

Two Aurora men among 104 charged in four-year child prostitution investigation



By Brock Weir

Two Aurora men are among 104 charged in Project Raphael, a four-year investigation by the York Regional Police in nabbing men trying to buy sex with children.

York Regional Police (YRP) launched Project Raphael in 2014 to combat child sex trafficking, including rescuing victims, identifying and charging those who traffic children, and identifying and charging those who attempted to purchase sex with children. Over the past four years, their efforts have seen 104 men charged, all of whom Police say made arrangements to purchase sex with a child between the age of 13 and 16. Each of the men responded to online ads for escorts.

Underscoring the prevalence of the demand prostituted children within York Region, Police say in just three days of the investigation this year alone, 19 men were arrested who believed they were purchasing sex from either a 13-year-old or a 14-year old.

Announcing the results of the ongoing Project Raphael, project lead Det. Sgt. Thai Truong said cases like these are difficult to investigate without gaining the cooperation of victims.

‘Enlisting their cooperation is very, very difficult,’ he said. ‘Getting them to trust us and tell us what happened is challenging.’ Project Raphael was a significant change of course.

In 2012, for instance, Police found that 33 per cent of human trafficking victims rescued were children under the age of 18. Further investigations identified 31 females working in the sex trade across York Region, nine of whom were under the age of 18.

‘The alarming concern for us in 2013 was that after interviews and investigations we found that the average age of entry into prostitution was 14.8,’ said Truong. ‘That was a big concern for us, which really led us to the genesis of how we were going to combat child sex trafficking. [In Project Raphael] we essentially put up advertisements online. When men were looking to purchase sex they were told they were communicating with a prostituted child. We used undercover operators for this investigation and once they were told they were speaking with children, for the most part men would stop and we were okay with that. We really didn’t want to identify any of the men who were not looking to purchase and to buy prostituted children.’

Over the course of the investigation, 104 men continued to try and negotiate the price for the purchase of a prostituted child believing they were purchasing a child between 13 and 16 years of age.

‘There is no actual child victim in this project,’ Truong stressed. ‘All of the men were arrested for essentially attempting to purchase prostituted children. If we look at it from another perspective, from a preventative measure, we have stopped 104 men from purchasing 104 children.’

As crimes become more sophisticated, so too must the methods of fighting the problem, added Susan Orlando, Provincial Coordinator of Ontario’s Human Trafficking Prostitution Team. All too often the victims of child sex trafficking do not report or seek assistance from the police. Project Raphael, she said, was a ‘fine example of proactive and effective policing which matches, and indeed surpasses, the ingenuity of criminals who seek to purchase children for their own sexual gratification.’

“Young lives are irrevocably damaged, some completely destroyed and others lost completely,” said Orlando. “Exploiting the most vulnerable segments of our society, our children and our youth, for personal gain, whether it is for a John's sexual gratification or a pimp's financial gain, is among the most abhorrent criminal conduct and transgression of our moral code that exists in our society today.

“For that reason, those responsible for creating the demand and trafficking underage children will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and brought to justice. The pimps who traffic underage children face significant charges and sentences given the gravity of their conduct when convicted.”

Both Truong and Orlando stressed vigilance at home as well, urging parents to keep a close eye on their children and monitoring what they do, particularly online.

“The pimps will target vulnerable girls,” He said. “If a child has parental supervision, they have an advantage because they have parents who are supposed to be guiding them and protecting them and monitoring what they do. The problem where risk increases is where they don't have that supervision and they don't have that guidance. A lot of the girls might not be as fortunate to have the social supports as other girls.”

Police investigations have found 85 prostituted children working within York Region. Of those 85, police were able to arrest the pimps and traffickers of 49, illustrating just how difficult a problem this is to combat.

Of the 104 cases placed before the courts, 40 of the cases have been resolved, and 64 are still before the courts. Aurora resident Ali Mansourinajand is due in court this Thursday, April 27 while Roman Kori will appear on September 25.

The charges have not been proven.

Of the 40 cases resolved by the courts, 32 of the accused pled guilty, four went to trial and of those four, three of them were found guilty and one man was acquitted. Five of the 104 cases were withdrawn.