

September 29th, 2014

Dear School Administrators and Educators,

Re: Appropriate Halloween Costumes:

Halloween is fast approaching and once again Children of the Street Society is raising awareness about inappropriate Halloween costumes which sexualize children and youth, and glamorize sexual exploitation, pimping, and gang lifestyles. Costumes geared towards children and youth have become increasingly sexualized. Costumes such as “prisoner of love,” and “pimp and ho,” create false perceptions of the perpetrators and victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Sexual exploitation of children and youth is a devastating form of human trafficking. The average age of entry into the sex trade in Canada is 12-14 years old. Sexual exploitation involves the exchange of a sexual act for **any** consideration such as drugs and alcohol, a place to stay, popularity, or acceptance. This is illegal and child abuse and it is not the youth’s fault.

Young people are recruited into exploitive situations for a variety of reasons, from false promises, gifts, addiction, coercion or control. Recruitment happens everywhere, including school grounds, shopping malls, transit, and particularly online through social networking sites and chat rooms. Sexual exploitation also includes the issue of child sexual abuse images. Due to the prevalence of online activity, image sharing and online facilitated sexual exploitation has significantly increased. In fact, Cybertip.ca recently issued a warning about sextortion: a crime where the perpetrator threatens to distribute images that the victim provided them unless more photos are sent or money is paid.

Victims of sexual exploitation face significant barriers and long term effects including homelessness, violence, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol addiction, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, drug affected babies, post-traumatic stress syndrome from physical, emotional and sexual abuse, social stigma, barriers to future employment and premature death. Dressing up in costumes that glamorize sexual exploitation or sexualizes young people only creates social acceptability and desensitization of this disturbing issue.

Dressing up as a “pimp” or a “gangster” also glamorizes the perpetrators of sexual exploitation, further normalizing this issue in the public eye. Many young men are lured into a gang or pimping lifestyle through false promises of money, power, respect, a sense of family, and protection – promises which lead to violence, criminal activity, and the risk of death. Earning a profit off of the buying and selling of children and youth, is sexual exploitation, and is illegal.

As a society, we have the unique opportunity to recognize that these costumes are not socially responsible, and instead encourage youth to emulate positive role models through what costumes they choose to wear. **This year, we are asking the community to be socially responsible by choosing Halloween costumes that do not glamorize either the perpetrators or the victims of child and youth sexual exploitation. We are also encouraging the community to avoid costumes that glamourize gang or pimping lifestyles.** Instead, please encourage children and youth to choose appropriate costumes that represent their own individuality and creativity.

Children of the Street Society is a provincial non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and youth since 1995. The Society’s mission is to take a proactive approach through public awareness, education and early intervention strategies to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth while offering support to families.. For more information visit childrenofthestreet.com. Please also Like us on Facebook and Twitter @ChildrenoftheSt. We wish your students a safe and fun Halloween. For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at 604-777-7510 or at info@childrenofthestreet.com.

On Behalf of Children of the Street Society,



Diane Sowden, Executive Director