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they used their knowledge of the street to form HUSTLE as a means to support men who are ready to exit, and teach them the skills necessary to lead a "regular" life. HUSTLE is on the street three nights a week, offering peer support to the men working in Downtown South, known as Boys Town. Located in the heart of Yaletown, it was the city's one-time warehouse district and a fair ground for male sex work, but has since been gentrified into the new kingdom of swank apartments and chic lounges—and is no longer too tolerant of prostitution.

Taylor says the men are hard to find because most don't want to be found. A vast majority of male sex workers utilize the Internet to find customers, but there are still a number working the streets. Those numbers can't be quantified because no comprehensive studies have been done. It's taken Taylor and his outreach workers about a year to establish relationships and build the trust of this group of men, often very young, who feel they've fallen by society's wayside.

"Traditionally, sex work and the support of sex work has been primarily a female issue," says Taylor. "There has to be a conscious shift in society to even understand or even acknowledge the fact that men are involved in sex work."

City council has addressed sex work issues through granting programs, and HUSTLE has received some of that money through the Vancouver Fund, but according to former city councilor Kim Capri, "There has been no attention from council to the issue of male sex workers."

While Capri says sex work is an "incredible issue," council hasn't been sure how to identify it from a policy perspective.

Female sex work hasn't even been officially raised in council, so of course very little thought—and indeed, priority—has been given to the men.

"It would be really hard for me to say why (that is)," said Capri. "I think that because there is such a predominance of violence towards women who are involved in prostitution, maybe that's why it's more on our radar. There are a lot of women who are dying out there, who are being victimized. That's not to say that's not the case for men, it's just not something that I'm as aware of."

Her attitude and knowledge mirrors that of the city she once counceled, and indeed North America at large, where there are

virtually no services designed specifically for male sex trade workers. According to Taylor, Canadian sex-worker advocacy groups are using European models of support, which are far more progressive than North American models. On this side of the Atlantic, men don't get the same airtime.

HUSTLE has met and supported a "good number" of survival sex workers in the downtown area, but Taylor doubts they've even touched the majority. But at least their name is out there.

At least the outreach phone rings. That's a major success, considering that most of these men have severe trust issues. Taylor says he can build their trust because they see a man who's lived what they're living and has come out the other end, alive and well.

"I'm not giving up"

Taylor has seen some positive change on the streets since HUSTLE began in 2007. There's now a trustworthy group of individuals that the guys can come to—when and if they want to.

HUSTLE recently launched a support group titled HUSTLE 'N' FLOW at the Three Bridges Community Health Center every Wednesday. It's the first of its kind in Vancouver—a drop-in center designed specifically for the men, to target their needs and begin developing the skills necessary to exit the trade if and when they're ready.

"There's been a bit of growth in that the guys and the youth are beginning to feel that they're not alone, that people care and that they're not forgotten or cast-offs or add-ons."

"We're really just trying to challenge some of the myths that are out there," said Taylor. "A lot of the male sex trade has just not been discussed. The women's issues and all of that have certainly been taken a hard look at and males are just up and coming."

Hudson meanwhile is doing well, though he's hit a few rough patches along the way. He's relapsed twice since getting sober—the most recent occasion led to his eviction from an abstinence-based residence. Right now he's couch surfing, but he has managed to hold down his management job at a popular Vancouver restaurant. He's sober. He's not sure what the future will bring, but he's hopeful.

"I could either give up and throw myself a pity party or I could stay healthy, stay off the streets and hold on to all those things I've fought for. I've learned some hard lessons, but I'm not giving up."

"There's been a bit of growth in that the guys and the youth are beginning to feel that they're not alone, that people care and that they're not forgotten or cast-offs or add-ons."

— MATTHEW TAYLOR
FORMER SEX WORKER AND
CO-FOUNDER OF HUSTLE

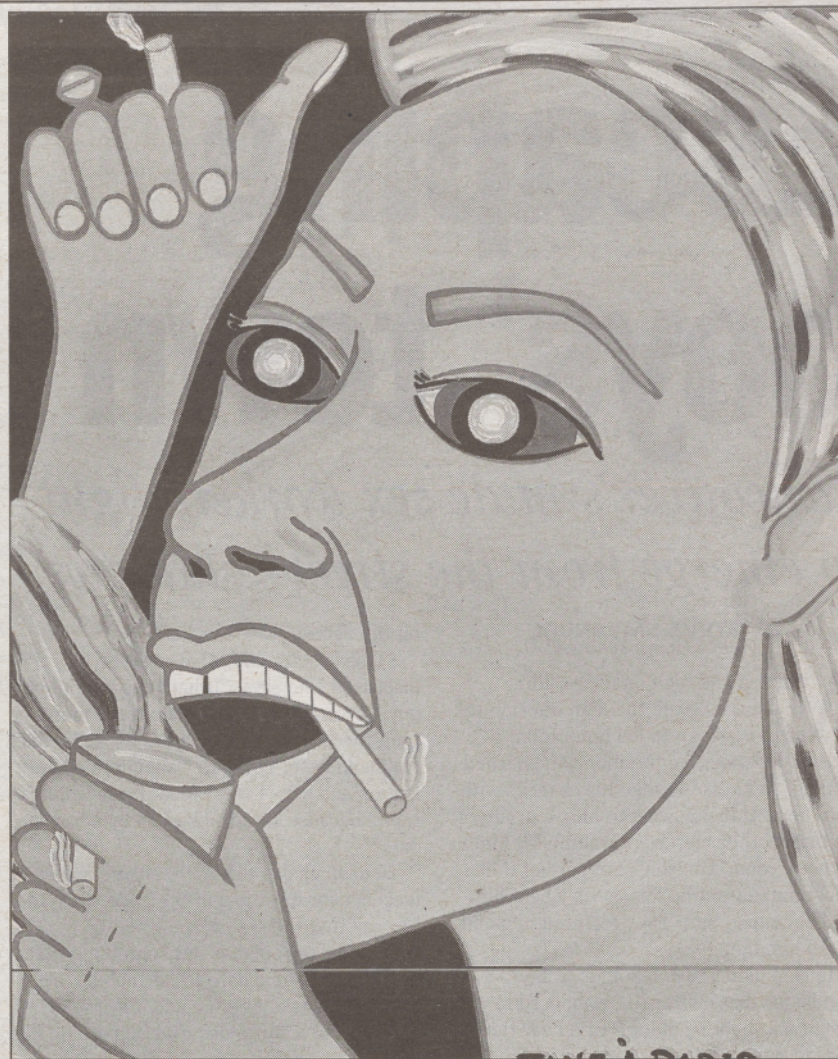


PHOTO BY JANE A PARIS

Jane Á Paris has been painting for more 15 years. Look for more of her work at www.redbubble.com. "Expressionist painting is intense, passionate and highly personal, based on the concept of the painter's canvas as a vehicle for demonstrating emotions," Paris says. "Violent, unreal color and dramatic brushwork make the typical expressionistic painting quiver with vitality."

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PDC assisted the project with a Signage and Lighting Improvement Program (SLIP) grant. The program provides property owners and tenants with funds to upgrade signage and awnings, and improve window and facade lighting. This in turn helps create a positive retail and pedestrian environment in our city.

PDC urges citizens to help restore Portland's iconic sign by purchasing a commemorative Hung Far Low t-shirt available at Ping restaurant in Old Town/Chinatown.

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