



Police policy and practice on sexual assault against young women

Youth Alliance Report

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Photovoice image, taken by young women

Improving the system: police policy and practice on sexual assault against young women

Youth Alliance Report

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Image from Youth Alliance retreat



Summary of Recommendations

Policy and procedures

1. Incorporate a unique definition of “youth” into police policies and practices.
2. Develop strong mechanisms to incorporate annual youth input into police policies and practices with a focus on young women. Support and promote development of a community-based youth advocate group to oversee these mechanisms.
3. Develop a collaborative leadership model that includes key stakeholders to address sexual assault. Key stakeholders include young women and youth peer groups, youth-serving agencies, parents and caregivers, representatives from various police units and front line officers.
4. Develop a youth-friendly interview protocol for sexual assaults against youth and young women.

Youth leadership

5. Build youth leadership in key decision-making bodies at Toronto Police Service and increase opportunities for youth leadership throughout the organization, focusing on inclusion of young women.

Training

6. Integrate information about sexual violence against young women into mandatory orientation and training for Toronto Police Service staff. Create strong incentives for staff to access additional professional development and training on the issues.

Communications

7. Increase partnerships and knowledge-exchange with local community and support services relevant to young women.
8. Enhance existing information about sexual assault and safety planning to better address youth needs. Develop more youth-friendly information to explain reporting processes and young women’s rights, better address common concerns young women express and encourage young women to participate and get involved in leadership opportunities.
9. Increase collaboration and partnerships between the Sex Crimes Unit and other relevant departments and staff to better address complexities of sexual violence against young women.

Accountability

10. Periodically release summary information about the implementation of these recommendations and other efforts to improve police policy and practices with respect to youth and young women.



“Increase safety in and around schools and promote student trust and confidence in police. Provide youth with crime prevention and safety information, and encourage reporting. Reduce the impact and effects of bullying and cyber-bullying. Focusing on violent crime, prevent and decrease the victimization of children and youth.”

(Focus on Child and Youth Safety, 2009-2011 Toronto Police Priorities and Goals, p. 9)

Introduction

The Youth Alliance

The Youth Alliance is a youth-led collective working to improve systemic responses to violence against young women in Toronto. It is supported by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), a non-profit community-based organization dedicated to advancing justice, safety and equity for all women and youth affected by violence. Our work targets three levels of change - individual, institutional and systemic - through outreach, education, training, safety audits, community-based research and policy.

“We work together within the Service and with members of our communities to achieve our goals, making use of diverse skills, abilities, roles, and views.”

(Core Values, Toronto Police Services 2009 Annual Report, p. 8)

Originally funded by the Canadian Women’s Foundation in 2007, the Youth Alliance convened with 15 youth leaders and advocated for improved municipal violence prevention strategies to support young women in Toronto. In 2010, the group received funding support from Laidlaw Foundation to reconvene and address issues of policing, sexual assault and gender-based violence against youth. With the leadership of five young women and one project coordinator, the Youth Alliance was supported by the Toronto Police Service’s Sex Crimes Unit to review police policies and procedures from a youth perspective. The alliance also conducted the following research activities:

- surveys with 44 diverse young women between the ages of 12 and 30;
- surveys with 21 Toronto Police Service staff members;
- surveys with 37 youth service providers;
- focus groups with eight young women aged 14 to 21;
- a focus group with eight youth service providers;
- a focus group with seven Toronto Police Service staff members;
- one-on-one interviews with four Toronto Police Service staff members; and
- a review of relevant studies and reports.

Finally, the Youth Alliance engaged 25 diverse young women between the ages of 14 and 18 in arts-based research activities and a day-long retreat. Young women used photographs and creative writing to express their thoughts and feelings about youth-police relations, support services and impacts of sexual assault and gender-based violence.

The entire research process allowed the Youth Alliance to identify strengths, challenges and gaps in police policies and procedures and make recommendations for improvement, as outlined in this report. It is the Youth Alliance’s hope that these recommendations will strengthen police responses to and collaboration with young women and all youth in Toronto, creating ripple effects to increase safety and quality of life of everyone in our city.

The facts: young women, sexual assault and gender-based violence

Up to 70% of women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2009). Young women and girls are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence. For instance, “nearly 50% of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls 15 years or younger” (United Nations Population Fund, 2005, p. 66).

Of the 19 million Canadians who reported having a current or former spouse in 2009, six percent reported being physically or sexually victimized by their partner or spouse in the preceding five years. Women reported experiencing repeated and/or more serious forms of violence, and “younger Canadians were more likely to report being a victim of spousal violence”. Canadians aged 25 to 34 were three times more likely to report being physically or sexually assaulted by a current spouse in the previous 12 months (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 5, 8-10).

“Sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes. According to the [General Social Survey], fewer than 10% of sexual assaults in both survey years were reported to the police” (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Young women experience higher rates of stalking or, as termed in the Criminal Code of Canada (1985), criminal harassment. “There are several risk factors associated with being a victim of stalking and they include being female, young and Aboriginal” (AuCoin, 2005, p. 37).

“The vulnerability of youth to sexual violence is emphasized by the fact that, overall, youth under 18 represented 22% of the Canadian population in 2004 but made up 58% of victims of sexual offences.” (Statistics Canada, 2006, p. 36).

Racialized women and women of colour may face more sexual harassment and may be more vulnerable to sexual assault because of racist stereotypes. Racist stereotypes can also mean that they have less access to justice and support after violence (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2002).

Aboriginal women experience violent crime, including gender-based violence, at a rate nearly 3 times higher than non-Indigenous women. Young Aboriginal women are particularly at risk (Brennan, 2011, p. 5). Studies suggest that assaults against Aboriginal women are more frequent and brutal (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts & Johnson, 2006, p. 5-7).

“It is estimated that women with disabilities are 1.5 to 10 times as likely to be abused as non-disabled women, depending on whether they live in the community or in institutions” (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1992). In the US, Valenti-Hein and Schwartz found that over 90% of people with developmental disabilities will experience sexual abuse and 49% will experience 10 or more incidents of abuse (as cited in Davis, 1997, p. 1).

In a Toronto study of homeless youth, 38.5% of young women reported experiencing sexual assault – queer young women and young Black women were most at risk (Gaetz,



“Sexual assaults have also increased at alarming rates across the city. Inhibitions to reporting sexual assaults in the present system have resulted in the vast majority of youth not reporting their own victimization or that of their fellow students.”

(School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008, p. 2)

O’Grady & Buccieri, 2010, p. 3-4). In a 2001 British Columbia survey of youth aged 12 to 19 years old, 87% of young women and 60% of young men reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse (Tonkin, 2001, p. 32). “Street-involved youth are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse; through their survival strategies they are exposed to a wide range of dangerous practices and persons. Although the evidence is limited, there is indication that the street-involved youth who are most vulnerable to further victimization are those with disabilities, minority sexual status, or of Native American or Aboriginal ancestry” (Covell, 2005, p. x).

“The high incidence of sexual assault among women, especially young adolescents, coupled with the fact that it is severely underreported is a cause for serious concern.”

(Vopni, 2006, p. 109)

In its survey of 870 students at a school in Toronto, the school safety group found that 29 young women (seven percent of all female respondents) experienced a major sexual assault at their school over the past two years. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported knowing one student who was sexually assaulted at school over the past two years and seven percent reported knowing three or more students who were sexually assaulted at school over the past two years. The vast majority of students at two Toronto Schools said they would not report their own victimization to the police or school authorities (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008, p. 11).

“Adolescents may not report to the police because they do not perceive their sexual assault experience as legitimate, or they may fear the consequences of their parents’ knowledge of the assault (e.g. the parents may blame them, or restrict their activities)” (Vopni, 2006, p. 108).

Youth inclusion initiatives of the Toronto Police Service

The Youth Alliance identified existing programs and bodies within the Toronto Police Service to engage young people in the broader community.

- **The Chief’s Youth Advisory Committee:** this committee, along with the Chief’s Community Advisory Council, can access the Chief of Police directly. The Chief of Police also accesses these bodies to “engage in constructive dialogue with appropriate, recognized community spokespersons”. Both the committee and council work with communities to identify, prioritize and problem-solve policing issues by: “being proactive in community relations, crime prevention, education, mobilization, and communications initiatives”; “acting as a resource to the police and the community”; and “developing a strategic long-term vision through building knowledge, education, tolerance and understanding” (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).
- **Youth in Policing Initiative:** this is a summer employment program aimed at young people aged 14 to 17 in priority neighbourhoods in Toronto. Its mandate is to “promote youth participation in and exposure to the work environment through diverse, educational and productive work assignments”; “enhance the link between the police and the neighbourhoods we serve by selecting youth reflecting our culturally diverse city”; “provide a safe and positive employment opportunity over the summer months for youth”; and “promote the Toronto Police Service as an employer of choice” (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).
- **Empowered Student Partnerships (ESP):** is a police-led partnership “directed to high school students who are encouraged to plan, organize and execute year-long safety initiatives in their local schools and communities” (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).

- **Public Education and Crime Eradication (PEACE):** this is a crime prevention strategy that “enables youth to work with the police and community partners to get guns and gangs off our streets” through “education, prevention and enforcement techniques” (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).
- **Toronto Recreational Outreach Outtripping Program (TROOP):** this is a program that provides youth an opportunity to take a “five-day excursion to the wilderness of Northern Ontario and a seven-day leadership trip at the end of the season” with police officers (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).

Additionally, the Toronto Police Service has a specialized **Youth Bureau**. As noted with respect to the function of Youth Bureau services in general, officers in each division use special investigatory skills to deal with incidents that involve youth (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003, p. 146).



Image from Youth Alliance retreat



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"No Exit" photovoice image, taken by young women

Youth Alliance Recommendations

Policy and procedures

1. Incorporate a unique definition of “youth” into police policies and practices.

Through surveys and focus groups with youth service providers and police officers, the Youth Alliance identified disparities in approach, language and age parameters assigned to the term “youth”. For instance, in response to the survey question, “How do you define youth?”, 73% of police staff (11 of 15 respondents) defined “youth” as people up to 19 years old and 20% (3 of 15 respondents) defined “youth” as people up to 12 years old. However, answering the same question, the lowest age youth service providers selected was 14 and 78% (29 of 37 respondents) selected a top age of 20 years or higher.

Differences in the definition of what it means to be a young person are found elsewhere. In the City of Toronto, a young person falls within the age range of 13 and 24. However, on a federal level, Service Canada defines “youth” as people who are between the age of 15 and 29 (Shen, 2008, p. 2). The United Nations General Assembly defines youth as people between 15 and 24 but recognizes nuances.

Many countries also draw a line on youth at the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the “age of majority”. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term youth often vary from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors. Within the category of youth, it is also important to distinguish between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24), since the sociological, psychological and health problems they face may differ (United Nations, 2009, p. 15).

Given complexities and disparities in the definitions of youth, the Youth Alliance believes it important that the Toronto Police Service develop its own definition of the term that recognizes the high risk of victimization youth and young women in particular experience beyond age 16, the age of consent, and age 18, the age of majority. While existing police policies and definitions embedded in the *Criminal Code of Canada* (1985) *Child and Family Services Act* (1990) and other legislation may pose complications, developing a functional, nuanced definition of what it means to be a youth will support the Toronto Police Service in recognizing factors that contribute to increased vulnerability to crime for all young people. A police-specific definition of youth should specifically recognize the increased victimization young people who experience marginalization face, including young women, youth living or working on the street, racialized youth, youth living in poverty, youth with disabilities and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and two-spirited.

The Youth Alliance also believes that any definition of youth must acknowledge ageism as a factor that creates vulnerabilities to violence. Sometimes termed “age discrimination”, ageism is stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals or groups because of their age. It is a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms and values used to justify age-based prejudice, discrimination and subordination (Blaikie, n.d.). It includes “making generalized assumptions about the ability of individuals because of their age”

“... a growing number of young people are limited in their development in both the public and private spheres. This negative trend is reflected in the struggle that many face in accessing not only their civil and political rights (e.g. opposition to the lowering of voting ages), but also their economic, social and cultural rights. This necessarily impedes a young person’s capacity to act as a full citizen – the result being exclusion, in varying degrees of severity, and in different sectors of one’s life.”

(Wulff, 2010, p. 11)

and those who are younger and older are most at risk of facing it (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2007). Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, (1990) age a protected ground and sections 1, 2(1), 3, 5(1) and 6 of the Code guarantee every person the right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, the occupancy of accommodation and the right to contract, employment and membership in any trade union. Under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), discrimination based on age is also prohibited. An understanding of age-based discrimination and the legal protections and rights that relate to it can serve as a powerful context to address higher rates of crime against young people in a police-specific definition of youth.

2. Develop strong mechanisms to incorporate annual youth input into police policies and practices with a focus on young women. Support and promote development of a community-based youth advocate group to oversee these mechanisms.

According to *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report, “the sense that many youth already have of being alienated from society is reinforced when they do not have opportunities to be heard in areas that directly and immediately affect their lives” (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 14). The report notes that dealing with violence involves having those impacted by violence and its risks – including young people themselves – playing “significant roles in setting policies and priorities” (p. 16). In general, citizen input is a pillar of successful community-oriented policing, “based on the idea that police departments should seek and carefully consider citizen input when making policies and decisions that affect the community” (Chaurprakobkit, 2002, p. 713).

As a distinct group that faces high rates of victimization, youth and young women in particular must be meaningfully brought into the process of police policy development. Their voices, ideas, needs, assets and priorities can support improved services for everyone and promote best practices in strengthening police-youth relations.

“... young women involved in policy change could be healing. [It can] validate their feelings and empower them.”

(Community service provider response to Youth Alliance Survey)

In the survey process, the Youth Alliance received positive feedback from police officer respondents on building youth input into police policy development. For instance, one officer said, “Feedback is critical so policies can better reflect the desires of the people who are directly affected”. Another stated, “I think it could be a good idea to take [young women’s] ideas into consideration since they have a firsthand experience of system”. Yet another stated, “Each generation changes. Young women who can voice out their concerns is the most effective way to improve policies and procedures”.



“Public and/or victim feedback is the best feedback the service can receive.”

(Police officer response to Youth Alliance survey)

While the Toronto Police Service’s Chief’s Youth Advisory Committee provides a level of consultative support to the Chief of Police, youth input should be broadened to the wider service and reach out beyond a core group of youth to include those whose voices are rarely heard (Toronto Police Service, n.d.). Young women’s voices should be a major priority and the process of accessing youth input should be regularized and conducted on an annual basis. It should focus on future priorities and service and policy improvements in addition to current perceptions of police performance. For example, a survey developed by the Lansing Police Department in Michigan, USA sought a large spread of residents’ input into police services and functions, and survey findings were used to influence policy and decision-making. The survey was created to avoid pitfalls of traditional satisfaction surveys that “only provide a yardstick of existing police performance” and “provide no opportunity for citizens to express their model of the ideal” (Trojanowicz, Gleason, Poland & Sinclair, 1987, para. 4).

Youth-friendly, accessible processes must be developed to ensure the voices of young people are effectively and respectfully sought out. Young women and other youth who tend to face barriers to civic engagement and political participation must be prioritized (O’Neill, 2007, p. 23). At the same time, processes to prepare the police as a public institution to listen and respond to whatever youth have to say must be instituted. An element of this preparation is combating common stereotypes about youth that may hinder the perceived value of their involvement in policy development.

One of the main obstacles to the participation of young people is the perception of age as an indicator of competence. Young people are still often perceived as being too young, too inexperienced and too immature to be able to form an opinion or make an informed decision. Moreover, youth, as a social group, is often portrayed in a negative light – perceived as threatening, reactionary, and troublesome. Seemingly, this can result in disproportionate social policies couched as “preventative” and based in a wider perception of public safety and order, which limit the independence of young people, and infringe their rights (e.g. the use of the “Mosquito” device to prevent young people gathering in public spaces). In this sense, we can recognise that there is a gap between the responsibilities and duties of young people on the one hand and the actual rights they enjoy on the other (Wulff, 2010, p. 12).

During the Youth Alliance’s focus groups with service providers, some participants suggested that a peer-driven group would best help young women to anonymously share their experiences in navigating the legal system with respect to sexual assault and gender-based violence. In addition to informing police policy and practices, a peer-driven group would be well-positioned to provide youth-friendly information about the reporting process; serve as “buddies” and advocates to those who want support; and gather real-life stories about young women’s experiences for others who are considering reporting victimization to the police.

3. Develop a collaborative leadership model that includes key stakeholders to address sexual assault. Key stakeholders include young women and youth peer groups, youth-serving agencies, parents and caregivers, representatives from various police units and front line officers.

“Ontario’s provincial violence against women organizations have provided leadership in raising awareness of sexual violence and advocating for legal and policy reforms. Since the early 1970s, community-based, grassroots agencies have led the way in supporting women who experience violence and engaging communities in prevention efforts.”

(Government of Ontario, 2011, p. 2)

Recognition of the power of collaboration to address crime and victimization is not new. *Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives: Ontario’s Sexual Violence Action Plan* heavily emphasizes collaboration between survivors, service providers and the government to ensure an effective response to sexual violence (Government of Ontario, 2011). The principles embedded in Ontario’s *Police Services Act* (1990) are, in many ways, grounded in the idea of collaboration between communities and the police, and the Toronto Police Service has liaison, consultative and advisory groups as well as youth-targeted programming (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).

However, as already mentioned in this report, youth and youth-led groups, especially those who experience marginalization, are not always prioritized in collaborative processes even though they are “best positioned to know what will work for other youth” (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 14). Additionally, consultation, advisement and program activities, while important forms of participation, are quite different than shared leadership (Bishop & Davis, 2002). Involving youth and youth-led groups in an enhanced collaborative leadership model to address policy and practice with respect to sexual assault can serve the community powerfully and improve policing for everyone, including young women. Other key stakeholders would also be assets in this model, such as youth-serving agencies, parents and caregivers, representatives from various police units and front line police officers who serve as first responders.

“Make us feel more safe and do more to make the community aware that they are taking abuse seriously.”

(Youth response to the Youth Alliance survey question, “What do you think the police could do to better support youth, especially young women?”)

The *Wisconsin Adult Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Protocol* is an interesting model of collaboration. While it focuses on the response to sexual assault against adults, it can be adapted to address sexual assault against all age groups with a focus on those who are most vulnerable, young women. The Wisconsin SART is a “multidisciplinary response team that provides direct intervention to sexual assault victims as they interact with the criminal justice system and coordinates effective investigative and prosecutorial efforts in connection with a report of sexual assault” (Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2009, p. 6). Amongst other functions, the group creates protocol to “provide seamless victim centred and offender focussed response to the victims of sexual assault as they interact with the criminal justice system”; educates the legal system and public; and seeks ongoing feedback from survivors of sexual assault (p. 16). Community-based advocates who work with survivors of sexual assault play an essential role in the team because they provide a “victim centered response” and “help keep the investigative and



prosecutorial process focused on the offender” (p. 11). Similarly, Making a Difference Canada (n.d.) is led by multi-disciplinary teams that “collaboratively challenge the status quo of the Canadian legal system as it relates to sexual assaults”. Teams include an array of members such as police investigators, advocacy and support workers, crisis counsellors, survivors, forensic medical practitioners and prosecutors. Right now, teams are functioning in Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, the Halifax-Antigonish Region, the Niagara Region, Charlottetown and Whitehorse.

4. Develop a youth-friendly interview protocol for sexual assaults against youth and young women.

“Over the past number of years, changes have been made to the Criminal Code of Canada to help ensure that cases of sexual assault are addressed by the courts in a manner that is more responsive to the victim. At the same time, practices are emerging here in Ontario and elsewhere to inform more appropriate approaches to sexual assault investigations. Part of an effective criminal justice response requires that police and justice personnel have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to conduct effective investigations and prosecutions.”

(Government of Ontario, 2011, p. 18)

The police interview process for young women survivors of sexual assault can be very difficult. It can at times create a sense of secondary victimization, frustration and ultimately alienation from the reporting process – this is particularly concerning given the statistic that fewer than 10% of sexual assault victims report to the police (Vopni, 2006, p. 110-112; Government of Ontario, 2011, p. 4). While the function of the police is to investigate crimes, difficult interview experiences can lead to gathering confused and inconsistent information, especially from youth survivors who may be less familiar with the legal system, may be hesitant to report in the first place and tend to experience sexual assault from intimate partners, family members and other persons known to them. How the interview process is administered can impact the quality of criminal cases, in addition to impacting the emotional state of survivors. As recognized in cases of child abuse, interview information is “critical to the subsequent investigation, and affects the outcome of the case”, especially where the child’s statement is the primary source of evidence (Interdepartmental Child Abuse Committee, 2006, p. 22). In most sexual assault cases, visible injuries are not present and the survivor’s statement becomes the primary source of evidence (Bowyer & Dalton, 1997).

The Youth Alliance believes that the Toronto Police Service should create a specific protocol for interviewing young women and youth, one that addresses their unique needs, concerns, barriers and realities in cases of sexual assault. The interview process in the Child Abuse Protocol developed in Saskatchewan is a helpful model to work from as it sets out “roles and responsibilities of communities, professionals, individuals and organizations involved” in addressing child abuse and “promotes a coordinated and integrated approach to child abuse investigations”. A Toronto-specific youth protocol should integrate the support of sexual violence crisis counsellors into the interview process (Interdepartmental Child Abuse Committee, 2006, p. 2). The involvement of crisis counsellors can build a stronger client-centred, peer-based approach, so important to survivors of sexual assault (Government of Ontario, 2011, p. 11). An integrated interview process would also better ensure the needs of young women and other youth are respected and understood (*Police Services Act*, 1990). As one service provider and Youth Alliance survey respondent said, it “should be mandatory to have support person” because “it is an incredibly intimidating system”.

A number of young women who participated in Youth Alliance focus groups communicated that police interviews of young survivors of sexual assault would be best conducted by a plain-clothed officer and a female officer, if the survivor so chooses. They also expressed a need for consistent follow-up about sexual assault cases, done by

a first response officer or other individual who conducts the original interview, someone specially trained to support young women as recommended elsewhere in this report. These are also key elements to include in a youth-specific interview protocol.

“Try to have female officers available to assist with calls; continue to ensure officers do not ‘interview’ or ‘interrupt’ at the scene.”

(Police officer response to Youth Alliance survey)

Further input of youth into the development of the protocol is essential and can be integrated through new processes for youth involvement recommended in this report. Finally, input from the Toronto Police Service’s Sex Crimes Unit would be vital to the success of the protocol, given its relevant expertise.



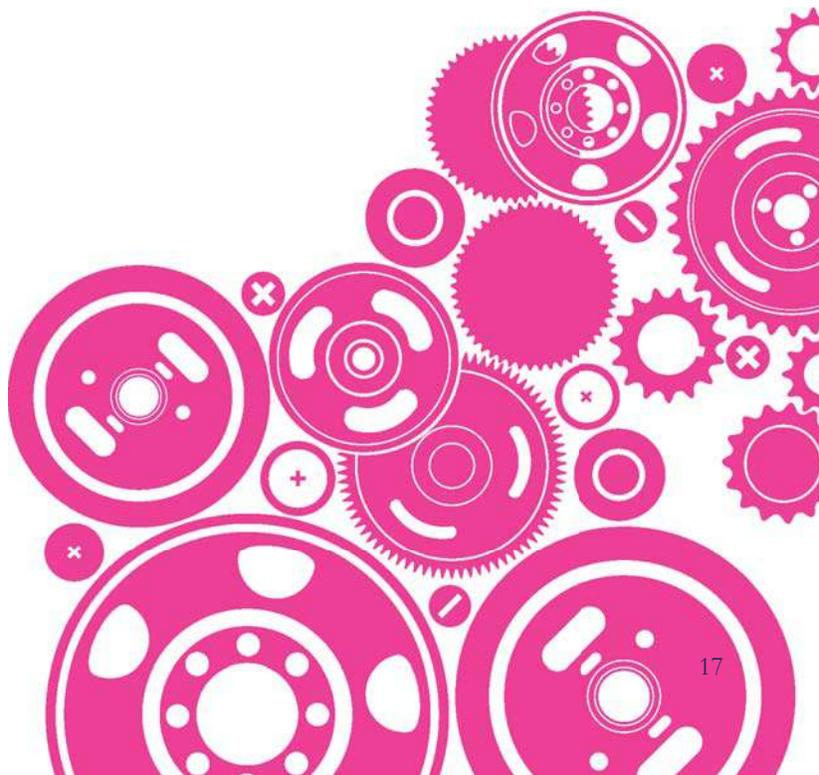
Image from Youth Alliance retreat



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“Escape” photovoice image, taken by young women



Youth leadership

“Believe in us and trust our ability to make really big change! Overcome your own stereotypes about young people. Just like adults, we’re not all lazy, partycrazed, and irresponsible people who are unmotivated about life. We are very active in our communities and aren’t provided with enough outlets to start our own new, innovative projects. Even though we already know we deserve the right to have our voices heard, it sounds nicer when we hear it from you too.”

(Youth Alliance, 2008, p. 8)

“Involving young people as apprentices or interns, allowing them to serve on management boards, inviting them to participate in consultative workshops, and creating advisory forums are just some of the mechanisms that might be used to democratize organizations.”

(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 286)

5. Build youth leadership into key decision-making bodies at the Toronto Police Service and increase opportunities for youth leadership throughout the organization, focusing on inclusion of young women.

Youth leadership is critical and beneficial to all areas of civic and community life. The United Nations’s *World Youth Report 2003: The Global Situation of Young People* notes that youth leadership in policy, governance and other forms of decision-making leads to better outcomes, well-being, protection and support for human rights, not only for youth but for everyone. Additionally, many young people want to get involved and “when given the opportunity, young people consistently assert their desire for wider recognition of their right to participate” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 274-278). Youth involvement requires action on the part of young people and institutions that define public life. It “includes efforts by young people to take initiative and organize around policy issues that concern them, by adults to involve them in policy proceedings of public agencies, and by youth and adults to work together in intergenerational policy partnerships”. Rather than focusing on youth as deficient, victims, a problem or disengaged, purposefully opening space for youth to contribute and lead harnesses the positive contributions youth can and do make to public life and safety (Checkowaya, Allison & Montoya, 2005, p. 1150).

There are a number of ways that young people get involved in governance and decision-making, including: participating in and conducting research on issues of concern to them; program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; peer support, representation and advocacy; policy analysis and development; and youth councils and parliaments (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 280). As such, the Youth Alliance believes that meaningful leadership opportunities for diverse youth to contribute to police policy, practice and planning can and should take a number of different forms, given the complexity of delivering police services in Toronto. New opportunities can be added to existing ones at the Toronto Police Service, such as the Chief’s Youth Advisory Committee (Toronto Police Service, n.d.). Intentionally building leadership of young women and other marginalized youth within the institution is important, again because of their higher vulnerabilities to crime, rates of under-reporting and barriers to involvement.

New processes to incorporate youth input in police policy development and new collaborative leadership models have already been recommended in this report. As recommended in a United Kingdom-based document entitled *Policing, Accountability and Young People*, a consultative body of youth with decision-making authority can also powerfully support the Toronto Police Services Board in its role (Hamilton, Radford & Jarman, 2003, p. 90). New sub-committees of the Toronto Police Services Board for young women and youth may help serve this purpose.

The structure of the Toronto Youth Cabinet is a useful model – it is the official voice for youth on a municipal government level and it advocates for youth issues, programs and services. The Youth Cabinet’s activities are supported by an annual budget that is controlled and monitored by youth members themselves. General information on best practices such as *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*, *Involve Youth: A Guide to Involving Youth in Decision-Making* and *Involve Youth 2:*

A Guide to Meaningful Youth Engagement can also provide insight on effective models for including youth on the police board level (Martin, Pittman, Ferber & McMachon, 2007; InvolveYouth Campaign, 2004; Shen, 2006).

“The demand for recognition of the right of young people to be heard, to have their views given serious consideration, and to play an active role in promoting their own best interests is far from universally respected, however. This demand represents a profound challenge to traditional attitudes towards young people in most societies throughout the world. It implies a radical change in youth-adult relationships in all spheres of life including the family, schools, local communities, programmes, social services, and local, regional and national government.”

(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 272)

With a longer-term goal in mind, seats designated for young women and youth on the Toronto Police Services Board itself should also be explored. Where any legislative changes to the *Police Services Act* (1990) are required for this and where associated bodies like the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards can support the efforts, they should also be explored.

Accordingly, youth leadership and involvement of young women and other youth should be a consideration in all areas of policing. For example, concerted youth involvement can support excellent policy and practices in different police units and departments, advisory groups such as the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee and specialized services such as school liaison officers. Youth participation and leadership in planning and delivering police training is essential and can strengthen police-youth relations in the long run.

As already alluded to earlier in this report, it is important for public institutions to prepare themselves for youth leadership and the power shifting and sharing it entails. The Youth Alliance recognizes how challenging the process can be but stresses its importance. For instance, structures for youth engagement can serve as “[mere] showcases and offer no real opportunity for the articulation of concerns”. Sometimes, participating youth are “chosen by adults and do not represent any constituency of young people” because “adults assume that youth lack the capacity to choose appropriate delegates”. In addition, youth participants may “be dominated by the most articulate and socially engaged young people, while the more marginalized groups are excluded” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 283).

To address these risks, the Toronto Police Service must work internally to build values of youth-adult partnership and power-sharing. Ongoing evaluation of the actual effectiveness of any new youth leadership and engagement processes should be a priority (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 284, 285). Best practices and case studies in building youth leadership must be sought out and various models explored and critiqued (Calvert & Zeldin, 2002, p. 10). Possible pitfalls of community inclusion in law enforcement committees must be identified and avoided. For example, diverse youth – not just those who are seen as “respectable” – must be included and members must be allowed to set agendas and “influence decisions about policing strategies and tactics” (Bull & Stratta, 1995, p. 77, 79). Finally, youth participation and leadership must be institutionalized within the service to ensure it continues, even if the concept of youth involvement no longer remains “fashionable” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004, p. 284, 285).



policy & procedures youth leadership training communications accountability



"SOS" photovoice image, taken by young women

Training

6. Integrate information about sexual violence against young women into training for Toronto Police Service staff. Create strong incentives for staff to access additional professional development and training on the issues.

The Youth Alliance discovered that young women likely experience the highest degree of re-victimization when they first report a sexual assault. Re-victimization or “secondary victimization” refers to a victim’s negative experience when reporting crimes and/or navigating through institutions like legal or medical systems and a loss of power and control over the process duplicates the trauma of the original crime (Campbell, 2005, p. 56-58). For instance, a study entitled *Young Women’s Experiences Reporting Sexual Assault to Police* says that “the literature has well documented women’s largely negative experiences of reporting to the police. The prosecution of rapists has been termed ‘the second rape’ because the victim is ‘twice traumatized’ - once by the offender, and then again by the authorities” (Vopni, 2006, p. 108).

The Youth Alliance’s research suggests this reality. Six of eight young women focus group participants identified knowing one or more friends who had gone to the police about a sexual assault and stated that the police “did not do anything”. A participant expressed lack of power over the reporting process by stating that they “don’t know if they [the victim] can trust the person [the officer] especially if they don’t want others to know; could be very traumatic”. Another participant stated, “nothing happens, no follow-up, they broadcast your information”, and yet another stated, “police won’t ask you how you’re feeling, or understand how you’re feeling, (they) just want to take action”. One participant said, “They’re rude to you, judge you - cops make you feel like you did something wrong, like you’re wearing the wrong thing, suggestive clothing ... blame you for the crime, make you more vulnerable by revealing to your abuser you have no support.” These statements by focus group participants are very concerning and imply a need to work on breaking down barriers to young women reporting sexual assault. Certainly, in its declaration of principles, the *Police Services Act* (1990, s.1) notes the importance of “respect for victims of crime and understanding their needs”.

The well-publicized instance where a police officer publicly commented that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” may also point to a need for enhanced training with respect to the impact of sexual assault and, importantly, enhanced incentives to promote training (Rush, 2011). As Chief of Police William Blair stated, “If that type of, frankly, archaic thinking still exists among any of my officers, it highlights for me the need to continue to train my officers and sensitize them to the reality of victimization” (CBC News, 2011). While Toronto Police Service’s training has been revised according to recommendations in the 2007 *Executive Summary of the Assessment of the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Course* and addresses myths and stereotypes about sexual assault, the curriculum only appears to be implemented at the investigatory level (Sexual Assault Steering Committee, 2007). As such, other officers and staff may serve without particular training on myths and stereotypes about sexual assault beyond initial orientation at the cadet level.

Through the Youth Alliance’s surveys and interviews with police personnel, it was also noted that, due to low reporting rates, many first-response uniform officers in local

divisions do not have a regular opportunity to handle sexual assault cases. While they may handle other crimes more often, these officers may be less familiar with respect to police policies, procedures, processes and best practices specific to sexual assault.



“More education on topic, maybe having group speaker from that age group come in for discussions (if ever possible).”

(Police officer response to Youth Alliance survey)

Additionally, it is unclear whether police officers have access to training specific to diverse young women’s experiences of sexual assault. Results of the Youth Alliance’s survey for police officers indicate that respondents, all of whom identified as investigators, did not receive training focused on the needs and realities of young women aged 13 to 25. Respondents also did not receive specific training on the complexities of sexual assault against young women marginalized by identity factors such as race, class, sexuality, ability and gender identity. Fifty-six percent (9 of 16 respondents) stated that they had not received training about the various forms of violence young women aged 13 to 25 are most at risk of and another 18% (3 of 16 respondents) were unsure if they received training on this.

Filling the gaps in training with respect to young women, sexual assault and gender-based violence can help address negative public perceptions about reporting and reduce trauma associated with reporting. All police officers, especially those on the front lines, should be supported with enhanced training on sexual violence against diverse young women. Enhanced training is important given first-response officers’ responsibility to address sexual assault cases deemed low risk and outside the mandate of the Sex Crimes Unit. Training should be mandatory and expressly address stereotypes, the “slut status” and rape myths young women, particularly marginalized young women, tend to be labelled by in society. Since rewards are effective motivators for all workers including police officers, incentives should be established to encourage officers to access such training as a part of their annual professional development plans (Kelling, Wasserman & Williams, 1998, p. 6). Particular incentive should exist for school liaison officers to access the training because they are key players in making schools safer for young women.

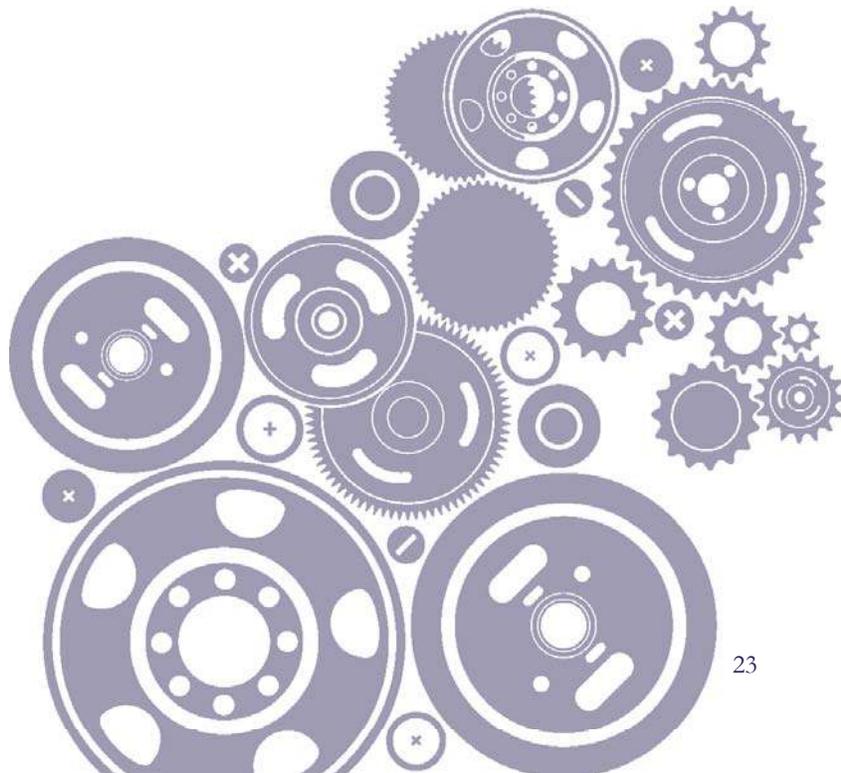
“I see a lot of training and education that’s missing. Everything from sensitivity training to how to talk with young people. Training component is huge.”

(Community service provider response to Youth Alliance survey)

The Youth Alliance identified an opportunity to address some of the training gaps in the half-hour training day sessions, delivered every five weeks in each police division. Here, Sexual Assault Liaison Officers in the Sex Crimes Unit could provide knowledge and experience on the topic, with input and support from young women themselves. An internal training needs assessment focused on first response officers can help identify any additional training gaps, best modes of delivery and effective incentives to promote the training to employees.



Image from Youth Alliance retreat



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“Smackdown” photovoice image, taken by young women

Communications

7. Increase partnerships and knowledge-exchange with local community and support services relevant to young women.

Community organizations service providers believe are important for youth and police officers to know about:

Anishnawbe Health Toronto, Sherbourne Health Centre, Shout Clinic, 519 Church Street Community Centre, Barbra Schlifer Clinic, Scarborough Agencies Sexual Abuse Treatment Program, West End Sexual Abuse Treatment Program, Boost, LGBT Youth Line, HEYY (Hearing Every Youth through Youth) Line, Kids Help Phone, East Metro Youth Services, Parkdale Community Health Centre, Queen West Community Health Centre, Rexdale Community Health Centre

(Youth Alliance focus group with service providers)

In the Youth Alliance survey of youth service providers, 11 of 17 respondents (65%) who described their relationship working with police identified it as limited, sporadic and/or problematic. Of those who answered the question, 75% (12 of 27 respondents) rated their relationship between one to five out of 10, one being “not at all effective” and 10 being “very effective”.

In the Youth Alliance survey for police officers, responses suggested that there may be limited access to and knowledge of service providers extending beyond Victim Services Toronto, children’s aid organizations and the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape. Additionally, as first response officers may have a fast rotation rate and may not remain in a particular neighbourhood for longer than one to three years, it can be difficult for them to create meaningful, long-term relationships with local community service agencies in the division where they work.

“I see us as needing to work with police. I was working with a young woman who was sexually assaulted; it was scary for me. The first officer was compassionate, but then they had to speak with a series of other officers who were not as compassionate ... If my program did not allow me to support her in that process, this would not have been successful as it was.”

(Community service provider response to Youth Alliance survey)

As a law enforcement agency, the Toronto Police Service cannot address the overwhelming issue of violence against young women alone and work must be done across sectors, including education, counselling and health care. Stronger communication with community agencies and increased information about local services can build officers’ awareness of supports and reduce distress and confusion for young women who approach the police for this information. For instance, simple written resource packages can be created for officers in neighbourhood divisions with contact information and mandates of local services. As marginalized youth may have limited access to the internet and telephone services, a printed resource for officers to give to them might be of benefit.

8. Enhance existing information about sexual assault and safety planning to better address youth needs. Develop more youth-friendly information to explain reporting processes and young women's rights, better address common concerns young women express and encourage young women to participate and get involved in leadership opportunities.

Access to relevant, easy-to-understand information is critical for young people, not only to best meet their needs and concerns but also to provide the tools for them to participate in systems that impact their lives. The United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2004) says, "Information of relevance to youth must be widely disseminated and made more accessible and user-friendly to enable young people to play a greater and more effective role in political processes." Importantly, young people must be involved in developing information for their peers "to ensure its appropriateness for a young audience" (p. 282).

In a city as diverse as Toronto, youth-friendliness is not the only concern and information must reflect the "pluralistic, multiracial and multicultural character of Ontario society" (*Police Services Act*, R.S.O., 1990, s. 1). Youth-appropriate information about police processes, rights, resources and youth involvement in policing should be designed by diverse youth to support other diverse youth, including young people with disabilities, racialized youth and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, intersex, queer and questioning youth.

New structures recommended in this report to increase the leadership of young women and youth in police policy and practice should be accessed to develop youth-friendly information such as:

- a youth-targeted handbook to support young people who experience sexual violence;
- a Toronto Police Service web portal for young women and youth, clearly explaining issues such as reporting processes, rights, safety planning, social and financial support available to people who have been victimized, questions and concerns;
- media campaigns to address the crimes young women and young people regularly face; and
- alternative options to deal with sexual violence, such as accessing peace bonds, transformative justice processes, healing circles and the civil legal system.

"Empower the victim by allowing them to decide whether or not to proceed with a criminal investigation or access community programs in order to deal with the situation outside the criminal justice system ..."

(Police officer response to Youth Alliance survey)

Different ways of delivering information must also be explored to ensure diverse youth get access to information. Considering the vulnerabilities especially young women and other marginalized young people face and their lower access to resources, distribution of information must be intentionally tested and planned. Web-based distribution cannot be relied upon alone because marginalized young people tend to experience a “digital divide” (Looker & Thiessen, 2003). For example, school liaison officers and community organizations can serve as portals to deliver youth-targeted information to young people.

9. Increase collaboration and partnerships between the Sex Crimes Unit and other relevant departments and staff to better address complexities of sexual violence against young women.

The Toronto Police Service’s Sex Crimes Unit is made up of:

- the Sexual Assault Squad that investigates sexual crimes deemed high risk, where there is ongoing risk to the community and the offender is unknown to the victim;
- the Behavioural Assessment Section that does Threat Assessment and polygraph testing, manages high risk offenders, and administers the provincial Sex Offender Registry;
- the Child Exploitation Section that addresses online child sexual abuse and exploitation; and
- the Special Victims Section that investigates sexual crimes against sex workers, including young people (Toronto Police Service, n.d.).

In addition to its other functions, the Sex Crimes Unit plays a key role in administering the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, a group including police representatives, the Ministry of the Attorney General, community service agencies and sexual assault care centres. The committee seeks to improve police response to sexual assault investigations and follow up support for survivors.

Given its focus and experience investigating sexual assaults, the Youth Alliance believes that the Sex Crimes Unit is an important resource that can help improve police response to and understanding of the dynamics of sexual assaults against young women, even those deemed low risk and handled by local divisions and other units. Some police survey respondents echoed this idea. One said, “Sexual Assault Liaison Officers need to play a more active role in all [Toronto Police Service] divisions” and another commented that “Sex Crimes should take a more interactive role in divisional cases”. It is necessary to explore increased resources to allow the unit to have greater involvement across the Toronto Police Service’s units, departments and functions.

As recommended before in this report, concerted youth involvement in the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee can bolster the Toronto Police Service’s overall response to young women and support the Sex Crimes Unit as it supports the entire organization. The Youth Alliance also noted that the Victim Liaison Officer’s role in the Sex Crimes Unit is an important one – this officer provides follow-up support for survivors of sexual assaults handled by the unit and gives them information about their case as they navigate the system. Local division Victim Liaison Officers modeled on the one within the Sex Crimes Unit can be of great support to all victims, but particularly young women



whose sexual assault cases are considered low risk. They could help demystify the system and reassure young women who are often so reluctant to report. As one police survey respondent said, “more follow-up after charges, court complete would benefit the victims”.

“... a police position that would be assigned sex assault cases post-charge, to advocate, explain and assist the victim to navigate the court system when the officer’s caseload prevents him/her applying full and constant attention to each case.”

(Police officer response to Youth Alliance survey question, “What do you believe are key best practices in the police’s response to violence against young women aged 13 to 25, including sexual assault?”)



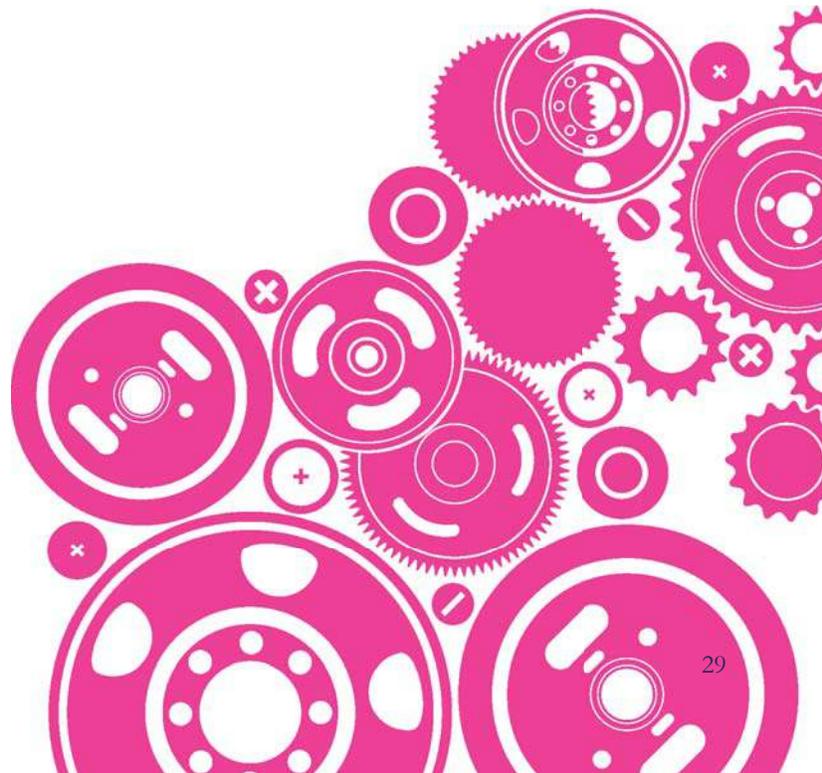
Image from Youth Alliance retreat



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“Peer isolation” photovoice image, taken by young women



Accountability

10. Periodically release summary information about the implementation of these recommendations and other efforts to improve police policy and practices with respect to youth and young women.

Saskatchewan Ombudsman Kevin Fenwick (2009) says that, in addition to making good decisions, people now expect government bodies to make decisions using an “open, transparent process that involves them” and “be treated with respect during that process”. It is not a stretch to assume that expectations of transparency and respect extend to other public sectors that impact individuals and communities on a daily basis, including law enforcement agencies.

A number of recommendations in this report focus on developing new and improved police processes to address sexual assault against young women. To make sure that public expectations about transparency are met and young women’s confidence in reporting is bolstered, the Youth Alliance believes that information about the implementation of these recommendations and other related initiatives should be proactively communicated to the city’s residents and, in particular, youth communities. Just as including communities in policy making is a best practice in building greater police accountability, proactive communication about that work can help ensure that gains made with respect to policing, young women, sexual and gender-based violence are not buried (Kelling, Wasserman & Williams, 1998, p. 4).

Communication strategies should be youth-friendly and accessible to Toronto’s diverse communities and done on an ongoing basis. Youth leadership should be engaged in all communication efforts and, ideally, those youth involved in the new leadership structures recommended in this report should take a central role. With respect to measures of accountability, *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report recognizes the importance of setting thoughtful and concrete goals, indicators and floor targets (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 31). These principles provide good guidance for how the implementation of recommendations can be monitored and communicated to young people and the broader public.

“... promote that they are against violence with women. Hiring more women staff to show they acknowledge them. And participate in youth fundraisers.”

(Youth response to the Youth Alliance survey question, “What do you think the police could do to better support youth, especially young women?”)

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