
For Immediate Release
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Mission, B. C. – The Safe OnLine Outreach Society (SOLOS) today launched an updated website amid growing concern about the online safety of British Columbia youth. “[Social networking](#) and online classified sites, such as craigslist, should concern parents,” says Merlyn Horton, Executive Director of the Safe OnLine Outreach Society. “Particularly as [more](#) isolated and [First Nations communities are being provided with broad band access](#),” she says.

[The site](#), and other programs offered by the grass-roots Society, educate youth, parents and professionals about the dangers of online exploitation. “Hopefully parents will wake up and start to realize they need to be aware and involved in what their youth are doing online.”

“We’ve recently spoken with several front-line youth workers who are worried about the alarming increase in the number of young people listed under erotic services on craigslist in the Whistler area” says Horton. “They are saying that ‘it’s out of control’ and has been increasing dramatically in the last few months.”

First Nations youth are disproportionally represented in sexually exploited youth populations. Estimates are that of the sexually exploited youth in BC, 14% and 65% are Aboriginal depending on the community. In some Canadian communities, research has indicated that up to 90% of the street-involved sexually exploited youth are Aboriginal.

“craigslist is of concern, but so are other social network sites,” says Horton, “which, once introduced to a community, maybe used for [recruitment by gangs](#), and subsequent sexual exploitation.”

“We are hearing that recruiters are online scoping out youth in isolated communities,” says Horton, “before they visit and target the most vulnerable youth once they arrive.”

Whistler has only recently got it’s own section on craigslist, in anticipation of the 2010 Olympics. Outreach workers are concerned that youth, who either post themselves or have pimps post ads about them, are at risk of physical and long term harm. This, despite [craigslist updating their practices in the U.S.](#) that remedies much of the illegal postings for those regions.

“It would seem only decent for craigslist to implement similar practices here,” says Horton, “if only to close down this obvious venue for youth exploitation.” She does, however, acknowledge that it won’t eliminate online sexual exploitation. “Asking online enterprises to act responsibly is only part of the solution.”

“Education for everyone, in every community, about the implications of these new technologies is vital,” says Horton.

The Safe OnLine Outreach Society (SOLOS) is a charitable non-profit society that is responding to the issue of cyberbullying, child pornography and online sexual exploitation by developing education and awareness initiatives aimed at youth serving professionals, parents and youth.

The ongoing efforts of the Society, including community presentations, community expert training and the distribution of online safety materials, are in high demand but face jeopardy due to limited funding and government cut-backs.

For more information:

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