

## **Community: The Many Faces of Prostitution**

To a casual tourist taking in the local sites, the town of St. James seems like an idyllic community set in the picturesque Newfoundland countryside. Beneath the surface, however, there are sub-cultures that “fly below the radar”. Homeless youth, a burgeoning drug culture, crime and prostitution are becoming increasingly evident to the townspeople.

There are several homeless teenagers (young men and women) who “couch surf” among friends and relatives. Some come from St. James; others have migrated from their home communities of Lynx River, Jim’s Arm or Coastal Point in Labrador. Their stories are similar: most come from low socioeconomic families where poverty has become an inter-generational cycle. These troubled teens are unable to live in dysfunctional or unsupportive home settings. Some are escaping from abuse. For many the best choice is to leave home and live on the streets. Most have dropped out of school, are unemployed and living a marginal existence.

In the evenings, young men and women walk the downtown near the corner of Main and First Street. This has become known to police, local residents and “John’s” as the place to purchase drugs or sex. The parking lot behind the church has become well known as the location prostitutes ply their trade. The area is frequently scattered with used condoms.

Local police are concerned because prostitution is often fed by drug addiction and crime. Local residents are worried because of a noticeable increase in vandalism and drug trafficking that can be witnessed on any night of the week. Residents also fear violence against themselves and others have expressed a genuine concern for the health of the young men and women who are drawn into prostitution to survive. There are concerns that underage children are involved in prostitution.

Local residents are also worried about the safety of their children and the value of their properties. Public health officials are concerned about the growing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and the effects of drug abuse.

Local media have picked up the story and have “uncovered” the seedy side of St. James in a number of new stories. Facing some pressure to do something about the growing problem, Town Council has called a meeting of interested stakeholder to examine the problem and find solutions.

You have been invited to serve as a panel member (along with police, social services and a representative from the property owners).