



Launch of public awareness campaign *Je mets mes culottes* on youth sexual exploitation

Montréal, March 6, 2017 – The YWCA Montreal and its Foundation are launching *Je mets mes culottes*, a campaign to raise public awareness of the sexual exploitation of girls. This campaign includes videos and posters illustrating recruiting strategies of pimps and presents a central message about the importance for self affirmation and critical thinking as tools for resisting these recruiting strategies.

Violence against women and girls and women's safety have been a focus of the YWCA Montreal's activities since its inception 142 years ago. Back then, the organization maintained a presence on train platforms to greet young women coming from the countryside to find work in the city. It helped women find housing and secure employment. The locations may have changed since then, but the issue has not. Metro stations, schools, youth centres, social networks, and shopping malls are fertile ground for recruiters using highly effective tactics. "The different components of this awareness campaign allow us to reach out to youth and adults to sensitize them to the danger of sexual exploitation and counter the phenomenon by highlighting the importance of critical thinking," said Louise Poirier, chair of the board of directors of the YWCA Montreal.

Youth Sexual Exploitation

Nearly 80% of women in prostitution were recruited when they were teenagers. The average age of girls when they are recruited is 14.7 years old. Emotional dependency, the sexualization of female identity, low self-esteem, negative body image, the trivialization and pornification of sexuality, and the lack of information about this subject among youth are risk factors that may make girls vulnerable to violence, particularly sexual exploitation. Girls are recruited everywhere, not only in youth centres. Enticing gifts, compliments, promises of undying love and fidelity, and the prospect of a life of ease and luxury are some of the methods used to lure girls. On the verge of adulthood and brimming with self-doubt and unanswered questions, girls are easy prey. This is why the development and reinforcement of critical thinking skills and self-affirmation are useful and essential to preventing sexual exploitation.

YWCA Montreal and its Youth Service

Since 2000, the Youth Service team has developed programs for girls and young women aged 8 to 35. Given in schools and community centres, the goal of the programs is to promote healthy and egalitarian relationships and prevent phenomena such as sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, and hypersexualization. By encouraging awareness and the development of critical thinking skills, leadership abilities, and self-affirmation, these programs aim to help young people make informed choices and prevent violence.

To support these programs, the campaign has a fundraising component in the form of the online sale of panties bearing the slogan *Je mets mes culottes* and the campaign mascot, an alpaca, designed by Pony. The panties can be purchased online for \$15. Proceeds go directly to the YWCA Montreal Youth Service.

Find out more about the campaign at www.jemetsmesculottes.com

About the YWCA Montreal

Since 1875, the YWCA Montreal has been active in the prevention of violence against women and girls and worked for inclusion, social and gender equality. By means of awareness, knowledge and skill development, it strives to improve behaviour and influence practices and social policy in these areas. In this way, it helps to build a better future for women and girls, with the vision of a just society in which women and girls have power and the opportunity to participate to the full extent of their abilities.

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For more information about the campaign, programs of the YWCA Montreal, or to arrange an interview please contact:

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