



October 11, 2011

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 glamorize the sexual exploitation of children and youth, the gang lifestyle and costumes which sexualize children and youth.

Dressing up as a “pimp” or “ho” glamorizes the sexual exploitation of children and youth, which is a form of abuse and modern day slavery. In reality, the sexual exploitation of children and youth leads to multiple, long-term disadvantages to the victim including homelessness, 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, and barriers to future employment.

Recruiters often attempt to lure children and youth by making false promises and offering gifts or intangible things such as popularity, love, and belonging. Children and youth can be recruited *anywhere*, including school grounds, shopping malls, and online through social networking sites and chat rooms.

Once again this year, the Society would like to take this message one step further. ***Not only are we asking the community to be socially responsible by wearing Halloween costumes which do not glamorize the sexual exploitation of our children and youth, we're also asking children, youth and adults to take the notion of social responsibility one step further by not wearing costumes which glamorize the gang lifestyle.***

With troubling similarities between recruitment into a life of sexual exploitation, youth who are recruited into the gang lifestyle are also made false promises of money, power, respect, a sense of family, and protection – promises which lead to violence, criminal activity, and the risk of death. The issues of sexual exploitation and gangs not only have similarities, they can also be connected. Girls can play a variety of roles in a gang, including participating in criminal activity, and being sexually exploited by male gang members.

This year, the message is simple: it's not socially acceptable to dress up as a ‘pimp,’ gangster, or sex trade worker this Halloween. Earning a profit off of the buying and selling of children and youth, glamorizing the sex trade or a gangster lifestyle, is only further contributing to our false perceptions about these harsh realities.

Please encourage your school community to choose socially responsible Halloween costumes that do not glamorize the sexual exploitation of children and youth, sexualize young people, or glamorize gang involvement. 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 Society and federal Charity 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. The Society's vision is a world where children and youth are safe and free from all forms of sexual exploitation. For more information visit childrenofthestreet.com.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diane Sowden', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Diane Sowden, Executive Director