

October 11, 2012

Dear Parents, Guardians, 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, glamorize sexual exploitation, pimping, and gang lifestyles. Costumes geared towards children and youth have increasingly become sexualized. Costumes such as "sexy teacher's pet," "prisoner of love," and "pimp and ho," create false perceptions of the perpetrators and victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The sexual exploitation of children and youth, a devastating form of human trafficking, is a serious concern in our society today. The average age of entry into the sex trade in Canada is 12-14 years old. Sexual exploitation of children and youth 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 a form of child abuse and modern day slavery, 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. Boys and girls can be recruited *anywhere*, 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, 1 in 5 youth have been sexually solicited online, while 75% did not tell a parent. Child pornography offences in Canada have increased by 900% over the past 5 years, while Canada remains second in the world to hosting the most child sexual abuse images online, next to the United States.

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 and preventable 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 from 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. ***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 awareness one step further by not wearing costumes which glamorize 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. 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. 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