

**THE TRUE COST OF PROSTITUTION**

**COURT COSTS**

**&**

**VICE UNIT STRATEGIES**

S/Sgt. W.L.D. MOWBRAY  
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1995 July 05

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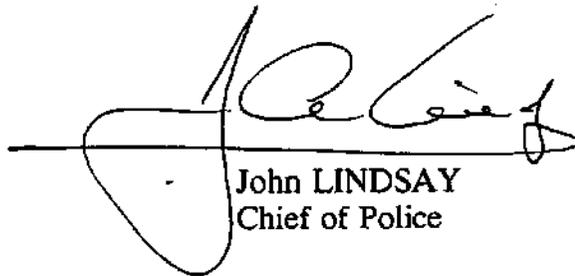
Dear Mr. Lusardi:

The Edmonton Police Service is pleased to nominate Staff Sergeant Bill MOWBRAY for the 1995 Herman Goldstein Award.

Staff Sergeant MOWBRAY has been extensively involved in the Edmonton Police Service's efforts to control street prostitution and deal with the inevitable social problems that prostitution imposes on affected communities. S/Sgt. MOWBRAY and members of the EPS Vice Unit have taken a problem-solving approach to prostitution which involves a coordinated agency effort to deliver existing community services in such a way as stem the flow of young people entering the trade. The "H.E.L.P" program (Helping Edmontonians Leave Prostitution) has proven to be an effective tool in achieving a reduction in the number of prostitutes returning to the trade.

Staff Sergeant MOWBRAY has documented the problem of street prostitution in Edmonton and the results of the H.E.L.P. program in the enclosed paper.

Yours truly,

  
John LINDSAY  
Chief of Police



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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Notwithstanding the best efforts of legislators at the Federal level, the problems of street prostitution remain. The inability to effectively control the" issue through legislation has led to the emergence of many special interest groups, all of whom call for further police action. Such enforcement action has seriously strained our already depleted resources, and the cost incurred by the Edmonton Police Service as a result of members testifying in court has become unmanageable.

This situation has proven costly, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of our members health, morale and family life. Court costs have escalated while the enthusiasm of officers who must work during evening hours and give court testimony during daylight hours, is understandably waning.

The solution therefore does not lie with further enforcement action. Both police and the community are better served by a coordinated agency effort to reduce the number of prostitutes working on our streets, by stemming the flow of young people from entering the 'Trade'. H.E.L.P. provides that solution by coordinating the efforts of community agencies, and delivering existing services in an entirely different way.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent times the task of policing has become increasingly complex and demanding. At a time when every aspect of our work is scrutinized in the courts and in the media, our problems have been compounded by the realities of the prevailing economical conditions. No longer does the community measure our success by how effectively the job is done, but also by the efficiency of it. While police services everywhere are afforded fewer and fewer resources, the demand for services has remained constant.

H.E.L.P. provides us relief from escalating court costs by examining traditional police strategies to Vice Unit, and exploring the implications of such practices. The benefits to the community of reducing the number of street prostitutes are many and varied. To the police service, such efficiency and savings equate to additional financial resources for an overburdened police budget.

## **PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

Current Canadian law does not criminalize or even prohibit the act of prostitution. It speaks instead to the ancillary problem of street prostitution and strives to rid our neighbourhoods of such business occurring on our sidewalks. In doing so the law can be applied impartially to both vendor and customer as it simply criminalizes the nuisance of communicating in any public place for the purpose of prostitution. I have no doubt that our legislators made this decision quite consciously and regardless of how divisive they were on the issue, showed a willingness to give police a law which could easily be enforced. This has certainly proven to be the case, as police in every major city in this country have laid successively larger numbers of charges for this offence. What started out with good intentions has sown the seeds of a problem so large and so expensive, that the legislation has been rendered all but useless. The problem is that of escalating court costs for officers giving court testimony on prostitution matters.

Street prostitution has been prevalent for many years in the inner city areas of all major cities. Such areas have experienced considerable change in the last ten years, as younger couples and families who are discontent with commuting and suburbia move back to the inner city and erect new homes. These people are better educated than the traditional inner city resident and have considerable sums of money invested in those areas. The result has been the formation of many special interest groups whose sole purpose is to pressure politicians and police to direct more resources to the area of vice operations. The Edmonton Police Service, as with most police services, responded to these emerging needs of the community, by laying successively more charges. Indeed, even within the police community, the number of such charges laid immediately became the yardstick of success in the fight against street prostitution.

In Edmonton, inner city groups lauded the efforts of police when, in 1993, it laid in excess of twelve hundred charges for the offence of Communicating for the Purpose of Prostitution. Such figures are indeed testimony to the many dedicated officers who, for one full year, sacrificed a great deal of time and effort, all the time believing they were making a difference by reclaiming the streets to the benefit of inner city residents. In retrospect, such was never the case.

As our members tired, street prostitution continued to flourish. Police surveys showed that the numbers of prostitutes had remained constant, regardless of the level of enforcement. To further underscore the futility of such a traditional response, year end accounts of court costs for the Vice Unit showed an increase of \$60,000. The need for change was never more obvious.

## **PROBLEM RELATED ISSUES**

### **1. Staffing**

The problem of inadequate staffing numbers is not unique to the arena of Vice investigations. It is a common problem faced by all police managers who organize various types of undercover operations. In Edmonton, we are afforded the services of only six detectives to investigate all vice related matters on a city wide basis. Obviously the problem of amassing sufficient personnel for undercover operations is ongoing and persistent.

A typical such operation, focusing on the enforcement of prostitution laws, involves the services of some twenty police officers. These people must be seconded from other divisions, all of whom are also fighting the loss of staff due to financial constraints. The implementation of problem solving policing has placed additional responsibilities on those divisions, with the result that vice operations often receive a lower priority. Staffing restrictions are a constant source of difficulty in an era of crippling budget limitations.

### **2. Effectiveness**

For many years the measure of a Police Services effectiveness in these types of investigations has been the number of charges laid in any one year. There is little existing evidence which might suggest that the number of charges laid by police has any relationship to our effect on the number of prostitutes working the streets.

The paradox here must surely be that despite the perceived effectiveness of police, prostitution continues to flourish. It is time therefore to redefine our goals and strategies if we truly want to respond to the needs of the community, we must find methods of reducing the pressures acting upon that community and move away from the traditional approach of compiling enforcement statistics.

### **3. Increased Job Related Stress**

The high number of charges being generated by a small number of officers can have a direct effect on increasing levels of job stress amongst Vice Unit members. Such numbers can only be achieved by everyone working at a torrid pace over long periods of time. Additionally this type of specialized investigation generally conducted during late evening and early morning hours, which has a detrimental effect on an officer's family life.

The high number of charges generated by these officers, demands an inordinate number of court appearances, all of which are scheduled during daytime hours. This greatly increases the number of hours an officer actually works in any one week and further diminishes family time.

The economic cost of this stress, in terms of productivity and health, can be very high. It is not the type of occupation or profession that causes stress. It is the individual's perception of his role and his apparent ineffectiveness that causes stress.

## HELPING EDMONTONIANS LEAVE PROSTITUTION

### (H. E. L. P.)

H.E.L.P. an acronym for Helping Edmontonians Leave Prostitution, is a program designed to reduce the costs and effects of prostitution by attacking the problem systemically as opposed to merely treating its symptoms. It recognizes the benefits of reducing the numbers of street prostitutes, by focusing the efforts of many, agencies, on the same problems, at the same time. H.E.L.P. takes the "Monkey off our Back", by placing responsibility where it belongs; with community and government agencies.

Such a program proposes that police services view prostitutes as victims and not criminals. We instead use our special powers to assist other community members help prostitutes gain a healthier lifestyle and meaningful existence. Police must recognize that their ability to solve societal problems such as prostitution, is extremely limited. However their role as community advocate and protector is ideally suited to any situation where a catalyst is required. Most communities have an abundance of agencies and special interest groups whose sole purpose is the treatment of societies ills. However the coordination of their efforts and their inability to perform in an outreach fashion has minimized their effectiveness. Police officers, who by nature are task oriented and pragmatic individuals, can use their experience and powers to assist the community in collectively attaining its goals.

H.E.L.P. starts by gathering together various agencies within the community and focusing them on the goal of reducing the number of prostitutes working on the street. The role of each group is clearly defined and the order in which they will operate is spelled out. Dates and times of the operation are set, as is its physical location. Usually this would be a community hall, but on occasion we have used community police stations, although this is not preferable.

The project begins with police mounting a standard vice undercover operation, targeting street prostitutes. Undercover members posing as customers acquire conversation, the extent of which is sufficient to sustain a charge of "Communicating for the Purpose of Prostitution". The prostitute is then taken into custody and properly identified by an 'Arrest Team'. It is at this point that the H.E.L.P. project diverges from standard undercover operations. Rather than lay a charge against the prostitute, thereby placing her within the Justice System, the officer merely hands the prostitute over to the community and removes the necessity of either himself or the prostitute from attending an expensive and time consuming trial. Those prostitutes who are unwilling to enter the program are of course charged, but this is rarely necessary.

The 'Arrested' person is therefore taken to the predetermined community hall and handed over to members of the Crossroads Outreach Program. This is a privately funded organization which supplies 'street walkers' with support and advice and a safe haven when

they need it. It is their job to gain the trust of the prostitutes and discover the reasons for their lifestyle. These reasons can vary, and may include drug or alcohol addictions, lack of finances or education, or the need to augment a meagre income to support a young family. Rarely, if ever, is prostitution the choice of a young person, It is often viewed as the way to escape an already abusive lifestyle.

Once the needs of the individual has been determined, she is then handed over to the next community group or organization which can provide the necessary help. This may be a women's shelter organization for those in need of a place to stay, or a health group if urgent medical attention is required. Detoxification facilities are often required at this stage but counselling and addiction assistance are left until daylight hours. Emergency welfare assistance can also be provided the next day, and for this type of help, outreach workers will make the necessary appointments and actually transport the participants to these appointments. In effect a diversion program designed around the individual's needs is constructed and presented at a time when it is most needed. Obviously this type of program must be agreed upon with the Justice Department, prior to implementation, and such was the case in Edmonton. This program saves approximately one hundred and fifty charges per year appearing in our courts, therefore alleviating to some degree the pressures on our overburdened Criminal Justice System.

An educational component was also designed to fit this program, as there appeared to be little point in helping women leave the streets, if we didn't do something to stem the flow of young people who might enter the lifestyle. A lesson plan containing topics, answers to common questions, a locally produced video and visual aids was developed and all School Resource officers in the city given the necessary training by Vice detectives. These officers in turn provided this lecture to those Junior High School and Senior High School classes who requested it. High risk groups such as female inmates at the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre, were also targeted.

The purpose of this Lesson Plan was to educate young women in the methods employed by pimps. We wanted to arm them with the ability to recognize the tactics employed by pimps and what they should do if they found anything similar happening in their lives. We used a video to reinforce the dangers of ignoring these warning signs. The video was designed to be hard hitting, but not traumatic and showed appropriate actual footage of homicides involving local prostitutes. Both the video and the Lesson Plan were designed to spur student participation and discussion.

It is difficult to measure the number of young people who have been prevented from entering prostitution as a result of H.E.L.P. but we do know that twenty percent of prostitutes who enter this diversion have not shown up on our streets again. At the outset we hoped that ten percent of participants would not return to the street and would have considered that a success. We are therefore delighted with the results to date.

From a Police Service perspective, this experience has also been rewarding and productive. We succeeded in sharing the responsibility for controlling other stakeholders and the issue of prostitution in Edmonton is no longer seen as solely a problem for police to solve. Vice Detectives now realize that prostitution is not a victimless crime, and with their new found contacts within the empowered community, are more apt to problem solve as opposed to simply processing another client. In doing so they have diminished their work load and relieved the stresses caused by continual court testimony.

H.E.L.P. will not rid our streets of prostitutes, but it has the potential to diminish their numbers at the present and in the future, thereby assisting with the revitalization of inner city residential neighbourhoods. Our Vice officers have already experienced its benefits, and our court budget shows a \$10,000 surplus for the first six months of 1995.

We learned a lot as we went through the first year of H.E.L.P. especially about the difficulties encountered in the process of pulling together the efforts of various community and government agencies. Some wouldn't work together because of past differences. Some government agencies didn't want to work past 4:00 p.m. and others didn't want to leave the confines of their office buildings. For those who dared to change their approach and join forces with others, the rewards and benefits have been many. Not only has their own contributions increased, but they have changed the face of the community and the lives of many who needed their help most.