



2023 is the 25th Anniversary of the formation of the Capital Region Action Team (CRAT). It was formed, in part, because the “Kiddie Stroll” in Victoria was very disturbing to the Council and Staff of the City of Victoria. In the beginning, CRAT was successful in getting grants, and a number of full-time staff were hired.

By 2007, the funding had ceased and there was no longer a “Kiddie Stroll”. By then, most youth sexual exploitation was run through Escort Agencies. There was a special meeting called, in 2007, with the purpose of winding up CRAT. By this time, CRAT had become a committee of the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (VFCYJC) with annual funding through the Capital Regional District of \$1500 per year. At that meeting, it was decided to continue on with CRAT.

From about 2007 to 2020, CRAT brought over Taking Care of Ourselves, Taking Care of Others (tco2) from Vancouver, to provide interactive presentations to High School students in the Victoria area. Although the tco2 presentations were free, there was a cost for out-of-pocket expenses for the Children of the Street Society, who had developed the tco2 program. In the beginning, the annual costs were about \$1200 per trip. By 2020, those costs had escalated to almost \$3000 per trip. It became necessary to secure additional funding through the VFCYJC.

The goals of CRAT were pretty basic;

1. To raise awareness of the issue of child and youth sexual exploitation in the Greater Victoria area,
2. To educate students about the issue of child and youth sexual exploitation, and
3. To identify gaps in services for sexually exploited youth and work to close those gaps.

Some of the challenges were:

1. that there was a new group of 13-14 year-olds every year
2. that there was a high staff turnover at agencies which provided services to these youth, and
3. that raising funds for services for sexually exploited youth was becoming more difficult, because the issue was no long visible, and was therefore removed from policymakers' awareness.

Covid has accelerated these challenges. As we get back to “normal”, there has been a huge gap in continuity with agencies serving sexually exploited youth. In addition, tco2 has not been providing interactive presentations in schools for about 3 years. There has also been some concern that the quality of the presentations has declined since Children of the Street turned their programs over to PLEA Community Services. More gang activity in Greater Victoria has led to increased drugs, violence and the subsequent sexual exploitation of youth.

2.

It is therefore timely to re-examine the role of CRAT in our community. There are a number of options to consider:

1. Remain part of the VFCYJC in the same manner as in the previous 25 years,
2. Consider becoming a separate committee under the Capital Regional District,
3. Incorporate as a non-profit Society,
4. Merge with another agency which provides services to sexually exploited youth, such as Boys and Girls Club, the University of Victoria, or the Youth Empowerment Society, as examples, or
5. Wind up CRAT.

In addition to the above challenges, the issues of leadership and accountability have not kept pace with other organizations in the community. The current Chair has been chair since 2007 and has been unable to find another Chair for the past 5-10 years. There are only a core of about 8 individual who regularly attend meetings, and it has become more difficult to secure meeting space and secure enough funds for operating costs.

Complicating the issue is that CRAT received a legacy of \$12,000 in 2019-20 in order to develop and print a Graphic Novel to hand out to students and parents at presentations. Because of Covid, this project has been on hold.

Discussion:

CRAT should not be wound up. The sexual exploitation of youth is a growing and ongoing problem in Greater Victoria and needs an agency to coordinate and identify gaps in services. Merging with another agency makes a lot of sense, but what will we do if the selected agency decides it can no longer afford these services and just cancels CRAT. We can remain part of the VFCYJC as we have in the past, but that does not address the issues of funding, management and participation. CRAT could become a working committee of the CRD. This would address the issues of funding, administrative support and ensuring a process of accountability and personnel change.

Recommendation:

That a subcommittee of 3 to 5 people meet to consider these options, come up with a recommendation and report back to CRAT and VFCYJC by September or October 2023.