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THE VANCOUVER SUN

Sex trade recruiters spark fear at school: Principal says proposed park would make first nations girls even more vulnerable

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VANCOUVER - First nations girls at a Vancouver elementary school have been targeted by sex-trade recruiters, Grandview elementary school principal Caroline Krause says.

"Every spring, active recruitment of our Grade 6 and 7 first nations girl students takes place," Krause told Vancouver city council's planning and environment committee last week. "We find that groups of traffickers and recruiters try to come on to the school grounds. Sometimes they come into the school trying to lure away our girls."

Krause urged the committee Thursday not to close Grandview Highway North between Clark and Commercial Drive as part of a new Millennium Peace Park beside the school because the school would not be able to police it.

Council members agreed to keep the street open and expressed concern about the plight of the school's girls.

In her presentation, Krause showed a copy of that day's Vancouver Sun with photos of the 12 additional women Robert Pickton is charged with murdering and said, "When young girls are recruited into the sex trade at 10, 11, 12, this is very well where they will end up.

"Over the past five years, we have been successful in keeping hundreds of students off the streets and in a safe and caring environment for three hours every day after school.

"Our concern is, if there is a park created beside our school with no recreational facilities, just a park, this can undermine everything we have accomplished in the area of prevention."

In a May 7 letter to the committee, Krause said the school, at Grandview and Woodland, had serious problems with drug users on the school grounds, with people regularly using the school's first nations longhouse as a crack house.

"Every morning members of our school staff have to sweep up broken glass, needles, drug paraphernalia, condoms, etc. as a result of evening activities," she wrote.

If the city created a park beside the school, Krause said, she was worried teachers would not be able to protect the students after school despite years of vigilance and the creation of successful prevention programs for at-risk students.

While they have been able to deal with recruiters by issuing "no trespassing" orders when they enter school grounds, Krause said teachers would not have the same authority in the park.

"We're worried that our girls will be lured over to the park," she said. "Even police have said they have little authority over the park. They basically have to catch people in the act."

Mayor Larry Campbell said it made his blood boil to hear about the solicitation of girls into the sex trade and that he'd discuss the situation with the police board.

Councillor Ellen Woodsworth said in the meeting it was "tragic" that the city had to choose between the safety of school children and the creation of a park.

Almost half of the 190 students at the school are first nations enrolled in aboriginal programs, according to a B.C. Ministry of Education report.

Krause told the committee a Ministry of Children and Family Development scale identified her students as some of the most vulnerable.

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