



Honey Bee Film Screening and Q&A: Feb 23, 2021

Transcript of Panel Questions and Answers

Introduction

The Honey Bee film viewing and Q&A panel was one of eight events in a series of events called Chelsea's Series. This series occurred throughout the month of February, 2021, to honour National Human Trafficking Awareness day on February 22nd. This was the third year running this series with the aim to raise awareness of the prevalence of online sexual exploitation and human sex trafficking in Waterloo Region. We also intended to have Chelsea's Story become part of school curriculum of youth ages 12-16. Each year Chelsea's Series has a goal to build off events from previous years, pushing the conversation Upstream. Awareness of the problem is the first step towards action. This event was hosted in close partnership with [Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council \(WRCPC\)](#), [MTSpace](#), and [Sexual Assault Support Center Waterloo Region \(SASC\)](#).

Girls as young as 12 years of age are tricked and deceived into sex trafficking in Waterloo Region. Human Sex Trafficking is the sale of humans for sex involving deceit, force, coercion and control for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The drivers of this abuse include the fact it is

lucrative; a trafficker can make an average of \$280k on one victim. It is easy to access potential victims, especially through technology. And the main driver is the high demand for the services that traffickers sell.

Since the beginning of the Pandemic, Sexual Assault Support Center of Waterloo Region's (SASC) Anti-Human Trafficking Program experienced a 27% increase in requests for services for online sexual exploitation.

Honey Bee is a Canadian film that shines a light on young girls that are lured into and trying to escape from human trafficking rings in Northern Ontario. It is directed by award-winning documentary director-turned-narrative filmmaker Rama Rau and stars TIFF 2014 Rising Star Julia Sarah Stone, Emmy-winner Martha Plimpton, Peter Outerbridge, Steven Love, Connor Price, Michelle McLeod and Sofia Banzhaf.

This event was a [film viewing and Q&A](#) with Honey Bee Filmmaker Sally Karam, Melissa Hern from the Victim Witness Assistance Program of Kitchener and Guelph, and Michelle Furguele an advocate and survivor of sex trafficking in Ontario. The event was hosted by WRCPC and moderated by Julie Thompson of WRCPC.



The following document is a transcript of the panel questions and answers to the Honey Bee Film Screening and Q&A event. [A recording of this discussion can be viewed on Youtube](#)

WCPC worked closely with MT Space and SASC to organize Chelsea's Series. We invited a variety of partners to the individual events in the series to expand the reach of the project. These partners include: Kitchener Public Library, Princess Cinemas, Children and Youth Planning Table, Victim Witness Assistance Program, and Women in Crisis Guelph.

Funding was provided by KW Community Foundation Community Fund, Weiland Family Foundation, Kindred Credit Union and Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council

The Honey Bee Film Screening was attended by 100 people, with 77 staying for the Q&A. Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council and their partner's would like to thank everyone who attended the event for their thoughtfulness and quality of panel questions. We thank the knowledgeable panellists for the breadth of answers and passion presented during the Q&A. We look forward to speaking with you again and continuing to raise awareness around human sex trafficking and child exploitation.

Honey Bee will play in Canada on CBC main channel and GEM starting in March 2021.

You can also rent or purchase Honey Bee on:

[iTunes](#)

[Vudu](#)

[Amazon](#)

[Vimeo On Demand](#)

[Google Play](#)



Panelist Biographies

Michelle Furguele is a Canadian Human Trafficking Survivor, speaker, consultant and social advocate. With over fifteen years of experience in multiple facets of the sex trade, Michelle now uses her story and extensive knowledge to educate and train various sectors on the realities of Human Trafficking.



Sally Karam is an award-winning film and television producer. Her latest film, Honey Bee, has won many awards. Sally's other award-winning films; What We Have, Show & Tell, Perfect and Kubo's Crickets all tackle social issues in Canada and have played festivals around the world.

Melissa Hern works for the Victim/Witness Assistance Program in Kitchener and Guelph. Melissa developed a strong interest in working with survivors of Human Trafficking as local cases began to increase significantly. She finds the work both challenging and rewarding.

Honey Bee Panel Transcript

Moderator-Julie: One of the constant barriers to addressing human trafficking is that people don't fully understand what it is or believe it happens here. From your experience, can you talk about what you see in your work.

- **Melissa:** I'll start by saying that Human Trafficking is very much about control and exploitation and it is absolutely happening in our Region (Waterloo). No one can consent to being exploited, being exploited can involve: threats, coercion, deception or the abuse of a position of trust or authority. Trafficking in our Region has significantly increased over the last few years. In our Region victims are primarily young females, currently on my caseload as young as 14 and into young adulthood. It's most often taking place in hotels, motels, Air B&B is quite popular recently, and private residences. There's definitely travel that's taking place between Kitchener, London, Toronto and even out of the province and into Quebec.

We are seeing human trafficking connected to gun violence, to gang affiliations and some of the human trafficking we're seeing is very organized. Traffickers are using drugs and alcohol to control victims and as a result those victims are often developing drug dependencies, or are often being told that because they are being provided drugs they have a debt to pay. Traffickers are often controlling victims' phones, access to social media and their personal identification. We are certainly seeing, as you saw in the film, Top Girls that are involved in the recruitment of other young females. There are a lot of young women who are both being victimized but are also participating in the recruitment. We often see that 'boyfriend' style or 'Romeo' style traffickers. And I can also say that we are seeing victims from all types of backgrounds. So people from secure families, but also those who may lack the support and may be more vulnerable. So really anyone can fall victim to human trafficking.

When it comes to offenders, we are definitely seeing repeat offenders. So that tells us that trafficking is very lucrative. And that there is a significantly high demand given that these offenders don't seem to be deterred enough by criminal consequences. Typically, as you got a hint of in the video, victims are often reporting their



victimization, or come forward, because of fear for other females who may be brought into the game. Or out of fear for the safety of family and friends who traffickers have often threatened to harm as a way of controlling victims. So that's kind of a brief snippet of what we've seen take place in our Region

Moderator: Michelle, as a survivor yourself and as a mentor to others, how does this film line up with your experience?

- **Michelle:** In my personal experience, just to give a background of what I went through, I was trafficked from the age of 13 from Oakville Ontario. I was living in my family home and attending high school during the duration of my victimization. I come from an upper middle class family, I am the eldest of four, I did not want or need for anything. But like Melissa mentioned, vulnerabilities and insecurities is all it takes to get trafficked, and that's really what we saw in this film. I can relate so much to Honey Bee's character in that desperation to belong. Even in some of the first scenes when we saw them drinking and smoking and listening to music, dancing outside at a picnic bench... if you take out that in they're in a parking lot at a hotel and put that at a high school, these are normal child-like behaviours. These are things that these traffickers are providing these victims, and like myself, I was so insecure, I was desperate to fit in and that's how I really relate to this film. This film really hits the nail on the head as depicting the true emotions that a victim goes through while they're being trafficked.

Moderator: Sally, can you tell us how you came to produce this film and its impact on you personally?

- **Sally:** We tried to make this film, I auctioned this script from the writer Bonnie Fairweather in 2008 if you can imagine. She wrote it in 2008 and I got the script in 2010 and I worked for 8 years to try and get it financed and I could not get anyone to invest in it. No one knew about trafficking at all at that point, and no one was interested in funding that kind of story. So, it was very, very difficult, very frustrating. A couple things changed I think in about 2017 when Ontario Press really shined a light on the issue in the summertime and kind of cracked open a little bit of awareness. Then we were able to sort of jump on that. My producing partner Damon D'Oliveira was integral in that too and we sort of pushed the financiers to take a look. Even then they didn't want to finance a movie, they thought it was too marginal. I think this speaks to what Melissa said, people just didn't think this was happening. So it was really difficult, and I think there was just a shift with that kind of awareness. Then people were more interested in Ontario and Canada in funding female lead projects and stories.

The other thing that happened is this story takes place in Northern Ontario for a couple of reasons. I'm from the North, as I mentioned I'm from Cochrane. There was a fund that was available that was going to support stories from the North, so all of a sudden everything came together and we were able to make the movie in 2018.



And a funny story about Julia Sarah Stone who plays the lead, Natalie, is that she's from Vancouver and she first auditioned for the role in my first round of trying to get it financed in 2010 when she was a tiny little young person. And then again in my second round of trying to get it financed around 2015, and then when I tried again in 2018 she still looked young enough, and she's matured enough really to take on the role. She came back and she auditioned every time and she got the role every time, so it was kind of meant to be.

Moderator: Michelle, can you help us understand if someone is being trafficked: 1. how can someone not know that they are being trafficked? 2. Why don't they leave when they get the chance?

- So I'm actually going to share some points that Melissa and Sally just shared; people didn't know what human trafficking was. From my experience, my parents found out that something was happening with me when I hit the age of 18. I did eventually confess to my parents and they brought me to the police. When we arrived at the police they simply told us: you know what, change your phone numbers, use the buddy system and they almost told my parents 'your daughters just a spoiled brat doing what she wants to do... you know, teenage rebellion' and we were sent home. And about 3 months later I was physically attacked and stabbed walking to work as a direct result of me going to the police. If society doesn't know what human trafficking is, how is a victim to know what human trafficking is? And that's why this education is so, so key, it's so important. And that's why I thank every person attending tonight and everyone who put this together because that's what I'm so, so passionate about, is preventative measures. I did not know I was being trafficked. I had never heard of human trafficking, I had never even seen the movie Taken. I still haven't seen that movie and that's the typical thing that everyone says, so I didn't know. Prostitution to me was Julia Roberts, Pretty Woman, or, downtown Toronto off Jarvis, street workers. Even living through it, I did not equate that I was a prostitute. I did not know where the men were coming from, I did not post my own ads, it was completely above my head. And I was a naïve 15-year-old girl that really didn't know anything.

Now I can also speak on, I got away from my first traffickers and re-entered the sex trade and was re-victimized by another trafficker. And that trafficker was a Romeo Pimp so it was extremely hard for me to leave even though I was fully able to identify that 'I am being trafficked, this guy is exploiting me, this is where I'm turning into'. It's hard to give up the only life you know. It's hard to go back to that vulnerable girl that was 15 years old, because I had been entrapped in this life I hadn't dealt with any of my insecurities. So going right back I would be vulnerable without him; I wouldn't have a place to live, I wouldn't have transportation, I wouldn't have food, I'm giving up everything in that moment and more so than physical needs, it was that emotional need that I just desperately needed. Honestly, you can give the excuse of; pass him off, or it's just I a bad boyfriend situation, or it will get better, I've been through this before I know how to handle myself. Which is why it's so key for education, and I am so glad that we've all come together tonight to shed light on this issue.



Moderator: Melissa, working with children and youth in the court system preparing to testify, what are some of the long-term struggles that you see in them.

- **Melissa:** The long-term impacts are immense when it comes to human trafficking. The survivors that I've worked with are dealing with a tremendous amount of trauma and the idea of testifying means asking them to relive all of the details of that trauma. It's an unbelievable thing that we're asking of them. Investigation and prosecution of these offenses is often incredibly involved, and the court process can take years. Those survivors need strong supports and most often professional supports to start the healing process. Rightfully so, they often have difficulty trusting others, they often resist supports, because again they may not even recognize. Usually by the time they've spoken to police they have some understanding that what's happened to them is wrong, but again they may not still have that full awareness so they often resist support. They often experience strained relationships with those that are close to them, they have difficulty rebuilding those relationships. Again they may have drug or alcohol addictions that they're battling. They may have developed those addictions as a result of being provided drugs or alcohol while trafficking, but now they may be using that as a means to cope with the trauma as well. They can experience anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide. They may be really dependent on others or have difficulty with decision making because they've lacked that control over their own lives for so long. As Michelle mentioned, it's really difficult for survivors to stay out of the game or the culture of human trafficking and they're very often dragged backed into that lifestyle. Because the court process is so long, it can also be difficult for survivors to stay engaged, and their feelings about continuing with the prosecution change a lot over the course of the prosecution. And Michelle also mentioned that she had been assaulted as a result of speaking with the police and many of our survivors do experience threats from traffickers or their associates. They create fear about continuing with the criminal justice system. Victims are often angry at the criminal justice system and its participants because of delays, re-victimization, all the rights an offender has when they're before the court. Because these prosecutions are so difficult and holding offenders accountable can be so difficult, that's also very discouraging to them as well. But I can say for certain all of the survivors I've worked with have been incredibly resilient, are incredibly inspiring but we know the healing process can have a lot of setbacks along the way.



Audience Questions: Answered Live

Audience Question read by Moderator: For the people who foster survivors, is there any special training?

- **Moderator:** There are recovery homes that are specific for people coming out of being trafficked. Those homes are wrap around, there is a huge amount of support that is offered for every aspect of somebody who's in those homes. I also know that SASC has an Anti-Human Trafficking Program that works with survivors and has programming that works for family members. They work with survivors as long as those survivors want the support. It is a real gradual building process, and the support is definitely a wraparound support. I can't speak to what happens in Family and Children's Services in terms of the foster system. I think the awareness of human trafficking has gone way up in the past few years and there are people from Family and Children Services attending some of the events we have over the course of the week. So I know it's definitely on their radar but I'm not sure specifically what kind of training that they have for fostering survivors.
- **Michelle:** I have been privileged to be a part of a lot of training sessions through sharing my own story. I will say even from my own personal experiences, when I was 15 years old, I'm 30 now so that's 15 years ago, even the amount of awareness and training that's out there is substantial. I actually just started at Restorations Canada Second Stage Homes, it is going to be open in the Burlington area and it is transitional homes. It's not a typical safe home which you see a lot of, but it's for up to 2 years for former victors to turn into survivors and reintegrate into society. But through our own organization, this morning we took a human trafficking seminar hosted the Halton Collaborative Against Human Trafficking, we have trainings on a monthly if not bi-monthly basis. We are always looking to educate ourselves because the dynamic of human trafficking is always changing. The pimps and traffickers seem to be always one or two steps ahead of us, so continuing on education is so key because everything is always evolving.
- **Jessica St Peter is the Manager of Public Education at Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. Jessica attended this event and responded to this question in the chat;** SASC responds to requests for training and other foster parents can make similar requests from their local anti ht services in their region keep an eye on SASC website for ht 101 education



Audience Question read by Moderator: It was mentioned in Monday's panel about the void in safe space in residential supports for 12-15-year-old people caught up in trafficking situations, can you speak to any known work being done in Ontario pertaining to this particular age groups. Michelle I think you were talking about this with Restoration Homes, does anyone have anything else to add?

- **Michelle:** I know it is very difficult, and the younger age group is always a duper difficult jurisdiction to handle, especially if children's aid society is involved. However, I personally know of one resource in the Halton area, Elizabeth Fry actually has two safe homes that they're running and they do allow 13 or 14 year olds, I'm not positive which age. But they definitely do the younger age group. But it really is hard to find beds for people under the age of 16 currently.
- **Melissa:** I would agree, there's definitely a gap in our services, a lot of our services are 16+ and we run into that problem too when we're trying to make referrals. Some places will make exceptions depending on what information you can provide but there certainly is a gap in service. So I think the more awareness we create, the more likely we can ensure that age group is supported. They're really in need of the most support.

Audience Question read by Moderator: With regards to language/ terminology, should service providers be using the word survivor or victim?

- **Michelle:** I can speak for myself personally and just from mentoring other survivors of human trafficking, I can't speak for them but maybe share some of their opinions with you. For myself personally, of course I would never want to be considered a victim, and I think that's the status who across the board. Nobody wants to be considered this 'oh poor me, I'm such a victim'. That's not liberating at all, that doesn't do anything along the healing process. For myself, I appreciate people calling me a survivor of human trafficking, do I feel myself like I'm a survivor? Not really, I'm still living my life. I'm just so grateful to be Michelle again. I love when people just identify me as Michelle and see me as Michelle and what I'm contributing currently in my life. And ask me something about hey what are you doing for work now, how's your day going? Other than focusing on my past experience as I'm trying to move on from my past experience. So I definitely would say overall, using the term survivor. I love the term lived experience. I have lived experience that I can bring forward in lots of aspects of my life and that brings me a little bit more self-awareness and confidence through referring to someone with lived experience.
- **Melissa:** I think I try very often to use survivor. Sometimes when we're in the criminal justice system we get caught up in 'victim'. I think I try to be very conscious of using the term survivor, that's truly what they are especially by the time they begin working with



us. I do agree, my experience is certainly people that have experienced and gone through trafficking would much rather be labelled a survivor, if anything, compared to a victim.

Audience Question read by Moderator: An audience member would be interested in hearing about how much success there is in prosecuting the people who are committing human trafficking crimes, what are their sentences like, are their sentences sufficient in the opinion of the panelists, are the current efforts to address human trafficking from the legal perspective sufficient?

- **Melissa:** I think the prosecutions are fairly new, at least in our Region. We certainly have had some that have gone from start to finish. I have one in particular that was very involved and is close to wrapping up in it's entirety. I think initially there were 6 individuals charged and we are soon to have the last individual sentenced. Because these prosecutions are so difficult and they're so complex, I would say that there's a lot of challenges and the law has a long way to go in dealing with those challenges more successfully. I don't particularly, and I may be biased because I'm working with those survivors and I form some sort of relationship and understanding with them, so I often don't feel that the sentences are sufficient. I don't know that you can ever be sentenced and it will provide any closure to that survivor or any satisfaction. But, I think we have a long way to go and unfortunately because of the complexity of prosecutions, often people only plead to certain charges, or are only found guilty of certain charges. It's very difficult to get a successful prosecution on the human trafficking charge. Often they end up sentenced on other charges, not necessarily the human trafficking which would carry the more significant sentence.
- **Moderator:** Another point is if we're waiting for the legal system to deal with this, there's already been victims. We need also need to focus further upstream and address the demand for services that created this lucrative business.



Audience Question read by Moderator: an audience member is wondering if someone can speak to what is going through the minds of those who are taking advantage of those who are being trafficked, i.e. Those are being serviced, why they're choosing to participate in the trafficking system. Trying to understand where the cycle begins and ends and how there can be more pressure on exposing offenders versus survivors.

- **Michelle:** It's a hard subject to broach, I would hate to say it but this is the reality of what's really happening. The people that are purchasing sexual services from victims of human trafficking are your husbands, your brother, your friend at work, your next door neighbour, they're every one of us. I actually work in a restaurant and I'm the general manager and one day I went on to the back of our line in our kitchen, and all the people that work here are either teenagers or in their young twenties. If you ask any one of them what the average hourly rate of an escort in our area, 9 out of 10 of them could have answered that question. This is common knowledge, this is just something they do on their way home from work, on their lunch break.

For myself it was shocking, my busiest periods for when I was an escort was lunch time and the after work rush. Those are the people that are servicing it. Now, again this goes back to education. A lot of these John's simply do not know they are seeing someone that's trafficked, and they don't necessarily know that this person might be underage. When I was 15 they advertised me older. Typically, when police do checkups at hotels especially, they typically go for the younger girls. So my trafficker would be like every girl coming in is 20 years old. We actually don't want to put 18 because now this is going to alert the police to come in and check things out and we don't want that so you're 20 years old.

It's a misconception even amongst people that aware of human trafficking of what John's truly look like. They're unaware of the amount of damage they're causing, and I'm not trying to stand up for them, I'm not condoning their actions by any means. But I've had some amazing conversations with some of the John's that I've serviced about my situation. I've heard apologies, since my exit I've had articles run in papers and I've had some of them email me and been like I am so sorry that I contributed to your victimization, what can I do for you? What are my next steps? I feel like I'm an awful person. And I said to three of those individuals that messaged me, please just educate yourself and do better in the future. I don't hold anything against you. But it is ridiculously common how many men are talking about which escorts they went and saw on their lunch break when they get back to work. There's review boards out there where men actually rate and review the service of these victims out there. So, it's a crazy world out there and these John's really do need to get educated in order to get them to stop purchasing the sexual services.



Audience Question read by Moderator: What is the difference between sex work and sex trafficking

- **Melissa:** Sex work is certainly someone who's choosing to participate in the sex trade. They're not being controlled or exploited by a particular individual. Someone is not taking the money they earn from them, they have control over the work that they are doing. So they are presumably booking their own jobs, posting their own ads, getting their own clients, arranging whether or not they're doing in calls, out calls. They are really controlling the work that they are doing, to the extent that they can. But they have control over the jobs that they take, they have control of the money they earn, there's no one that is booking their jobs, there's no one that's dictating the services they'll provide. They are choosing to participate whereas with sex trafficking there is that level of control and exertion and exploitation. Where someone is usually posing the ads indicating which services an individual will provide, mostly without any consent. The victim doesn't have any communication with the clients that are booking those services and don't usually have access to any of the funds that are being received for those services.
- **Moderator:** I think there's also an age level for consent as well right? People have to be at least 18 to be able to consent.

Audience Questions: Answered in Text

Will any film making be created with a BIPOC centred position? Especially highlighting gang/rings of traffickers in Ontario?

- We don't know this. There are several other depictions of Human Trafficking online, if you have Crave check out "I May Destroy You" for some more BIPOC representation.

Are there systems/ways to identify trafficking situations? Who identifies individuals (the survivors or police or other helpers?)

- The answer to your question is complicated. All of the above can identify traffickers and because this crime is so sneaky and pervasive it's important for all people to be aware so there is a higher likelihood that a trafficking situation can be identified. It's important that many sectors receive training such as: police, hospitality, travel, education, etc. Anyone can identify a trafficking situation when they see it, and it's important to reach out to a program like the Sexual Assault Support Centre WR's Anti-Trafficking Program



How do you respond to (adult) sex-workers and their advocates, who (horrifically) oppose your work, claiming that the prevalence of trafficking is over-exaggerated, and ends up harming the "willing" sex-workers who choose to make their living through sex-work, much more than it helps trafficked victims? (To be clear I am horrified by that response, but unfortunately I see it online way too much.)

- It's important to clearly state the difference between Sex Work and Sex Trafficking/Exploitation. There are willing sex workers, and that is okay! But it comes down to informed consent. There must be no manipulation or coercion from a third party and sex work must be between consenting adults. Also recognize that the majority of trafficked individuals are women under the age of 25, many between ages 12-15. People under the age of 18 cannot consent to sex work. This is an easy way to tell the difference:
Sex work differs from trafficking/exploitation in the following ways:
Sex workers must be in control of:
 - Their TIME
 - Their FINANCES
 - Their CLIENTS

And anyone under the age of 18, cannot consent.

What are the warning signs that parents should watch for?

- There are many warning signs, unfortunately many resemble normal changes that come with adolescents. Big things to look out for are sneaking out at night, unexplained gifts (new phone, clothes, manicures, etc.). Watching Chelsea's Story tomorrow or Saturday shows some of the signs to look out for. The talk back for both shows are geared for parents.

Great to hear your experience and thinking thank you - - can you speak a little about the trafficked person's first step / what form it often takes? - and Sally, did you spend time with people with lived life experience as part of your process, or was the script fully in place and you didn't enter into dialogues?

- The first step is receiving non judgemental, unconditional, wrap around support. Sorry we couldn't get to your question more fully.



Is there curriculum available for schools to teach students about what to look for in relationships to help prevent the "Romeo pimp" scenario or intimate domestic violence?

- Chelsea's Story is a play that is actually designed for schools. Email pam@mtspace.ca

Audience Questions not answered during the event due to time constraints:

- Why are the younger victims not finding access to help?
- Besides a Romeo pimp model, how might a woman or girl or boy from a stable home get recruited?
- Can the panelists share some of the signs that friends and family should be aware of for prevention?
- Michelle had mentioned when she went to the Police they turned her away and basically said turn off phone and go about life. I would hope that has now changed to protect the survivor more as its clear how dangerous this is? and does anyone know what that situation would look like? What is the process when survivors come forward?
- Are boys involved? If so are the "johns" women?
- Is there a way to get involved to help people?