

York Region victim leads to international child porn bust



Police outlined the specifics of the case last week at the YRP's Aurora headquarters.

By Brock Weir

After receiving a tip from Ottawa's National Child Exploitation Centre last week, York Regional Police's Internet Child Exploitation Section was on the move to a York Region address to nab a suspect emailing images of child pornography. With the York Region address determined and the search warrant executed, what they found was not necessarily what they had anticipated.

Further investigation revealed it was a young person who had uploaded the images of child pornography, said Inspector Tim Kelly of the YRP. The young person advised investigators they had been chatting, sending and receiving child pornography with others and people throughout the world through popular social networking websites and chat rooms. Investigators learned the young person had been a victim of child exploitation and had been coerced into providing self-exploiting images to unknown people online.

While the youngster and his or her family received support through Victim Services of York Region and the Children's Aid Society support which continues, investigators continued their work, contacting owners of the website in question and worked together to identify suspects worldwide exchanging child porn through the use of cloud storage.

Collaborating with the OPP, the RCMP, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI, Project Hydra so named after the Greek myth of the multi-headed beast which grows multiple heads where each one is cut off, resulted in 125 search warrants in 17 different countries, 41 suspects arrested, and 110 charges across North America.

The main charges include possession, distribution and accessing child pornography, said Inspector Kelly. In Canada, 17 suspects have been arrested and a total of 63 criminal charges laid. Within York Region, seven suspects were arrested resulting in 17 criminal charges.

Suspects in York Region are aged between 12 and 44, with victims ranging from infants to teens. 19 children have been identified by investigators as being victims of child exploitation and two victims, a male and female ages 9 and 15, from Ontario.

The abusers appear to be people the victims trusted, or online predators that coerced the victim into creating child sexual abuse materials, added Kelly. Investigators are continuing to use all resources available to identify any further victims. Hydra comes from the Greek legend of Hydra, the gigantic monster with multiple heads. As one head was cut off, multiple heads grew in its place. Our project began with one child victim in York Region and through investigation has grown into a significant international project with thousands of potential victims. The investigation is ongoing and continues to grow with every stone that is overturned.

Detective Mark Van Wolde, one of three detectives with the York Regional Police working full time on this case, warned parents to stay vigilant in being aware of their kids' online activities. Perpetrators will befriend young people, and children need to be made aware of the dangers. Going to seek out a suspect and finding the suspect to also be a victim is not uncommon, he added.

“Circumstances change, and there are tricks that certain predators will utilize,” he said. “As parents, it is very important you are aware of what your children are doing on their mobile devices, not so much their computers at home, but their mobile devices.”