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# **ESCAPING THE TRAP:**

PREYING ON THE VULNERABLE FROM HOMELESS GIRLS TO THE GIRL NEXT DOOR



Dan Pearce/Metroland

## Malvern ready to host Junior Carnival

**TARA HATHERLY** 

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The Toronto Caribbean Carnival's youngest performers took over centre court at Scarborough's Malvern Town Centre on Tuesday to drum

up excitement for the annual Junior Carnival Parade and Family Day.

Almost 100 kids in colourful Mas costumes decked with sequins and feathers put their best dance moves on display under the court's skylight, as onlookers clapped along to the beat of the island music.

This year's Junior Carnival Parade hits the streets of Malvern at 11 a.m. this Saturday, July 16. Starting at the Malvern Community Centre, 30 Sewells

>>>FAMILY, page 31

## Funding available for school renovation work

Schools in Scarborough will be the first to benefit from a \$297 million provincial boost to renovation of aging education infrastructure in Toronto.

The money will allow for a range of repairs and renewals at Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District >>>WORK, page 24















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# **ESCAPING THE TRAP:**

# PREYING ON THE VULNERABLE FROM HOMELESS GIRLS TO THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

#### MIKE ADLER AND FANNIE SUNSHINE

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Girls are growing up online, and many in Greater Toronto spend as much time with social media as they do in school, chatting, liking, posting.

They don't know pimps are watching.

Predatory men and boys are waiting not just at the shopping mall, but on Instagram, Snapchat, free dating sites, anywhere they can catch a girl at the right moment.

Experts say that could be after she argues with her parents, or expresses vulnerability about her looks.

"They'll tell her how smart she is, how pretty she is, that she's a grown-up who can make her own decisions and doesn't have to listen to her parents," says Michele Anderson, human trafficking advocate for Toronto's Covenant House.

Sixteen is a typical age, but girls as young as 12 are targets.

"They tell their life stories online," saying things like, "I look fat today," said Det.-Sgt. Nunzio Tramontozzi, head of the Toronto Police human trafficking team.

Trolling, traffickers start out by assuring the girl, "You're not, you look great," he said.

"Within days, they hook them."

Online luring is one reason sex trafficking happens around Greater Toronto

- a hub for this type of crime through which victims are moved quickly from hotel to hotel - not just to homeless girls, but to the girl next door.

If a child looks for validation or acceptance in an online space, and someone offers it, "that's an adrenaline rush, that's dopamine," said Debbie Gordon, director of kidsmediacentre at Centennial College.

Online culture puts pressure on children to get approval for posts, or to build up followers, without really caring who those followers are, she said.

Some may say, "If I show more, take more risks, the next selfie will get more likes," added Gordon. "You see so many kids taking such incredible risks."

A trafficker will suggest meeting for dinner or coffee, and will shower a girl with expensive designer purses or cell phones, said Anderson.

They'll then head to a hotel, where the girl is introduced to some of the trafficker's friends, and she's forced to have sex with them in exchange for the gifts she received.

"They'll say, 'What, you think this is all free?'" Anderson said.

If the girl resists, blackmail ensues. Or the trafficker gets aggressive and abusive.

Victims are typically allowed home at night, but the threat of physical violence always looms if they dare tell anyone what's happening, Anderson said.

In Olivia's case, the trafficker was someone she knew from high school, entering her life when she was about 20, struggling with her mental health and severely low self-esteem.

There was a honeymoon phase where she felt special and loved. Olivia (not her real name) began living with the trafficker, feeling like she hit the jackpot.

"He played on those vulnerabilities, knowing I wanted this relationship to be my forever."

Olivia worked as his girl for two years, in hotel rooms from Burlington and Oakville to Markham, Richmond Hill, and downtown Toronto.

"To some degree, the industry itself met a lot of my needs. Now I felt good at something. I felt desired."

Leaving was difficult. She was incredibly scared for her reputation, and her trafficker threatened to

He played on those vulnerabilities, knowing I wanted this relationship to be my forever."

- Olivia

send her sex ads to people she cared about.

One day, a police officer posed as a John, checking Olivia's identification to see if she was underage. She wasn't, and wasn't too receptive to his questions, but kept his card.

It was six months before she called, hoping to escape and rebuild her life.

Some trafficked women and girls finally, literally run for their lives. Others are held in place by ingrained feelings of love, dependence or fear.

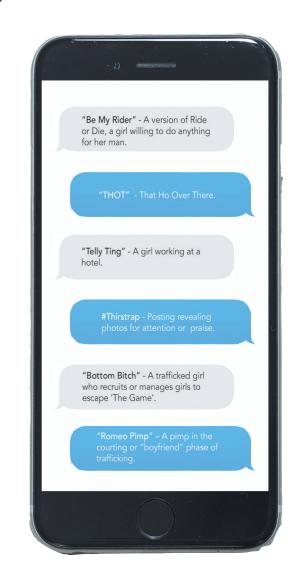
Luring is sometimes done by women, most often by friends who are victims themselves.

Some are told they could be "partners" with their trafficker if they recruit replacements.

Recruiting is a means of self-preservation, a chance to have sex with fewer people, said Carly Kalish, a therapist for the Scarborough-based East Metro Youth Services.

"The illusion of being their partner is a big part of why you stay, but it's never actually the case," she said.

**NEXT:** How Ontario's new anti-trafficking strategy could convict more traffickers and offer crucial support to more survivors.



This is some of the language and words used which could indicate a girl is trapped in "The Game" (prostitution).

Sources: East Metro Youth Services, kidsmediacentre, Toronto police detective



### **MORE ONLINE**

**Karly's story:** From being homeless and a drug addict who engaged in the sex trade as a teenager, Karly found a way out and is now giving hope as a peer counselor to women and girls who survived sex trafficking or are still in the sex trade. (bit.ly/karlystory)

**Signs a girl is being lured:** Experts say sex trafficking masks itself as a typical relationship for a girl. Parents and friends can spot these and other warning signs a girl is in a dangerous relationship. (bit.ly/luringsigns)



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#### **PHOTOS**

Thousands came out to party at the Junior Carnival / 16



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# ESCAPING THE TR

COMING UP WITH A CO-ORDINATED STRATEGY TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

### MIKE ADLER AND FANNIE SUNSHINE

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The young man stands before the judge, barely crossing the age threshold of being tried in adult

Charges against him are lengthy and grim: a snippet includes forcible confinement, uttering threats, sexual assault and human trafficking.

Police know the human trafficking charge will be the hardest one to land a conviction on, mainly due to the victim's unwillingness to testify or memory lapses, and will often take pleas for lesser offences.

The total number of human trafficking convictions in Toronto since 2014 now stands at nine; in the first week of July alone, Toronto police arrested seven men within a four-day span on human trafficking charges, one case involving a victim as young as 14.

And one York Region cop has no problem dropping human trafficking charges if it means pimps will land in jail.

"It doesn't mean they all walk, they all got away," said Det. Sgt. Thai Truong, adding as a

>>>HUMAN, page 3

# **Pokemon Go** players try to 'catch 'em all'

More than 1,000 attend official Canadian launch party at the base of the CN Tower

### **KELSEY CHENG**

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Marina De La Peña remembers playing and watching Pokemon when she was little. Now at the age of 20, she never thought she'd be meeting more than a thousand people who shared a collective memory of Pokemon – at the same

"I grew up with Pokémon - I've watched all of the anime and played most of the games," said De La Peña, who gathered at the base of the CN Tower Monday night with her brother Rodrigo and many other Pokemon Go players to celebrate the official release of the game in Canada.

"I am so happy about this launch because I get to meet people who love what I love. It's brilliant.'

The launch of the game was particularly special to De La Peña, who was inspired by

Pokémon to study animation at Toronto's Max the Mutt college in Toronto.

She said the augmented reality aspect is what draws her to the new game.

"Pokemon has always been about travelling," she said. "Now you get to explore the city while playing the game and you get to meet new friends along the way. It's a really positive experience."

The highlight of the evening was when a life-sized Pikachu mascot showed up, attracting hundreds of fans. Tanisha

>>>PLAYERS, page 8



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Thornhill: 7562 Yonge St. Toronto: 793 Spadina Rd.





### Sex trafficking hurts.

There's another side to the sex industry. If you or someone you know needs help, call 9-1-1. Find out more at <a href="mailto:yrp.ca/theotherside">yrp.ca/theotherside</a>.

Women's Support Network Helpline: 905-758-5285

#TheOtherSide



# Human trafficking issue is 'a provincial, national crisis'

>>>from page 1

police officer, as long as the accused is found guilty for what he's done and justice is served, "I'm happy with that."

The provincial government unveiled the long-awaited human trafficking strategy Thursday, June 30, which calls for an investment up to \$72 million aimed at increasing awareness and coordination, enhancing justice-sector initiatives and improving survivors' access to services. Currently, Ontario is grappling with roughly 65 per cent of police-reported human trafficking cases in Canada.

The strategy involves nine ministries and is based on four pillars: strong leadership through an anti-human trafficking office through CommSoc, which will collect and share information; increased awareness and community supports to help survivors heal; justice sector initiatives to identify trafficking earlier and hold traffickers to account; and indigenous-led approaches.

Det. Sgt. Nunzio Tramontozzi of Toronto Police Service's human trafficking team called the strategy a great start, noting specialized Crowns are a police asset.

If Crowns don't understand "trauma bonds" between the victim and pimp, it's hard for them to wrap their mind around why a girl would protect a guy who brutalized her for years, he said, adding instead of forging ahead and putting the victim on the stand, they tend to take pleas for lesser offences.

"As of last summer we only had one (human trafficking) conviction in Toronto," he said. "One guy. It's pretty sad."

Ontario's Attorney General Yasir Naqvi, who was on hand for the strategy's release, called human trafficking an increasing, complex problem.

A specialized team of Crown attorneys will ensure cases are prosecuted effectively and consistently across province, he said, adding expanded quick response programs will be in place to help victims, including paying for things such as travel costs, identification replacement and enhancing 24-hour crisis assistance.

But not everyone was pleased with the strategy.

Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MPP Laurie Scott, who put forward a private member's bill Saving the Girl Next Door, which calls for victims to obtain restraining orders against their trafficker and sue them for damages, said while the strategy is a step in the right direction, it ultimately falls short.

The Conservative MPP took issue with the lack of permanent multiyear funding and firm deadlines for establishing a multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary task force.

In an interview with Metroland

Media Toronto prior to the strategy's release, she said the province needs to take the lead in human trafficking enforcement.

"It's modern-day slavery," she said. "Will all survivors sue? No, but it's a means of justice."

Michelle Smith, executive director of Women's Support Network of York Region in Newmarket, which runs a human trafficking help line, called the issue a "provincial and national crisis."

She said she hoped the strategy would include long-term core funding, along with people specialized in human trafficking and infrastructure for couselling.

Trafficked women sometimes require "eight, nine, 10-hour care", with psychological and emotional trauma the most pervasive aspect. "We have women that are servicing eight to 10 men a day, against their will," she said.

Besides a strategy, greater emphasis on social media literacy must be taught in schools to help combat human trafficking, said Debbie Gordon, director of kidsmediacentre at Toronto's Centennial College. Being able to share case studies about other young victims works, but voices of young people who question the sensibilities of the social media culture need to be heard, she said. "Kids will listen when it's one of their own."

### FOR IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE

Like the York Regional Police campaign 'The Other Side' that is helping victims hurt in the sex trade find a way out, there are other people and organizations offering assistance to survivors of human trafficking in the Greater Toronto Area. Here are a few:

- Covenant House: 416-598-4898, www. covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/ Home.aspx
- East Metro Youth Services: 416-452-3018, http://emys.on.ca/
- Women's Support Network of York Region: 905-758-5285, www.womenssupportnetwork.ca/
- Toronto Police Service human trafficking team: 416-808-8385, www.torontopolice. on.ca/sexcrimes/htet.php
- York Regional Police human trafficking team: 905-758-5581, www.yrp.ca/en/about/human-trafficking.asp



## MORE ONLINE

**VIDEO:** Watch this Covenant House Toronto video: a dramatization of the real-life experience of "Amy" – a teen who found herself enslaved by a man she believed was her boyfriend. **(bit.ly/covenantvid)** 

**STORY:** Read this story from York Region about a real court case from 2014 involving a man who police alleged was pimping out a 16-year-old girl, and the subsequent verdict. (bit.ly/yorkcase)

**STRATEGY:** Get more details about the provincial anti-human trafficking strategy and the four areas of action the strategy will be focused on. (bit.ly/ontariostrategy)

**STATISTICS:** See statistics from Toronto Police Service about the number of occurrences, arrests, charges and victims related to human trafficking in the city since 2013. (bit.ly/policestats)

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