



Covenant House Toronto

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October 25, 2013

Affordable Housing Committee, City of Toronto
c/o City Clerk's Office
City Hall, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Re: AH74 – Housing Initiative for Women Who are Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking

Dear Members of the Affordable Housing Committee:

Covenant House Toronto welcomes this opportunity to lend our experience, expertise and support to the efforts of the Affordable Housing Committee as it works to address human trafficking and sexual exploitation and improve services to the victims of this grievous crime.

As the country's largest agency for homeless youth, we have offered our support and services for more than 30 years to homeless victims of domestic trafficking and sexual exploitation and to those who find themselves here from other countries.

We believe we provide more hands-on services to these young people than any other agency in the country and our staff is among the most expert in this area. We are strong advocates, working to improve support services and raise awareness of these issues. We also collaborate with many community agencies dedicated to helping prevent and address human trafficking and exploitation. Our international organization, including sites in Canada, the U.S. and Latin America, has long been a recognized leader in combating human trafficking and sexual exploitation globally.

There is no doubt that these horrific crimes are major problems in our city. We know that almost half of the 77 human trafficking charges laid in Canada between 2006 and 2011 were in Toronto.

These terrible situations are happening right on our doorstep. Research shows much of this activity is in a corridor through the downtown core between city hall and our Gerrard Street location.

Our agency sees at least a dozen young trafficked and sexually exploited victims, primarily young women, annually. But the number is likely far higher as young people are often too fearful to disclose their experiences. These youth are among the most damaged that we

Opening Doors for Homeless Youth

serve and often need long-term support for physical and psychological problems, including post-traumatic stress and addiction.

Our staff help them in rebuilding their lives through counselling and our on-site programs, including educational and vocational services, job training and health care. We also help youth navigate the justice system in the event that they are prepared to lay charges. We help those from other countries with immigration issues. We work closely with law enforcement agencies on related activities.

Often we provide our expertise as a resource to workshops and training programs, including those for police and other agencies. When the City Council made the commendable decision to launch anti-trafficking initiatives earlier this year, we became involved in these efforts through our membership in community alliances.

We are encouraged by the Affordable Housing Committee's interest in specialized housing for trafficked and sexually exploited victims. We have recognized this critical need for some time and see it as imperative that these victims would be provided with safe, dedicated housing and wrap-around supports similar to those in other major cities. We are hopeful that such a pilot project will be endorsed as recommended and look forward to collaborating with the city to bring life to this proposal.

We congratulate the Affordable Housing Committee for considering this plan and stand ready to offer our assistance and support.

Sincerely,



Bruce Rivers
Covenant House Executive Director