THE PEER PREVENTION PROJECT

2018/2019 PROJECT IMPACT REPORT

A PROJECT BY AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TORONTO RAPE CRISIS CENTRE/MULTICULTURAL WOMEN AGAINST RAPE
WHO WE ARE.

Aura Freedom is a grassroots Canadian organization that promotes the human rights of women and girls and prevents gender-based violence by advancing gender equality. We are women-led and survivor-centred.

Through education, advocacy and empowerment, Aura Freedom has experience implementing sustainable interventions in both Canada and beyond. We have seen firsthand that educating women and girls on their human rights empowers them to resist long-standing societal norms of gender inequality and the resulting implications, including poverty and violence, and live a life of health and inclusiveness. Our work has created change, empowered women and girls and given survivors access to life-saving services.

Aura Freedom seeks to create long-lasting systemic change and is of the firm belief that when women and girls are educated and empowered, they become catalysts for positive change whose success benefits everyone around them.

It is important to note that Aura Freedom does not participate in “rescue industry” activities. We meet survivors where they are, recognizing their diverse backgrounds, stories, and choices. We also refute the patriarchal ‘victim narrative’ that has a limited view of what trafficking and trafficked persons look like.
OUR PREVENTION WORK GOES DEEP. WE FOCUS ON ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

**GENDER INEQUALITY, SYSTEMIC RACISM, COLONIALISM, TRANSPHOBIA, HOMOPHOBIA, CAPITALISM AND MORE.**

- **Gender inequality and rape culture** and their connections to sexual violence and exploitation.
- **The hyper-sexualization of women and girls** in the media and how unhealthy body images and unhealthy gender norms and role models for both young men (toxic masculinity) and women are contributing to the problem of gender-based violence.
- **Systemic racism, colonialism** and the marginalization of certain communities, including Indigenous and Black youth and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
- **Poverty** (which is linked to inequalities and the marginalization of communities) and gaps in social services including housing, the child welfare system and mental health services.
THE PROBLEM: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2017, a woman was killed every 2.5 days on average in Canada, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. 50% of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since age 16, and the rates of violence against women aged 15-24 are the highest (Canadian Women’s Foundation). There are thousands of unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Most recently, the National Inquiry called the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women a Canadian genocide. Education is key as research indicates youth violence prevention programs work. Having this information obligates us to educate all youth at risk prior to violence/exploitation so they are empowered to make healthy choices.

Despite common beliefs, over 90% of Canada’s trafficked persons are Canadian. Toronto Police have investigated 360+ sex trafficking cases since 2013, with Toronto/Highway401 corridor dubbed a major hub (Global Slavery Index). Youth girls represent 90% of victims. According to a 2014 survey by the Canadian Women’s Foundation, 51% of Canadian trafficked women and girls were Indigenous.

Infringing upon numerous national and international decrees, sex trafficking is an extreme form of violence against women and a direct violation of human rights. The rise of the online world and social media has only exacerbated the issue, pushing it further “underground” and making it increasingly less visible to the public.

Aura Freedom’s own internal data also points to the need for more GBV prevention for youth. We receive ongoing requests from concerned teachers, parents and youth workers who struggle to address this problem. More than half of Aura Freedom’s presentations in 2017/2018 resulted in disclosure of GBV and/or human trafficking, with staff referring 22 survivors to services.
• The rise of sugar daddies, being ‘paid to party’ and the ever-increasing need for social media popularity are directly related to sexual exploitation.

• Recognizing unhealthy relationships and truly understanding consent can empower youth to protect themselves. Giving youth this information is just as important as any other subject they learn in school.

• Almost all of the youth survivors we have worked with were exploited by who they thought was their boyfriend or intimate partner.

Placing more value on girls.

“The constant dehumanization of women and girls in our society and in the media exacerbates gender-based violence and crimes like sex trafficking. When there is no value placed on a girl besides on her physical attributes, then it becomes easier and easier for her to be seen as a commodity, to be exploited. Indigenous, Black and other women and girls of colour are further marginalized and lack social supports, making them targets for exploiters. This must end. However, the solution is long term; there is no quick fix. We must actively work to deconstruct the hierarchy of power and inequalities which exist in our society— we need to address patriarchy and gender inequality, colonialism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia to see a real change. ALL girls and women must be viewed as powerful members of society that contribute valuable and important things to our world, and we cannot leave anyone behind. This means that we must be in it for the long haul.”

Marissa Kokkoros, Executive Director of Aura Freedom International
WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?
GIRLS.

Young women and girls are at a greater risk of GBV and exploitation. This is due to patriarchy, and the resulting gender inequality, which has given rise to the hyper-sexualization, dehumanization, and commodification of girls/women.

Black, Indigenous and girls of colour are further marginalized in Canadian society, making them more vulnerable to exploitation.

In the same way, we discuss toxic masculinity and its link to violence against women and girls. We call on youth who identify as men to step up and be part of the change, and they do.
INDIGENOUS YOUTH.

Some of the most vulnerable to human trafficking and sexual exploitation are Canada’s Indigenous youth, due to intergenerational poverty, substance abuse, sexual violence and extreme marginalization as a result of colonization, the residential school era and systemic racism. First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls are over-represented in the sex trade, ranging from 14%-60% of sex workers across Canada. We can, and must, do better.

Aura Freedom works closely with Indigenous women who are fighting against human trafficking in different communities in Ontario. We have collaborated with Indigenous women since our inception and have fostered lasting relationships with several advocates, scholars, researchers, frontline workers, survivors and youth.

LGBTQ2S YOUTH.

Youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+ are also affected by human trafficking. They face higher rates of discrimination and homelessness, making them especially vulnerable to traffickers. Moreover, they often lack family and community support.

Moreover, when LGBTQ2S trafficking survivors seek services or go through the criminal justice system, they are often penalized for their sexual orientation or gender identity.
HOW THE PROJECT STARTED AND HOW WE IMPROVED IT

In 2014, Aura Freedom launched **Human Trafficking Prevention & Awareness for Canadian Youth**, aimed at educating youth in schools and homeless shelters to advance gender equality and prevent human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Ongoing requests for awareness presentations from teachers, students, and youth workers, and the number of disclosures we received as a result, demonstrated to us that Toronto youth needed a safe space to talk about these issues and get help. The demand for HT prevention and awareness was growing quickly.

So, we asked ourselves: **"How can we make the program even more powerful? How could we empower marginalized youth even more?"**

We knew the answer was to make the project youth-led, and with the support of the City of Toronto, Aura Freedom officially launched the **Peer Prevention Project** in October 2018. We believed the best way to respond to this issue is to train and empower youth and survivors/peers to become facilitators of human trafficking prevention presentations in their own communities.

WHY YOUTH-FACILITATED?

Marginalized youth who are ready to contribute to society must be empowered to do so. It is crucial to provide them with the opportunity to make a difference. Not only does it benefit them and their families, but programs for youth are much more powerful when delivered by youth themselves.

*Viewing youth as agents of change can shift the course of an entire nation.*
The PEER PREVENTION PROJECT project brings awareness to and prevents GBV and sexual exploitation in the City of Toronto by advancing equality through presentations for youth, by youth which take place in schools, homeless shelters, group homes, and other youth spaces across Toronto. It also provides support and access to services for survivors of GBV and sexual exploitation in the City of Toronto and beyond.

For this project, Aura Freedom recruited, trained and mentored six youth who identify as female and have various lived experience that enhances their ability to communicate to youth and identify those in need of support. Youth were referred from project partners and community organizations and some answered job postings on social media. A total of 42 people applied for the positions.
THE TRAINING CURRICULUM

Before facilitating a single presentation, over the course of five (5) months, the youth team completed a rich training curriculum. This curriculum was developed in collaboration with HT survivors and key stakeholders in Toronto through a large consultation hosted by Aura Freedom in August 2018. We invited survivors of GBV/sexual exploitation (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), staff members of Toronto high schools, feminist groups, crisis centres, LGBTQ2S organizations, Toronto Police, City of Toronto staff, and frontline health/social workers.

The questions we posed:
- What training would a young person require in order to feel confident as an advocate and facilitate non-oppressive HT prevention presentations to Toronto youth in schools, group homes and shelters?
- What knowledge should they have?
- What will best prepare these young women (some who identify as survivors) to address HT in their communities and respond to survivors who come forward, all while empowering themselves with new job skills?

The result was a comprehensive training curriculum that many professionals today have not completed. A total of 17 training sessions/workshops were provided to the youth. Moreover, all staff was paid for their training time, another key component of the sustainability of the project.

We believe that the training was the most important part of this project. Not only did the training help prepare staff for Phase 2 of the project and even future employment, but it will equip each youth with the tools they need to lift up their communities and interrupt the cycle of poverty and violence. Education is key…and the ripple effects are undeniable.
1. Human Trafficking:
- Overview of human trafficking (sex, labour)
- Vulnerable populations, means of control, the grooming process (red flags)
- Survivor case studies, how to humanize survivors
- Forced Marriage
- Immigration/International human trafficking
- Laws, Policies and Support for Survivors

2. Presentation Skills:
- Confidence Building
- Storytelling (body language/communication skills)
- Public speaking
- Professionalism (social media use/email writing)
- Boundaries with participants, managing "challenging" audience members

3. Trauma Informed Training:
- Active listening
- Safety, Personal boundaries, Managing personal triggers, mental health awareness, self-care
- Building trust and building community (especially in other people's spaces)

4. Gender:
- History of women's rights/gender inequality/gender norms
- Gender Expectations: Media, Hyper-Sexualization/Objectification of Women and Girls, Toxic Masculinity, Bystander Approach

5. Violence Against Women and Girls
- VAWG and Sexual Violence - what is it?
- Healthy Relationships, Consent, Rape Culture
- HIV/AIDS Awareness

6. Anti-Oppression (including intersectional identities and social location):
  • Indigenous/Colonization Awareness
  • Anti-Black Racism Awareness
  • LGBTQ2S Awareness

7. Internet Safety and Social Media Awareness

17 TRAINING SESSIONS. TOPICS INCLUDED:
Of all youth team members felt the training curriculum they completed was relevant and up-to-date.

Of all youth team members thought the training curriculum chosen added to their professional development for future job opportunities.

“The training was the best part of the project!”

In regards to the training, mentoring and coaching provided by Aura Freedom, all staff indicated that it successfully prepared them to deliver anti-trafficking presentations to youth and service providers. This is important.

“I like how each training gave us knowledge that could be linked related to trafficking even though that particular training was not actually about human trafficking.”
DATA COLLECTION FOR REAL CHANGE

Through the Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Project, Aura Freedom collected and tracked data through an evaluative survey distributed at the end of each awareness presentation. This survey identifies new information gained and attitudes on gender inequality and other systemic issues, as well as consent and rape culture. Most importantly, since the survey is anonymous, it offers an opportunity for youth to tell us their experiences with trafficking and/or violence. Teachers, shelter staff and other service providers also complete the surveys.

Project launched in October 2019 to September 2019.

35

Number of awareness presentations for Toronto youth delivered through the project. This includes schools, youth shelters, group homes, libraries, community spaces and special events.

1,000+

Total participants who completed a survey: 843 - This does not include the many students/staff who left before the survey was given out or opted out of completing surveys, or staff and frontline workers who did not complete surveys at all. By conservative estimates, an additional 200 people did not complete the surveys, resulting in over 1,000 people reached by the HTPPP.

AGES SURVEYED:

- <14 - 19%
- 14-19 years of age - 59%
- 20-24 years of age - 11%
- 25-29 years of age - 2%
- 30 and above - 4%
- No answer - 5%

GENDER IDENTITY:

- Female - 61%
- Male - 34%
- Other - 2%
- No answer - 2%
PARTICIPANT RESULTS

PROJECT IMPACT AND DATA COLLECTED FROM INDIVIDUALS WHO ATTENDED YOUTH-LED PPP PRESENTATIONS
57% 
In one Toronto youth shelter visited, 57% of participants said they knew someone who is being trafficked or is trafficking others. In another shelter, 57% of participants said the same. These are staggering statistics.

60% 
of Aura Freedom’s presentations have resulted in face-to-face disclosure of sexual violence and human trafficking by youth participants, who were given on-site counselling and support and referred to crucial services.

PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE/SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN THE CITY

Official disclosures of sexual violence/sexual exploitation to our staff is common after Aura Freedom’s presentations. Due to the powerful nature of the awareness and the unique safe space we create with youth, we often have official disclosures of sexual exploitation and violence from young participants and are able to provide them with immediate counselling and timely access to the appropriate services.

Percentage of participants who have experienced trafficking, knew someone being trafficked, or knew someone trafficking others according to the anonymous survey. 

30%

Survivors of sexual violence/human trafficking who came forward as a result of the youth-led presentations

19
After the presentation, 62% of participants believed Canadian society promotes rape culture.

“After the presentation, 67% of participants believed GENDER EQUALITY will help end violence against women and girls.

“I got bullied for being gay and almost ended my life and had to switch [schools] this year.” - High school student

After the presentation, 62% of participants surveyed believed that the hyper-sexualization of girls, toxic masculinity and rape culture were root causes of GBV and human trafficking.
After attending the presentation, participants agreed that education and gender equality (both of them focuses of Aura Freedom’s work) are keys to ending trafficking. This demonstrates that our preventative program is indeed essential to all youth in Toronto, and is equally as important as improving the justice system or social services.
IN YOUR OPINION, WHY ARE INDIGENOUS YOUTH PARTICULARLY TARGETED BY EXPLOITERS?

- Systemic racism: 20%
- Impact of colonization: 15%
- Impact of residential schools: 15%
- Less police involvement in Indigenous cases: 17%
- Harmful stereotypes: 17%
- Amount of Indigenous children in care: 13%
- Other: 17%
- No Answer: 1%

After attending the presentation, participants gave their opinions on the marginalization of Indigenous communities and the targeting of Indigenous women and girls.
A large proportion of participants surveyed were unsure or did not believe the Police exists to help them. This is a huge problem. In our experience, we have found that most cases of human trafficking are never reported to police due to a mistrust of authorities, resulting in victims falling through the cracks and not being able to get support.
After attending the presentation, participants gave their opinions on who they would contact if they were being trafficked. Various contact numbers were distributed to participants indicating Crime Stoppers, crisis centres and the human trafficking helpline (first the Provincial one and then the National one after it launched in May 2019).
SAFETY

Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?

- Yes: 77%
- No/Not sure: 19%
- No Answer: 4%

Do you feel safe online?

- Yes: 38%
- No/Not sure: 60%
- No Answer: 2%

73% of participants surveyed said they have accepted a follow request on social media or online message from someone they didn’t know, identifying a gap in internet safety awareness.
As a youth in society today, do you feel your ideas are valued?
After attending Aura Freedom’s presentation, 90% of participants agreed that awareness makes a difference and can help end GBV and human trafficking.

"Thank you for inspiring and empowering us!"  
High school student

"More voices need to be heard and human trafficking should be part of the curriculum in education, starting from grade school."  
High school student from North Toronto Collegiate

"Aura Freedom performs miracles. Thank you for coming here and supporting our young women. Every youth needs to hear this."  
Sabrina Murreda - Youth Worker, Toronto District School Board

"I really appreciate the work you guys do. Thanks for being an inspiration."  
Participant, Horizons For Youth shelter

"Thank you for sharing your story, stay strong and never stop educating youth because you guys are definitely making a difference."  
Participant, community event

"I am so happy you came to our school and educated students on such important issues."  
Teacher, Subway Academy (TDSB)
What did you learn from today's presentation?

How common trafficking is in the GTA

It is important to be aware these acts are happening under our noses.

I learned about consent.

I learned how to help survivors.

Sugar daddy culture

Internet safety and human trafficking

Empowering women equals fewer trafficking issues.

This needs to stop.

“Today I learned that a friend’s situation is an example of human trafficking.”

High school student
Through pre and post project surveys as well as focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews, we were able to determine the following results regarding the youth team:
Youth facilitator confidence in "facilitating a presentation in order to further youth awareness on the topic of human trafficking, gender-based violence and gender equality" increased from 84% to 100% after the project.

There was an increase of 18.6% in facilitator confidence in "responding to/supporting a survivor of human trafficking or gender-based violence".

There was an increase of 24% in youth facilitator confidence in discussing gender-related topics in their community (gender equality, gender roles, hyper sexualization, toxic masculinity, etc.).

Youth facilitator confidence in "facilitating a presentation in order to further youth awareness on the topic of human trafficking, gender-based violence and gender equality" increased from 84% to 100% after the project.

After the project, youth facilitators rated their overall self-confidence to be 88%, an increase of 14.6%!
SUPPORT NETWORK

80% of youth facilitators said they had three friends they trust following training, an increase of 13.3% from 66.7%.

100% of youth facilitators said they felt valued as a team member.

Post project, all youth team members said they had a positive role model, compared to 66.7% pre project.
Please rate your confidence in discussing the topic of human trafficking (for the purpose of sexual exploitation) with a group of 10 or less.

Rate how comfortable you would feel leading a presentation for 30+ people.

Youth facilitator knowledge of human trafficking increased 12% from 83.4% to 96% following the project.
All youth team members strongly agreed or agreed that the work gave them a sense of accomplishment in their communities.

Doing this work gives me a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment by positively contributing to my community.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Strongly Agree: 80%
Agree: 20%
Are you aware of your rights as a woman?

0 %
25 %
50 %
75 %
100 %

Pre Project
Post Project

+16.7%
+12.6%

AWARENESS OF RIGHTS

100%

Pre project, 83.% said they knew who to contact if they experienced physical/sexual violence. Post project, 100% said they knew who to contact.

Are you aware of your rights as a woman?

Please rate how confident you are in exercising your rights as a woman.
Why does Aura Freedom focus on gender equality and anti-oppression?

Why do we focus on empowering marginalized groups with knowledge and support?

Quite simply, because it works.

Education and knowledge dissemination works. Prevention programs work.

Lifting young people up by accepting them for who they are and telling them their worth is empowering. And, it’s very hard to exploit an empowered person.
WE RISE BY UPLIFTING OTHERS.

Marissa Kokkoros, Executive Director
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