the time in the dark. The alarm clock reads 2:58.

There's the knock again. You wrap a robe around you and head downstairs. You look through the peephole, there are two police officers standing on the other side of the door.

You know. When the police knock on your door in the middle of the night, nothing good awaits on the other side.

In January of 2015, the CFSEU-BC, in partnership with Odd Squad Productions and Brightlight Pictures, unveiled a project that had been in the works for well over a year. *End Gang Life: Myths & Realities* is a series of six gang prevention and education videos that provides a unique and thought-provoking look into many of the myths surrounding gangs and exposes the truths and perils of it, all with the aim of promoting community conversations about gangs, their effects on communities, and to prevent and deter youth and young adults from entering organized crime and gang life.

Each video, which runs between 7 and 12 minutes long, features interviews with parents who have lost children to gang-related murders, police officers who have spent years investigating gangs and gang-related homicides, and former gang members who give rare insight into the world of gangs and gang violence.

The individual stories are, at the same time, both unique and familiar. But the feelings of torture and heartbreak belong to the individual, and no matter how much time passes and dulls the pain, it is still there, it is felt and experienced in the individual's daily life. The messages the modules relay are poignant and powerful. They invoke feelings of heartache, hopelessness, and tragedy. The modules stir up emotions and illicit a variety of reactions from its audiences. These are the true stories of real people affected by the horrors of gang life.

The tears are genuine. The anguish is relived. Fear is palpable. The horrors of gang life are real. Every person who volunteered to tell their story suffered in one way or another, and yet still wanted to share their story in hopes of sparing more people from having to experience all that gang life has to offer. The modules dispel the myths of gang life and eliminate the lore.

Myths & realities:

“Mom, they don't murder girls”

A memorial bench has been dedicated to Brianna Kinnear, the victim of a brutal gang murder on February 3rd, 2009. Brianna, 22, was found shot to death in a pickup truck on Oxford Street in Coquitlam; her dog Ferdinand, alive, still by her side when she was found. Her mother, Carol, often visits the bench, remembering their argument hours before her young life was taken, when Brianna uttered those fateful words about her involvement with her then-boyfriend whose gang affiliations posed a direct



Brianna's murder remains unsolved.

If you have any information, please contact:

The IHIT tip line at **1-877-551-4448**

Crime Stoppers at **1-800-222-8477**



END GANG LIFE.CA

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commitment and dedication

Website and Social Media

The CFSEU-BC unveiled a brand new, redesigned website in order to better engage the public. Launched in the fall of 2015, the website is a valuable resource to the public, and a tool for law enforcement personnel to utilize. The new website will further increase the CFSEU-BC's public profile, not to mention highlight the work being done around the province to combat gang crime.

The new, mobile-ready, website is comprehensive, detailed, and visually thought-provoking. Users will be able to access information on a number of areas within the CFSEU-BC and become knowledgeable on the issue of gangs and organized crime not only in their community, but across the country. While enforcement, suppression, and disruption are a large part of what the CFSEU-BC does, education and prevention are priorities as well. The End Gang Life webpage will serve as hub for prevention material such as the *Youth and Gangs: A Parent Resource* handbooks and the *Myths and Realities* video modules and facilitators guide, as well as links to enable visitors to navigate to the different resources in an efficient way.

The CFSEU-BC continues to use Social Media to enhance its profile in the community and strengthen its relationship with the public. The open, two-way conversation that the CFSEU-BC is a proponent of, and renewed commitment to utilizing available online tools, has led the organization to see growth of numbers and engagement with the public. The CFSEU-BC has made a commitment to sharing information and being transparent via its Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube channel, as well as Instagram where the organization can interact with the public. The CFSEU-BC aims to continue evolving and being a leader in the law enforcement community by employing new and innovative technology in order to better serve the public.



Understanding Youth and Gangs: A parent resource.

Ultimately, it is the parents who assume responsibility for their children. Children are a source of pride for their parents but children are also a source of consternation. In spite of their upbringing, children from all walks of life are lured into gang life. Parents are either blamed or questioned when their children kill or are killed because of this high-risk lifestyle. There are numerous resources and a plethora of information available to parents and the community that will help them in dealing with troubled and at-risk youth, as well as provide tips on how to speak with children to deter them from joining gangs or engaging in criminal behaviour. **Understanding Youth and Gangs: A Parent Resource** is available in a number of languages: English, Punjabi, Cantonese, Arabic, Somali, Spanish, and Korean. Its reach

is significant. The booklet is a testament to the thriving relationship the CFSEU-BC continues to foster with the Kwantlen Polytechnic Acting Together - Community University Research Alliance Project (AT-CURA). Significant time has been dedicated to the research and understanding of what factors lead a youth to a life of crime.

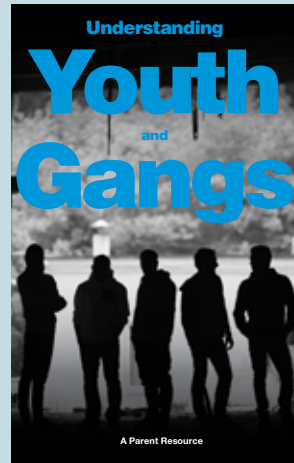
In the past year, over 50,000 of these booklets have been distributed to communities across Canada. Books were sent to organizations that help at-risk youth, new immigrants, schools, community centres, temples, as well as distributed at Community Safety forums, the Sikh

Summit, and countless other community events. Having been translated into so many languages, the resource can be a helpful tool. The research all suggests that youth need to build enduring relationships with role models. Perhaps this is because they come from homes that do not provide them with security, though this is not always the case. Some kids are not open to talking to their parents.

These kids need to be able to develop their communication skills, have a sense of gratitude instilled in them, and be nurtured to be empathetic individuals. If they come from difficult home lives, those qualities would not necessarily be intrinsically instilled in them. Beyond this emotional scope, there is a need for practical life skills to be taught, including academic tutoring,

resume-building, and job-relevant skills. All of this would come from creating an environment in which youth have a safe space to exist under the guidance of those who genuinely cared about their wellbeing and would set them on a path away from destructive behaviour and the lures of gang life.

Parents can benefit from recognizing the signs of gang involvement and criminal activity. **Understanding Youth and Gangs: A Parent Resource** is a valuable tool. It is full of knowledge and recourse to arm any parent as they try to deal with keeping their children out of gangs and away from organized crime.



You wanna roll like a gangster?



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