**LETTER IN SUPPORT OF A CARE TEAM IN OTTAWA, ONTARIO**

**To: The Honourable Doug Ford**

**Submitted by:**

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking

**Date: September 22, 2023**

***Who are We?***

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (“OCEHT” or “The Coalition”) works to meet the acute, immediate, and long-term resources and support needs of persons impacted by human trafficking, including those who have exited a trafficking situation, their families, and communities, as well as persons who may be at risk of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and/or organ removal/harvest.

The OCEHT also provides training to volunteers and service providers to assist and educate them to identify signs of trafficking and to know how to respond appropriately. We are a community-based network made up of various local organizations, service providers and community members from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, both educational and occupational. Our approach to human trafficking is a preventative one.

We are committed to creating and sustaining a continuum among organizations, service providers, community members and volunteers that provides a uniform, timely and appropriate response to those who seek access to supports, services and resources because they have been affected by human trafficking, irrespective of their age, gender, religion, sexual orientation and ethno-cultural background. Irrespective of the avenue through which a person seeks assistance, our commitment is to work together within and outside our network to ensure that the response is equally appropriate and effective.

***What is our stance?***

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking writes this letter in support of the implementation of a CARE (Children At Risk of Exploitation) Team within the Ottawa Police Service.As a Coalition comprised of survivors, service providers, frontline staff, law enforcement, healthcare staff, educators and Indigenous-specific service providers, we know firsthand the importance of specialized outreach units for those at-risk of or actively being trafficked. Across all sectors of the work we do, we see the complex needs of youth, which can increase their risk of being trafficked. With this in mind, we unequivocally support the implementation of a CARE team in Ottawa, comprised of specialized child protection workers, indigenous child protection workers and police officers to identify, intervene, and support sexually exploited/trafficked youth between the ages of 12-17.

***Ottawa - a hub for sex trafficking of youth***

Ottawa is the second largest City in Ontario. The city’s population exceeds one million people, and Statistics Canada’s 2021 census estimated that there are 120,000 youth between the age of 10-19 in Ottawa (<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?lang=E&topic=2&dguid=2021A00053506008>). According to the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking’s (“The CCEHT”) Report released in August 2023, 1,029 cases of sex trafficking disclosed from 2019-2022, and 2,170 survivors/victims or trafficking recognized by the Centre.[[1]](#footnote-0) According to the same report, 67% of all cases of HT happen in the province of Ontario. According to a 2021 Statistics Canada report on Human Trafficking in Canada, between 2011 and 2021, 24% of reported victims of trafficking were youth under the age of 17 (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>) . The Coalition believes that proactive intervention is incredibly important in anti-human trafficking work. It is crucial to have teams on the ground who can detect and assist people at risk of or actively being trafficked, and can potentially intervene before an individual is trafficked, or before their situation gets worse. That is why the Coalition strongly supports the implementation of a CARE team in the Ottawa region.

***Importance of a CARE team***

The Coalition understands that a CARE team is composed of police officers, specialized child protection workers, and Indigenous child protection workers. The Coalition cannot state enough how important the implementation of a CARE team is for the Ottawa Region. First and foremost, Ottawa has a high population of youth, youth in care, and Indigenous youth. Therefore, having specialized child protection workers, especially those who are culturally-relative to Indigenous youth (which are estimated to make up roughly 50% of all HT victims in Canada), is vital if we are to prevent and end human trafficking in our community. Specialized child protection workers are trauma-informed and understand the unique challenges that youth in care face. They are also specially-trained in human trafficking prevention and intervention, which can be crucial in offering aid to youth on the streets of Ottawa who may be at risk of or are actively being trafficked. Specialized child protection workers can also help law enforcement build rapport with youth in the community, which may increase the number of reports of HT that police receive. According to our soon-to-be-released COVID-19 report, 100% of respondents to our survey stated that they believe sexual exploitation will only continue to increase if current efforts stay the same. According to the same report, throughout COVID-19 it is noted that youth in Ottawa presented with higher and more complex needs, which is alarming - and points to the need for specialized efforts to identify, intervene and support the Ottawa community.

There is a special need for a team that is focusing on at-risk youth in Ottawa, and we feel that a CARE team will fill the current voids. The OCEHT cannot understate the importance of having a dynamic team in this work.

***Indigenous populations in Ottawa***

***Child Welfare Youth***

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an increase in missing youth, particularly youth in care. The Coalition’s frontline agencies have also seen a vast increase in the number of sexually exploited youth in the city of Ottawa.

***Conclusion***

We would like to thank the Honourable Doug Ford for his consideration, and we appreciate the opportunity to present our opinions, ideas, and recommendations. The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking is hopeful that the implementation of a CARE team is on the horizon for the Ottawa community and would be happy to provide any further insight in support of this initiative.

**Notes for letter to OPS re CARE team**

**Deadline: September 22, 2023**

* **Holly will formalize all notes and send for committee review by Tuesday September 19th**

**Simone — notes about care team**

* OPS HT unit - influx of high risk youth
* Similar to CHEO piece — not enough supports with hospital stays
* HT unit - so complex - takes a long time
* Need specific team focusing on the at-risk piece
* Ontario - Toronto, Durham
* Care team - Children at Risk of Exploitation
* Pairs police with child protection workers
* Indigenous liaison — CAS
* Ottawa has 2nd largest amount of kids in care
* In process of writing a letter (analyst)
* Genevieve and JoJoe - info on what your indigenous-based services look like
* Letter of support from Coalition to support this initiative
* Google link
* Children under the age of 16
* Streamlining services
* End of next week deadline - letter
* Increase in missing youth since covid
* Care Teams consist of specialized child protection workers, indigenous child protection workers and police.
* - The goal is to identify, intervene and support sexually exploited/trafficked youth under between the ages of 12-17.
* -The letters have to be addressed to Hon. Doug Ford
* -It will be sent up the chain at OPS and then hopefully approved to be sent by the Chief to Doug Ford. We have had past conversations with him and he was on board (Hopefully he likes the letter )
* -A big part of the letter is the size of our city, 2nd largest city, 2nd largest number of kids in care and we were left out.
* - Seeing an increase in sexually exploited youth
* -That the Coalition supports this initiative
* - Info about our community, program support and our ability to work together to help our youth
* -If someone wants to write a blurb on what they are seeing with youth within the indigenous community too that would be great. (Maybe Savannah from Wabano?)

**Steering Committee Thoughts on CARE team:**

* please add any thoughts, experiences, or helpful resources to aid in our letter of support
* When possible, please reference your field of work (ie service provider, homelessness, indigenous-led/focused work etc.)
1. https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/human-trafficking-trends-in-canada-2019-2022/ [↑](#footnote-ref-0)