

**SEX, LIES, from page 3**

Still homeless and working the streets, Lorenz-Todd was in Portland, searching for an elusive father. Surviving violent attacks from customers, cold and rainy winters and harsh judgments from people, Lorenz-Todd kept her head above water. In June, at age 26, "through the grace of God" (and county services), she finally moved into her first real home. And she couldn't be more relieved.

"I will never, never let myself be homeless again," Lorenz-Todd says. "I won't allow it."

She receives Social Security and food stamps but still sells sex every so often to pay the bills. But, she says, she would love to put prostitution behind her.

"It would be lovely to not have that as an option anymore, not have to give myself to strangers," she says. "That would be a dream come true."

Based on her experience and those of people she's met along the way, Lorenz-Todd believes a deep distrust in authority is a one of main reasons sex work and sexual abuse keep happening.

"They look at us like we're pieces of shit," she says. "They don't see who we really are. We're going to do everything and anything we can to not be outside that night. It's survival."

If she ever found herself in a situation with a client where she felt her life was threatened, the last thing she would do, she says, is call the police.

"A cop would easily take me to jail for prostituting before saving me from an attack, or even pursuing an attacker," Lorenz-Todd says. "It's so wrong. So backwards."

However, Sgt. Mike Geiger, head of the Portland Police Bureau's sexual abuse unit, says, "We recognize that people from all walks of life can be the victim of a sexual assault. We draw no line." He adds the bureau needs the help of outreach workers to get a more accurate account of the extent of sex abuse among people who are homeless.

Both Lorenz-Todd and Harris say outreach and friendly faces among authority figures are welcome and would help homeless people to begin trusting the police.

"If we can get people on the streets to help the homeless have a voice and understand their rights, if they can be made to feel like a person again, they are more apt to open up," Harris says. "Compassion goes a long way."

Among outreach agencies helping the homeless women who have been sexually assaulted is JOIN, a nonprofit aimed at transitioning people into permanent shelter.

JOIN's Liz Weber, an outreach worker who describes herself as a "cheerleader" for the homeless people she works with. From

survival sex—for warmth, shelter, food and protection—to traumatic rape, Weber's heard it all. "It's more shocking to me if a woman hasn't faced sexual assault," she says.

But Weber's not only advocating for women. Predatory men, she says, are also victims of homelessness.

"A lot of the talk around sexual assault is what women can do to protect themselves. I think this is a less practical approach, the men are the main issue here," Weber says.



Maggie Lorenz-Todd

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER ONSTOTT

"Men usually feel disempowered in their lives through being homeless and impoverished. In abuse, they find power. They need our help, too."

Another approachable outlet is the Bad Date Line, a Multnomah County-funded program that collects reports of violent or STD-carrying customers in the sex industry. Compiled from the line's voicemail, e-mail or simply word-of-mouth, this rap sheet of offenders is dispersed monthly among sex-workers to fill them in on who to avoid.

Ellen Miller, an advocate at the Portland Women's Crisis Line, has been focusing on the Bad Date Line for six months. Although the housing status of a victim is not normally in reports, Miller says she knows abusers are prone to target "VAL"s—or workers who are

vulnerable, accessible and lack credibility—which homelessness can accentuate. Although her work is a valuable short-term effort to the violent epidemic, Miller says that bigger change needs to take place to educate the public.

"It's going to be a slow process," Miller says. "It will take the voices of leaders to have it come forward, to get a lot of people talking about it in a legal sense. For now, this is what we have to do."

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— SGT. MIKE GEIGER  
PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU'S SEXUAL ABUSE UNIT

While local organizations' efforts to create relationships with homeless and sex-worker populations bring wary people out of the woodwork to get access to social services, many vulnerable people remain largely distrustful of law enforcement. But the Portland Police Bureau's sexual assault division is hoping to change that.

"We should always be mindful of the people who are most at risk, not dismissive of them," says Geiger, the bureau's sexual assault unit head.

Although the Police Bureau doesn't have an exact percent of sexual-assault victims who are homeless, Geiger says they are most likely to be the majority of the people at risk.

"Homeless are the most vulnerable people in our society," he says. "They don't have the normal protective systems that people living behind closed doors have and unintentionally end up in the same place as the other people that they don't know."

Contrary to Lorenz-Todd's view, Geiger says the police approach prostitution and its inevitable violence in a thoughtful manner.

"It's a matter of priorities, really," says Geiger. "In the grand scheme of things, what's more important: The fact that this adult was involved in a criminal offense or that a man hurt her?"

But Geiger is not naïve to his career's stereotype. Distrust, says Geiger, is the leading reason that the bureau lacks a concrete number of victims in its database.

"I would say there are probably a significant number of people who are sexually assaulted but distrust the system, so (they) won't make a report," he says. That "makes it hard to build concrete data. If we could put one message out there, it's that police are safe, people can report to us even if you don't want us to take any action. But it's hard to get that idea out there."

The training video created by Transition Projects is a breakthrough step in connecting the dots on sexual assault and homelessness, which its creators hope will lead to greater awareness of the rights of victims.

For example, Mindlin with the Victim's Rights Center says that sexually abused homeless people can sue their landlords or workplace if they were evicted or fired for being an abuse victim. But when it comes to sexual abuse on the streets, it's hard to find the funding for consultation, let alone a trial.

"No one provider is going to do it all," says Mindlin, who's worked with and defended sexual assault victims since the '70s. "The key here is working collaboratively with other programs to reach a solution."

Mindlin, along with Binder, hopes that the video project will kick-start the national conversation toward change.

"Sexual assault has historically been underresourced," Mindlin says. "We still have societal discomfort when it comes to talking about sex, so we push it out of sight. It's an American tragedy."

"Sexual abuse is so intimate and violating," Harris says. "It's still much more embarrassing to talk about than physical violence. Once society accepts it, then the victims will."

While Binder and Mindlin's training video project is not a cure to this social epidemic, it could break the ice when it comes to starting the discussion.

"Sexual assault is a bigger issue than drug abuse in this country," Binder says. "Because we allow it. We have to start seriously looking into what triggers this epidemic. And we have to start now."

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person to tell you when you are doing something wrong and correct you.

A lot of single mothers break down sometimes because they have to deal with so much like making sure they keep the lights on, food on the table, paying the rent, making sure your child has clothes. Managing that stress can become overwhelming.

When a kid doesn't have that father, you start to look to other directions for that comfort and support. That might be their friend's who are falling into the wrong things. Having a father figure and that guidance is so important.

**I.B.:** Have these experiences prepared you

for today. I mean, you are now living the dream.

**D.L.:** Having that support and foundation in my family really prepared me for this. It's hard to even put into words. Again, I am humbled by this experience and work hard. I will do my best to take advantage of what's been offered to me.

**I.B.:** For many people experiencing homelessness, they tend to hang onto every Trail Blazer game. Talk a little bit about what sports means to people in a community?

**D.L.:** I can understand for many people on the streets, they might not have a chance to go and watch a game—maybe they don't have a TV. Anything we can do that might take these negative things off of people's

mind and have something positive to hold onto, even if it's for a few moments is a great thing.

Knowing that NBA players have this type of impact on people—kids, families, people struggling, for me, it's about lifting people up.

Being an athlete can pick you up when you are down, and pick other people's spirits up. That's what sports is all about. I'm not above the people.

**I.B.:** What are you hoping to get out of the next year?

**D.L.:** I am hoping that we can grow as a team and I can grow as a person. Anytime we can pick people up, I am all about it. We're going to give our best.



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