MAISEY

Media Awareness Initiative about Sexually Exploited Youth

BACKGROUNDER

Background

In April 2003, young female residents of a Marymound group home were the subject of a criminal trial involving an adult male accused of obtaining sexual services of a person under the age of 18. Local media coverage of the trial incorrectly and inappropriately identified the young women as "young prostitutes." Media portrayed the perpetrator in sympathetic terms, seeming to justify his actions by referring to a recent divorce and his feelings of loneliness. Additionally, one of the local papers identified the young women involved as living at a group home on a particular street which it named. This virtually identified them within their immediate social circle.

Motivated by the above, Marymound addressed the concerns about the media coverage directly.

Action

Marymound communicated with the media involved in the inaccurate reporting, as well as the Crown Attorney's Office, with respect to the identification of the young women (identification of underage victims or offenders is illegal).

Results

The media outlets tempered the follow-up coverage of the trial as the result of Marymound's concerns. However, in discussion with other organizations working with sexually exploited youth, it became evident that what happened at Marymound was only one example of a larger issue. Others in the field voiced concerns about how sexually exploited youth are depicted in the media.

As a result, Marymound decided to spearhead a committee comprised of individuals representing organizations working with young people victimized through sexual exploitation. The hope is to create a strategy to change the way the media depict these youth.

Formation

MAISEY, chaired by the development and communications coordinator at Marymound and the director of communications at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, welcomes individuals representing organizations working with young people who have been sexually exploited. Membership is open and new members are encouraged to join at any time.

In The Future

MAISEY envisions a day when Manitoba news outlets in print, radio and television will portray sexually exploited youth in a way that accurately reflects their victimization.

Changing Words ... Changing Minds

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The printing of this material courtesy of Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union

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