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**PAUKTUUTIT**  
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

# **Strategic Actions for the Prevention of Human Trafficking of Inuit Girls and Women in Canada:**

## **Human Trafficking Workshop Summary**

### **Annual General Meeting**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

**March 8, 2013**

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## Background

Every year Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (Pauktuutit) staff and its board of directors that represent different regions of Inuit Nunangat come together at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to develop work plans and strategies that meet the needs and priorities of Inuit women. Guest speakers from various organizations attend to share initiatives that address issues related to Inuit women. The 2013 AGM was held in Ottawa from March 3 – 8<sup>th</sup> and included a number of presentations and workshops on topics of key interest to Inuit women.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> Pauktuutit held a workshop during its AGM about human trafficking. The goal of the workshop was to share information about human trafficking of Inuit women in Canada and discuss ways to approach Inuit communities about this sensitive topic. Helen Roos, President of Roos-Remillard Consulting Services, was brought in as an expert on the subject matter to facilitate the information session. Roos-Remillard Consulting Services has been funded by Justice Canada to review the service and capacity for victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking in Nunavut. Pauktuutit is a contracted member of the project to help consolidate current research, data, statistics, and information related to Nunavut and Inuit.

About 25 Pauktuutit staff, board members, and community members of Ottawa attended the Human Trafficking workshop. The workshop began with an overview of what human trafficking is and explaining some of the ways traffickers attempt to lure Inuit women and girls. The next part of the presentation described the unique vulnerabilities for Inuit women and girls including showing a video of an Inuk woman telling her experience. How Inuit women and girls are vulnerable in Ottawa to human trafficking was examined next with a discussion on what elements are known, what information gaps exist, and what supports and services are currently available for victims. Following was an opportunity for AGM delegates to discuss the issue through a series of small group discussions. Each delegate had an opportunity to share their thoughts and information about the topic with a recorder assigned to each group to record all answers. At the conclusion of the workshop, a review of key issues and next steps were discussed and recorded. This report is a summary of the feedback received from the small group discussion portion of the workshop concluding with a summary of recommendations to prevent the human trafficking of Inuit women and girls in Canada.

## Findings

The small group discussions provided the delegates an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss ways to make Inuit communities more resilient to human trafficking. Each group had an opportunity to discuss questions and then report back their suggestions to the main group. The following are questions that were discussed during the small group sessions with a summary of responses received below each question:

**Do you suspect or know of anyone who's gone down south and haven't returned or been heard from?  
Do you want to share that story?**

Two participants stated they knew of two women that have been missing for 30 and 40 years from their Inuit communities. Four respondents mentioned they knew of Inuit women in the Northwest Territories who have disappeared and are still missing. Other participants mentioned women's disappearances could be linked to drug trafficking, prostitution, relationships developed from online, and leaving the community to escape an abusive partner.

**Would you like to talk with someone one-on-one or be connected to supports and services?**

One participant who works with vulnerable teenagers asked to connect with the presenter for more information about supports and services related to human trafficking.

**What's the best way to start talking about this in the community?**

Several participants made comments about raising awareness about human trafficking through social media outlets such as Facebook and the local radio. Others mentioned making presentations and providing resources to schools, health and youth centres. In addition, a couple of comments were made that the message needs to be conveyed to parents with a focus on educating in the home. Comments made included reaching out to people of all ages (kids, youth, and adults) and that it is important to make the information available in English as well as the local Inuktitut dialect.

**What kinds of words or messages do you suggest?**

Main themes included educating kids about risky situations such as internet use and travelling. Another participant suggested encouraging pride in self and fostering healthy self-esteem. One participant recommended that real human trafficking stories and experiences could be shared on a local level by asking the families that have been affected to share their stories and perhaps give advice.

**What are some cultural factors that may discourage or prevent someone from coming forward?**

This question yielded three main responses. First, a few participants identified there may be a communication gap between the younger and older Inuit generations. Reasons for this gap ranged. One participant stated that many of the older Inuit generation are not as technology advanced as the younger generation and this creates a cultural divide between the two age groups. Likewise, another participant commented that many of the older generation cannot read English or know how to use a computer so they are unable to monitor the internet surfing history in their home.

Second, some participants stated that the younger generation may not feel comfortable talking with their elders because some topics are considered "taboo", and they are encouraged to be "seen and not heard." Third, some participants agreed fear may keep trafficked victims from coming forward. They may fear prosecution from the RCMP, that they will no longer be accepted in their community, or simply that their feelings of embarrassment or shame prevent them from reaching out.

## **What do you think makes Inuit women and girls vulnerable to becoming a victim of human trafficking?**

This question generated numerous responses. The most common responses were because of low self-esteem and abuse. Several participants attributed vulnerability to low self-esteem or low self-respect which could lead Inuit girls and women to become easily manipulated and lack healthy boundaries with others. Many participants stated being physically or sexually abused make Inuit girls and women more susceptible to human trafficking. Substance abuse was also suggested as a cause, whether living in a home environment with alcohol or drug abuse or having an addiction themselves. Another possibility was that poverty and overcrowded housing in the North makes people desperate to get away.

A few respondents thought a lack of parental supervision in the home or monitoring their children's internet use contributes to the problem. Lately, some participants explained that naivety or ignorance about human trafficking can be a cause. A participant shared that many people may not be aware that human trafficking exists in their own communities and take the attitude if happens far away and therefore their community is not affected.

### **Internet is a luring tool. These questions relate to the use of technology in the home:**

#### **Do you have a computer at home?**

A total count was not taken but several participants indicated they have a computer, I-pods, I-pads, and cell phones in their homes.

#### **Do you know who your children are talking to online? Are they adding "friends" that they haven't met?**

The most frequent response to this question was that the parents do not always know who their children are talking to online. A remark from a grandmother stated that when she asks her grandchildren who they are talking to online she is told "it is none of your business."

#### **Do they talk about having a boyfriend?**

Some participants stated "yes." Two comments were made that meeting boyfriends online can have negative impacts on girls. For example, a comment was made that girls up North are getting foreign boyfriends from chatting online. The boyfriends claim they are "so in love" with them that they want to illegally immigrate to Canada to be with them. Another participant shared that some girls meet their boyfriends online, and the girls will change their behavior to try to impress the boyfriend.

### **To whom and how should we talk to about online safety?**

A variety of responses emerged from this question. Comments included talking to children, families, youth, computer service providers, and parents about the possible dangers of internet communication for young people. The primary response as to how this topic should be brought up was through family discussions and parents monitoring their children's internet use by checking the internet surfing history, seeing if their children are on chat lines, etc. A mother shared that she takes her daughter's cell phone when her daughter is asleep to see who her daughter is talking to on the phone.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants appeared engaged in the small group discussions and for many questions similar answers were generated by several groups. Several themes came forward as factors that make Inuit girls and women vulnerable to becoming a victim of human trafficking. These themes and recommendations to help prevent the trafficking of Inuit girls and women are summarized in this section. These include:

- A number of participants emphasized that parents and/or caregivers need to take more of an active role in monitoring the internet use in their homes. More importantly, that families and communities need to receive more education about internet safety including how traffickers lure girls and women through the internet. Teaching internet safety in schools and in the home is vital to reducing Inuit girls and women's vulnerability to human trafficking. Grandparents who may be primary caregivers may need to teach their children about the importance of internet safety rather than take on a monitoring role because they may not read English or use a computer.
- Educating families and communities about all elements of human trafficking was raised by many participants during the discussions because many Inuit communities do not know that it exists and those that do may feel it happens only in the South. Participants recommended using social media (radio, Facebook, etc.), making presentations and resources available to schools, health, and youth centres as some ways to educate the public. Also sharing real stories and experiences of those that have been trafficked locally can help raise awareness of the issue.
- Many participants identified low self-esteem as a leading cause to Inuit girls and women becoming vulnerable to human trafficking. Some remarked that low self-esteem allows girls and women to want to please others to fit in making them easily manipulated and controlled by others. Teaching to have pride in yourself and healthy boundaries in relationships were suggested as ways to help foster positive feelings of self-worth in Inuit girls and women.
- Addressing cultural issues that may stand in the way of fostering positive communication between younger and older Inuit generations is important reducing the vulnerability of Inuit girls and women to being trafficked. These issues may include feeling fear and/or shame, the younger generation feeling they cannot talk about certain issues with their elders, and technology creating a cultural divide between younger and older generations.
- Some participants stated that social issues contribute to the vulnerability of Inuit girls and women. Poverty, poor and overcrowded housing, and physical and sexual abuse are some of the most prevalent social issues facing Inuit communities. These issues need to be recognized and addressed as part of the action plan to reduce Inuit women's vulnerability because many Inuit girls and women leave their home communities in search of better living conditions or to escape abuse making them more susceptible to being lured by traffickers.

**Appendix**

**Human Trafficking Workshop Agenda**



# **Violence and Abuse Prevention Workshop**

**Wednesday, March 6, 2013**

## **AFTERNOON**

- 1:00 PM**                      **Overview of Pauktuutit's Work and Current Projects**
- 1:30 PM**                      **Overview of Human Trafficking**
- 1:45 PM**                      **What is Human Trafficking?**
- **What, why, who, how?**
  - **Unique vulnerabilities for Inuit women and girls**
  - **Grooming, baiting, luring**
- 2:15 PM**                      **Video Presentation**
- 2:30 PM**                      **Ottawa Snapshot: What we know, what we don't know, and what supports and services are available.**
- 2:45 PM**                      **BREAK**
- 2:45 PM**                      **Plenary Debrief**  
**Introduction of Discussion Questions**
- 3:00 PM**                      **Small Group Discussions**
- 3:30 PM**                      **Review of Key Issues and Next Steps**
- 4:00 PM**                      **Adjourn**