

A STUDY GUIDE

street kids

Filed on the streets and in a group home of downtown Vancouver, **street kids** is a story of juvenile prostitution. By looking at the lives of five young prostitutes, this film gives one an insight into the reasons for which juveniles take to the street and their difficulties in getting off it.

Screening time: 21 minutes 53
seconds
Black and white

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about the film

Bobbi, sexually abused by her father since the age of nine, has run to the streets, but the increasing violence she encounters is causing her to question her life as a prostitute.

Todd, another victim of sexual assault, has quit prostituting, but sometimes finds himself wanting to go back.

Angel, 16, got pregnant while working the streets. Social workers took her child away when she was found to be a juvenile prostitute. Angel is still haunted by memories of her pimp.

Terry, a tough young man whose devil-may-care attitude masks his real feelings of pain and anger, came to the street at the age of 13. Four years later, he is finding that this lifestyle has taken its toll.

Christie is Terry's girlfriend and new to this life. Terry wants her to start prostituting, but she is afraid.

This film tells their stories about the fears and dangers of working as prostitutes. It also shows how dedicated counsellors in a group home offer positive help and encouragement to start a new life.

filmmaking background

In order to make this film accurately, filmmaker **Peg Campbell** worked as a child-care worker in a group home for two years. Many of the teenagers she met during this time helped with the scripting of the film. So as to protect their identities, Campbell has used both street kids and other teenagers as actors. She is pleased to say that no one who appears in the film is working on the streets today. The stories are based on real people and real incidents, but none of the actors portray themselves.

The film was shot in black and white with a still camera. By using the still images and treating them with special effects under the animation camera, viewers find themselves responding differently than they usually do when viewing a film of this nature. The issue becomes deglamourized and the sensational

aspects are removed, so that we get a clearer picture of this way of life.

Gritty and realistic, **street kids** begins on the Vancouver streets where police estimate that two or three hundred juvenile prostitutes work every day and night of the year. **street kids** pulls no punches, neither does it exploit. It simply tells us the truth about these young people running away from painful backgrounds and a world where adults don't seem to care, from abuse at home to the streets. Although the stories are grim, Campbell shows that change is more than possible. With the help of understanding workers with adequate support, juvenile prostitutes can start new lives for themselves.

street kids sheds light on the hard and ugly world of juvenile prostitution. For teachers and other concerned adults, the film shows



that street kids can be helped. For teenagers, it demystifies and deglamourizes street life.

juvenile prostitution

Popular Misconceptions:

Here are some commonly held beliefs about juvenile prostitution:

- Street kids come from poor families. Rich kids don't run to the street.
- Life on the street is glamorous and exciting. The teenagers make a lot of money and enjoy what they're doing.
- Street kids come from cities. They don't come from the country or small towns.
- Both men and women buy the services of juvenile prostitutes.
- Street kids are just bad — there are no contributing factors for their rebellious nature and self-destructive behaviour.
- Boys who work the street are all gay and so are the men who purchase their services.

some facts

- Vancouver street kids range in age from ten to eighteen and come from small towns, as well as urban areas. They represent all racial and economic backgrounds. The ratio of girls to boys on the street is about two to one.
- Most juvenile prostitutes have been sexually abused as children. When there's no caring adult to intervene, abused kids often run away. Although statistics are still being compiled and many teenagers are fearful about disclosing past

abuse, the relationship between sexual abuse and juvenile prostitution is undeniable.

- It is estimated that most of the "tricks" who use juvenile prostitutes are middle-aged and middle-class. Often these men are married and have children of their own. Therapists are beginning to understand that sexual attraction from adults towards children is a desire for power. Therefore, a trick might pick up a girl or boy with the desire to assert power, not sexuality. Over ninety-nine percent of the tricks are men.

- While some boys who work the street are homosexuals, not all are. Many are heterosexual and have girlfriends.

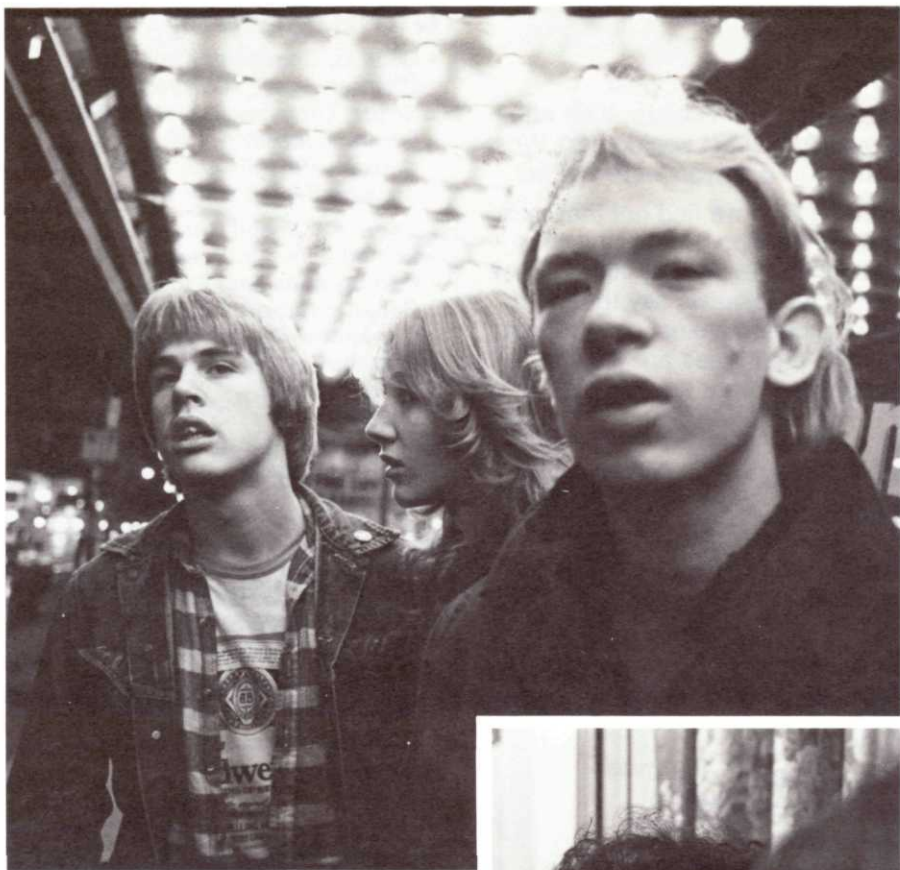
- Since new proposals are now before parliament to control prostitution, it is not possible at this time of writing to outline the legalities of it. Some Canadian cities are attempting to introduce by-laws to deal with the problem but these by-laws are often challenged and ruled out. To check upon the current legalities, please check with your Provincial Ministry of Attorney General.

abuse

Sexual abuse is a serious problem in our society and the incidence of it is much higher than was previously thought. Evidence shows that there is a high correlation between children who have been sexually abused and those who became juvenile prostitutes.

Children who have been abused and become juvenile prostitutes often feel that in receiving money for sex, they've reversed their position in the abuse cycle and are using their tricks, the way they were used. This justification helps them





cope with their feelings of low self-esteem and self hatred.

Suicide and self-mutilation are only two painful side effects of sexual abuse and juvenile prostitution. Others include drug addiction and alcoholism.

what next?

Getting off the street is a long, hard process and can take years. As teenagers get deeper into street life the thought of returning home or leaving the street seems impossible. They feel the "straight world" won't accept them, that they can never come back. Most of their friends live on the street and few have families they can return to or support systems to go to.

Most juvenile prostitutes have incomplete educations. They need real training (scholastic, vocational or both) in order to become self-sufficient. As well, they need assistance with responsibilities such as opening bank accounts, renting apartments and budgeting money.

These teenagers need emotional assistance. They are often fearful of real relationships and emotions



because of strong feelings of self-hatred and self-destruction. Most juvenile prostitutes need help in understanding their feelings about the abuse they experienced as children.

A pattern develops once teenagers leave the street. Initially, real progress is made; but when faced with a setback, most return to the streets. This cycle usually goes on for several years before teenagers gain enough self-worth to make the final break with the street.

The most effective approach is that of guidance by emotionally supportive, non-judgemental adults to help them get the education, training, life skills and therapy they need. Once all this is available, it

will become possible for more and more juvenile prostitutes to leave the street.

the courts

While juveniles cannot be sent to jail for prostitution (at this time of writing), they are often convicted of other crimes like drug dealing, theft, being in bars while under age and, in areas where there are laws regarding curfews, for being out on the streets after a certain time. Most youth detention centres, where most street kids are sent for punishment, are seen by the kids as being just like a jail and often just increases their anger against society as opposed to serving any useful rehabilitation process.

the system

When juvenile prostitutes leave the street there are social agencies who want to help. A social worker can begin legal proceedings to make them a ward of the court. This means they'll be assigned a regular worker and that the government will pay for education, training and living expenses. Often they'll be placed in a group home until they're ready to live on their own. These services are only available until the teenagers become adults (18 or 19, depending upon the province), then the services are withdrawn.

summary: prevention

If intervention can take place before a teenager runs away from home, then possibly the street experience can be avoided. But it will take sensitive adults to recognize the underlying causes of the child's anger, rebelliousness and self-destructiveness. Is it abuse at home? Often the answer is yes.

Next it will take work and understanding to discover what is best for the young person. Our schools and social services must be willing and able to respond to these issues and problems. Ultimately, the responsibility for street kids rests with adults.

discussing the film

- What would you do if a friend of yours ran away to the streets?
- Do you think you'll feel differently now about kids you see working in the streets? Why?
- Can you understand why these young people ran away to the streets after being sexually assaulted at home? How can this be prevented?
- How do you think Todd felt when the boys in the cruising car yelled at him? How would you feel? Have you ever called out names to kids you've seen working on the streets?

- Do you think Bobbi will be able to leave the street behind her? What would you do if you were Bobbi?
- In the film, we find out that many of the men who pick up juvenile prostitutes have young kids of their own. Psychologists say that men who purchase sexual favours from juvenile prostitutes are looking for power more than sex. Why?

This guide was written by **Peggy Thompson.**

using the film in the classroom: what one teacher says

“ **street kids** is a film that touches **all** of our lives. Some of us know of kids who ended up on the street, some of us could have been street kids ourselves, some of us have heard or read about kids on the street. The film sensitively and evocatively explores the reality of streetlife. As an educational tool, the film helps us understand how and why kids end up on the street, and, therefore, how we can prevent our own students, friends, and children from becoming street kid casualties.

Since many of our school and district guidance programs are currently focussing on safety, decision-making and coping strategies for adolescents, using **street kids** makes sense.

Grade twelve students in our school who screened the film were highly enthusiastic about its use; particularly as a prevention and awareness tool for younger adolescents. The critical relationship between child abuse and runaways was duly noted by these teenagers. Many knew of friends who may have been willing to seek help for their family crisis had they seen such a film in their younger teens.

I heartily endorse the use of this film in the classroom. If the film was to have a positive and direct impact on one adolescent and possibly many others through the close-knit peer network of the teenager, its purpose would be well served.”

Ms. Terry Taylor

Counsellor
Nakusp Secondary School
Nakusp, BC
September, 1986

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film credits

Director
Peg Campbell
Editor
Haida Paul
Photography
Moira Simpson
Graphic Animation
Svend-Erik Eriksen
Location Sound
Rick Patton
Producer
Jennifer Torrance
Executive Producer
John Taylor

