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**Subject:** Supportive Housing – Human Trafficking Safe House Pilot

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, June 11, 2019

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## Recommendations

That the report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## Key Facts

- Public Safety Canada defines human trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour. It is often described as a modern form of slavery."
- Despite a well-recognized need, currently Niagara does not have a human trafficking safe house, a recommended resource to support victims of human trafficking.
- In an effort to clearly quantify local need, for the last six months the YWCA Emergency Shelters have identified five to six survivors of human trafficking presenting each month in need of emergency shelter and crisis supports necessary to successfully exit this dangerous situation.
- The planned safe house pilot (up to two years) will support six to eight young women at any given time.
- The safe house pilot is a partnership initiative between the YWCA and the Niagara Regional Native Centre, with Niagara Region funding 50% of the costs, leveraging the Provincial Home for Good supportive housing funding.
- The safe house pilot will provide safe housing and programming to young women fleeing or exiting their exploitive situation. The house will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week and have a peer worker on staff.

## Financial Considerations

The Regional share of the operating funding for the safe house pilot would be financed through the Provincial Home for Good supportive housing funding envelope. In the event that sustainable funding is not secured at the conclusion of the pilot, the clients would be transitioned into the YWCA Home for Good build, estimated to be completed in January of 2021, to ensure continuity of service, however the additional programming provided through the safe house pilot would be discontinued.

## Analysis

### Background

The Niagara region is a well-known hub in Canada for human trafficking. Shae Invidiata, founder of *Free-Them* (an anti-human trafficking advocacy group) states that Ontario's Golden Horseshoe accounts for 75% of all human trafficking cases in Canada, with Niagara, Stoney Creek, Grimsby, Ancaster, and Hamilton identified as major hot spots.

In the last fiscal year, YWCA Niagara's drop-in program for sex trade workers supported 140 individual women, of which 80% stated that they were initially trafficked as young girls.

The YWCA documented 134 disclosures of human trafficking in the 2018-2019 year. Victim Services Niagara made 49 referrals for trafficked individuals.

In addition, the YWCA has seen an increase in individuals accessing shelter as a response to fleeing a trafficking situation. Previously, one or two people every few months requested assistance, however over the past six months the average has increased to five to six survivors accessing YWCA emergency shelter every month. It should be noted this does not include data from Niagara's domestic violence shelters.

The YMCA in Hamilton has a Youth in Transition worker (for anti human trafficking), funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, supporting the geography of Hamilton, Brantford and Niagara. The chart below represents the age demographics of the 33 clients identified in Niagara that have presented, since work commenced in December of 2017. All 33 clients have identified as having been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Clients are largely from the communities of St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Port Colborne.

AGE	NUMBER OF CLIENTS
15	5
16	7
17	2
18	4
19	3
20	3
21	1
22	2
23	3
24	1
Other	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

Service offerings to support young victims of human trafficking are almost exclusively available outside of the Niagara region. Unfortunately, as a result, Niagara youth are often choosing to go without supports or incomplete supports, as they are choosing to remain in Niagara even when arrangements for services could be made in alternative cities.

### **Opportunity**

Through a recognition of urgent need and a spirit of collaboration, the YWCA and the Niagara Regional Native Centre have established a partnership strategy to operate an, up to two-year, safe house pilot, designated for young women exiting human trafficking. Niagara Region Community Services is contributing to this initiative by leveraging Home for Good operating funding temporarily available during the construction phase of the new Home for Good supportive housing units by the YWCA. Home for Good supportive housing includes intensive case management, addictions support, occupational therapy, access to mental health services and housing allowances. In addition, Community Services will provide data support and continued offering of human trafficking awareness training to the homelessness system and other agencies who may interact with victims.

The pilot program will provide clients with: on-site, trauma informed support staffing 24 hours a day, seven days week; culturally appropriate healing; and supportive housing services available through Home for Good, as noted above. The safe house will offer physical security and monitoring to ensure clients are safe and can actively participate in programs allowing them to recover and transition into independent living.

During the pilot, Niagara Region Community Services, YWCA, the Niagara Regional Native Centre and other local agencies will continue to collect data on the incidence of human trafficking in Niagara to support proposals and advocacy with the province to secure ongoing funding for this important service.

In the event sustainable funding is not secured, the pilot will be concluded upon occupancy of the new YWCA build, estimated for January 2021, and clients can be transferred to the new build and programming associated with human trafficking supports will conclude.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Not applicable (pending the development of Council's new Strategic Priorities).

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

None

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*This report was prepared in consultation with Kayla De Pauw, Program Financial Specialist.*