

# Exitus

An act of making an exit,  
a departure, an exodus



# 30

Years of Stories

**RESET** 30<sup>th</sup>  
Society of Calgary  
Rapid Exit from Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking  
*There is a Way Out*



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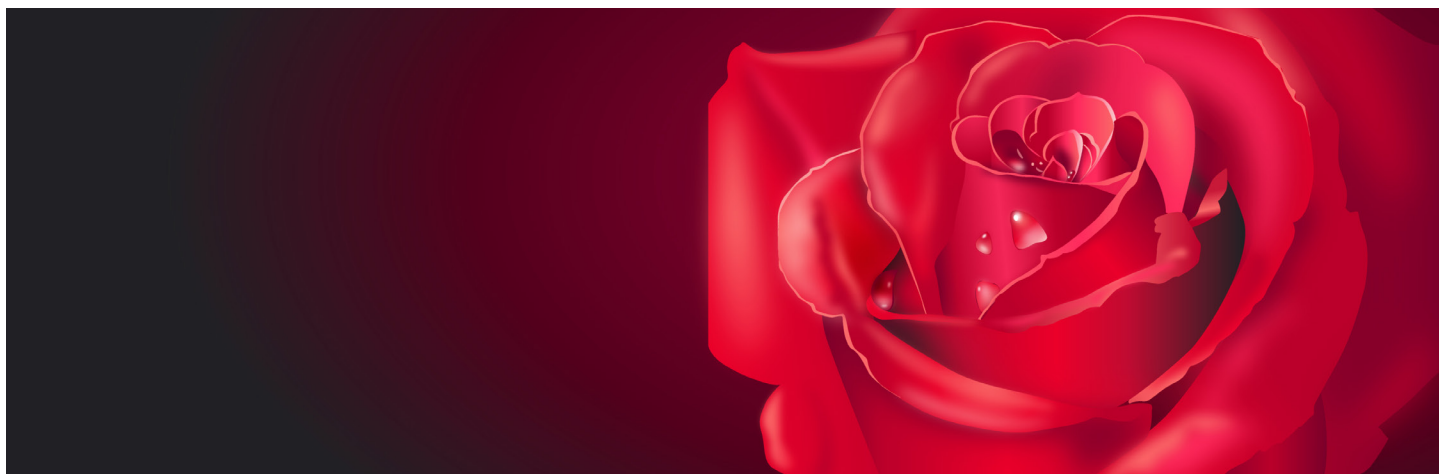
## Editors' Letter

This edition of our annual publication celebrates our 30th Anniversary with a new name. The name *Exitus* came to be to represent the community of women (us) that are seeking an Exit from sexual exploitation. The *Exitus* publication is written by women involved with the RESET Society of Calgary, who are either healing from sexual exploitation, addiction and violence or have been a Participant in our program.

Our vision for our Anniversary edition was to share some of the stories from the more than 900 women that have walked through our doors since we started in 1989. Their stories will take you from the first edition of the Cry of the Streets publication, through the 30 years to current day. Although there may be similarities, no two stories are the same. We also wanted to honour those we have lost with a special page created by two of our current Participants.

Thank you for travelling with us on our 30 year journey.

## The RESET Rose



The symbol of RESET is the rose, and so it is that we regard each woman who takes her first step to recovery from street life.

For the rose is a thing of beauty...it is also very fragile.

The rose says 'embrace me'...but its thorns say, 'stay back'.

The rose is a rose...but no two are the same.

As you come to know the 'roses' within our doors, and they come to know you, you will both learn. At first all the 'watering and tending' may seem to be one way. But as you share in the pain...and the laughter of recovery, you will find that you too are nourished. You will find your place in the garden alongside our roses.





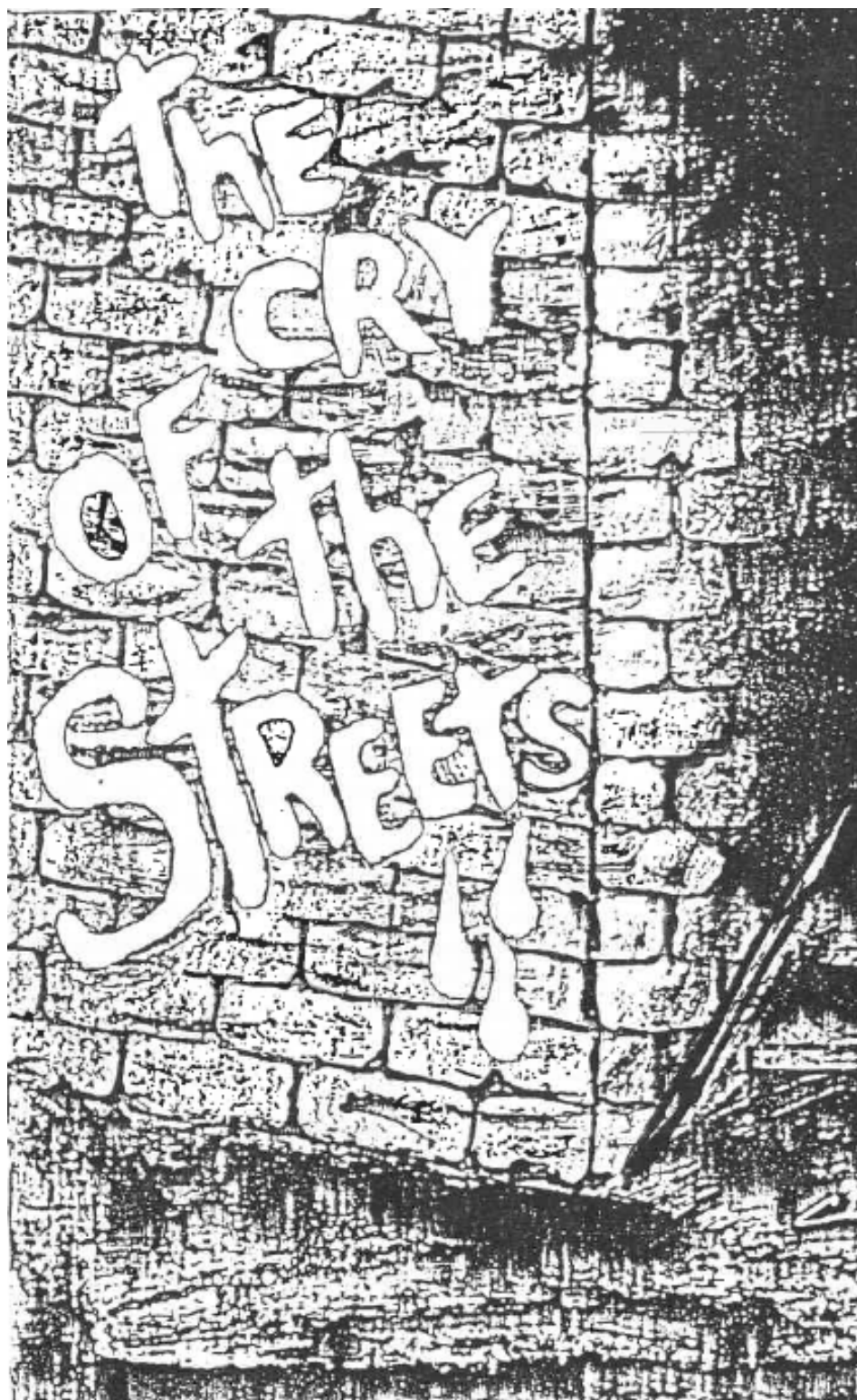
# In the beginning...

## 1989

### Volume 1, Issue 1

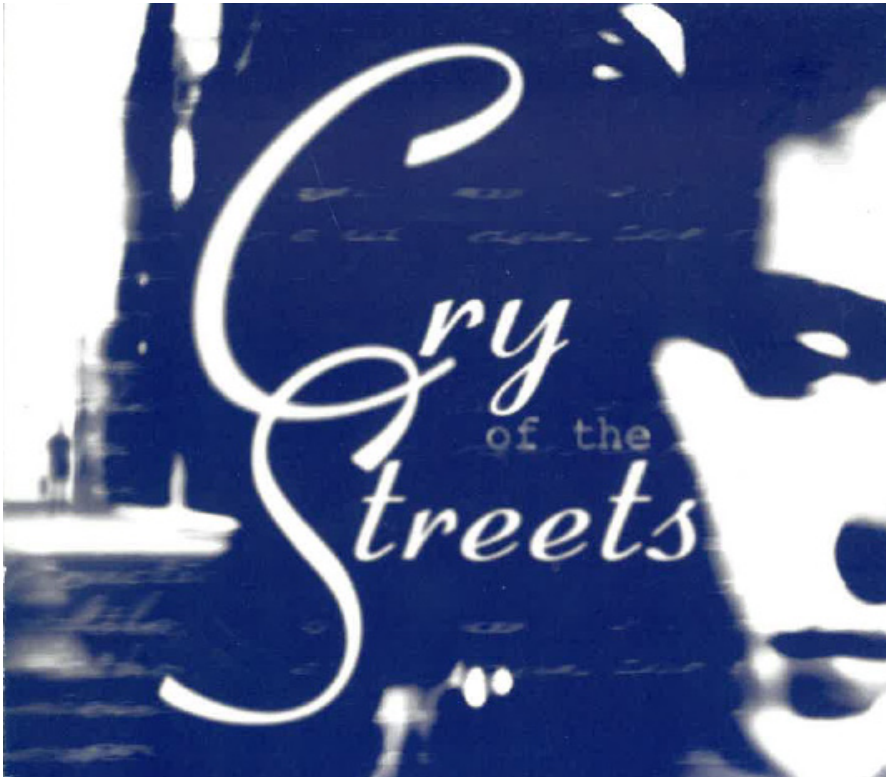
When the street puts on  
her pagan clothes,  
And the good folk flock  
to the picture shows  
The gape in horror at  
make-believe fears  
And cry at the safe parts  
with copious tears  
And then it's all over  
'cause the picture's done.  
They're on their way home,  
and they've had their fun.  
With expressionless faces,  
the sober and sane,  
Will pass dry eyed through  
the street's domain  
And stare at the street kids,  
the hookers and queens,  
The drunks and the junkies,  
who look old for their years.

We chose to ignore it,  
has it not been heard plain?  
The depressing song of sin and shame  
The cry of the streets.  
It floats through the doorways  
of the tenement row,  
Down stairwells and alleys  
where shadows grow.  
It seems only the outcast really know  
The cry of the streets.  
It's the sound of the homeless,  
the lonely and cold,  
The cries of children forced to be old.  
Victims of neglect, abuse and greed,  
Poverty, sickness, desperate need  
The cry of the streets.  
Will the sound ever reach  
our deafened ears  
If no one comes to dry their tears  
What hope do they have  
if no one hears  
The cry of the streets ...





# 1992 – 2001



## The Angry Current

T, 1992 Participant

Your anger is like a river  
Flowing so fast and powerful  
When I try to calm it I get swept in so quickly  
and start to drown in madness

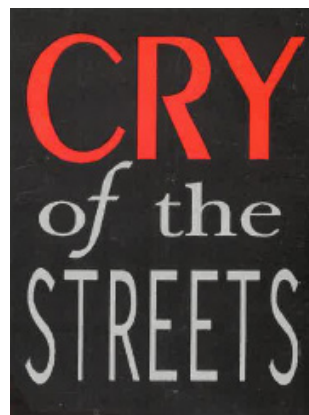
I gasp for a breath of understanding  
my arms reach for a branch of hope  
To pull myself from this angry current  
but I can't reach far enough  
everything is happening so fast

So I guess I'll just be swept away  
until I am so bruised  
From the rocks of hatred lying below  
the surface of this painful water  
That I have no strength  
to stop myself from drowning

## 1992, Author Unknown

I live in a house called torture and pain  
It's made of materials called sorrow  
and shame  
It's a lonely place in which to dwell,  
There's a horrid room there and they  
call it hell.

From the faucets run tears that I've  
cried all these years;  
And it's hated by my heart made of  
stone,  
But the worst part to face is I'll die in  
this place  
And when I die, I die all alone.





# 2002 – 2009

## It Can Happen to Anyone

AS, 2002 Participant

This is the kind of story to hear and think, it can't happen to me. I come from a good family, and my parents are still happily married. I was an honour roll student through high school, and I graduated with credits to spare. Guess what? It happened to me.

I was 18 and naive. I went to a house party with a group of new "friends". I was told the drug being passed around was hash oil (I'd NEVER been around hard drugs before, so I believed it). I remember saying I would try the hash oil... and that was all I remembered of the night. The drugs I believed were relatively harmless turned out to be crack cocaine.

When I finally came to, I was in a hotel. I only recognized one other person, the woman who had brought me to the party. She was a recruiter for two pimps. I sat there with six other scared girls, and two of the scariest men I have ever met in my life. I was told I was lucky; my drug debt was relatively low. The bills for the "shopping trips" me and my new "friend" went on - that was a different story.

I was forced to live a nightmare. They used threats against my family - particularly my little sister - to ensure I was compliant. In order to survive, I developed an alter ego strong enough to deal with johns, pimps and everything that was thrown at me. I called her Cassandra and she was a fighter. She fought to keep the last shred of my sanity intact. She was the one who laid under the first john, who kept my mind from shattering while I threw up in bushes after fleeing his car.

There were many johns, more "debts," and two beatings that put me in hospital. One night I overheard my pimp and a recruiter planning to take me to Vegas for a blitz on the strip. Men would buy me at any hour, as many as possible, and then I would be sold into sex slavery overseas. I froze, realizing that I was officially going to disappear, become one of those statistics.

I had a regular client that night. He took one look at me and asked, "Cassie, what's wrong?" I collapsed and started to cry. I told him what I had heard, and that I was done and I had to end it. I had to escape. He did the most selfless thing that anyone had done for me for quite some time. He called police, admitted he had hired me as a prostitute, and got me to tell my story.

I stayed at SAS for four months. Eventually I said goodbye to Cassandra. I have been able to stay clean for over a decade. I am now in a loving relationship with an amazing man and my soulmate and have two beautiful children. I have been able to move on.

## Editor's Note...

*This letter was mailed to RESET in 2012, with a request for us to share it to help others avoid what happened to her.*

**"The classroom is a sisterhood. We build each other up, and we grow together." - BC, 2010 Graduate**

## **An Invitation to Hope**

R, 2009 Participant

Dear woman who still waits...

How does one begin to express the hope they have for one who, at times, does not share that hope for herself? Let me try to convey what my heart longs to let you know - you are precious beyond words, and worthy of a bright and hope-filled future.

In times when you can't see your beauty through the destruction that surrounds you, remember that there are others who can.

When life gives you reason to wonder what anyone could ever see in you, know that there are those who see your endless potential and wish you could begin to recognize it in yourself.

When the core of who you are seems lost to you, look to the One who created you and find yourself. You are not gone, just hidden for a time.

When others make you feel like less than who you are, turn and look for those who know your value and believe that one day you will become all that you can be. Run in their directions, listen to their voices; ignore the taunts of those who would destroy you. On the days when you wonder if

life is worth living and the work towards a healthy future seems excruciatingly long, look around at those who are walking alongside you; those whose hope for you is complete healing and strength, and know that it is possible.

When you feel like giving in and taking the "easy way out", decide to take the road less travelled and press on. You are not there yet, but life has called you and you were created with a purpose that nobody else can fulfill.

At those times when frustration rears its ugly head, choose laughter instead of anger. Tears have their season, but in the end hope rises through a positive attitude.

You are a light that the world needs to see. You have gifts that the world can benefit from. You see life through a lens that others want to begin to understand. There is only one you. Honour and respect yourself first for out of self-respect flow the courage and strength to do what is right and to become the best of who you were created to be.

Ultimately, hope means to "wish, expect, look forward (to something)". My hope for you is health, strength, courage, motivation, and a positive fulfilling future. What is your hope?

## **"Mommy, I want to be an escort when I grow up"**

E, 2009 Participant

Pretty unrealistic to hear a young person speak those words isn't it? So, if no one is growing up with that desire, how is it some end up in that lifestyle? Is it a choice? Or, could it be the result of a series of childhood, or even adulthood, traumatic experiences? Could the lifestyle be the result of desperation? I'll bet you're thinking it could never happen to you. Let me ask you, have you ever been short on groceries or rent? Ever struggled to house or clothe your children? Ever wondered where next semester's tuition is coming from? Most of us have been there. Most of us wish for a quick fix to our financial concerns. Now imagine feeling unloved or unworthy and suddenly having someone willing to spend time with you and even paying to do so. Now, not only are you gaining a sense of self-worth (although false), but your financial concerns are being taken care of. Still think it couldn't happen to you? Maybe it will, maybe it won't. But, please, next time you see someone in the sex trade, instead of thinking "how disgusting!", think "how can I help". If that person is you, know that you're not alone. If you're reading this, it's not too late to get help.



## 20th Anniversary of

# SAS

"I knew I could not stand it any longer; I knew I wanted something better out of life" L. - COTS 1990

"I didn't need drugs and alcohol to make me happy. I just needed to learn how to handle my feelings" S. - COTS 1992

"You walk by and glance down at me, then look up, pretending I'm not even there" L. - COTS 2000

"My life had no more meaning until I realized that I have to love myself before anyone else could love me" D. - COTS 1997

"I felt very ashamed of myself and I didn't know what to do"  
M. - COTS 1994

"Today, I have a tomorrow" A. - COTS 1998

"She's building a strong foundation which will help her deal with life on life's terms" S. - COTS 2005

"The cry of the streets. It's the sound of the homeless, the lonely and cold. The cries of the children- forced to be old. Victims of neglect, abuse and greed. Poverty, sickness, desperate need" K. - COTS 1989

A Single Red Rose.

It means Hope.

It means Triumph.

It means Love.

It means Thank You.

"Thank you to all who have helped along the way, to the women and children that have walked through these doors, and to those who have supported us over these last 20 years"



MK



# 2009 – 2012



## Hope

A, 2009 Participant

I always had it  
Sometimes, it was barely a flicker  
Almost gone.  
It was resilient though  
Even when I couldn't find it  
It was there  
Keep me alive.  
My secret knowledge  
Deep inside,  
I was destined for something  
Something different,  
Beyond where I was  
Something better, than this

## We are Like Stained Glass

EM, 2012 Participant

When I think of The Beauty of Us, the first thing that comes to my mind was the analogy of a stained glass window that a staff member and I talked about years ago when I was in Program. That analogy has had a profound impact on my life as well as some of the women I now work with, in the prison. Whenever I feel broken or damaged or useless I remember my staff friend telling me that a stained glass window is one of the most beautiful pieces of art. And yet it can only be created when you have a collection of broken, damaged or useless glass. To me, the Program community is like my stained glass window. I don't think you can truly appreciate the light unless you've been in the darkness. I think what makes recovery so beautiful is learning to shine and that you deserve to shine.

## Dear Teacher

PK, 2012 Participant

Your class felt like an infusion of love and as the class came to an end, I looked around at the clients' faces in the classroom and the way they intently looked at you with the most charming smiles - a smile that says "You're bringing out my truest beauty - we are appreciating someone who truly comes from love. Look, my love is rising up and connecting with you." That's why I intently look at you, enjoying your life affirming presence here, enjoying every word that falls from your lips because this is so rare, a small moment in time and then - it's gone - but it remains in my heart forever.



# The Beauty of Us

## A Collective Poem

### 2012 Participants

#### Vow to Myself

AD, 2012 Participant

I promise to always cherish  
and take the time you need  
from me.

I promise to be, forever  
more, your friend when  
you are suffering.

I promise to be your lover,  
your best friend and your  
heart's knightly keeper.

I promise to hear your  
thoughts and encourage  
your dreams and do my  
best to help you right your  
wrongs.

Your love, your light will  
always be my frontal lobe.

I will protect you I will  
believe in you

Forever and ever

My best friend until my last  
breath

Always and forever

Amen

I used to walk with my eyes on the ground. Now I walk with my head up, stopping to lift the chin of another girl.

I used to not have a voice, I felt so small - I was disappearing. Now I see that all along I had the heart of a lion.

I used to keep a vow of silence - hidden tears, buried fears. Now I am learning to raise my voice. Now I know my words are precious.

I used to feel unaccepted and unloved. I have found my voice with SAS, and now I can be myself.

My pain used to define me. Who I thought I was, is not who I am today. Now I know that what I thought I wanted was, in fact, a lie and what I lost was what my dreams are made of.

I used to be afraid to be successful. I never felt accomplished, with anything I did. Now I have multiple years sober, have regained so much of what I lost to addiction, and have accepted my successes as some of my best achievements.

I used to feel so much shame and guilt. Now I know I did those things to survive. Now I know being a survivor and overcoming that life has helped me become the person I am today.

I used to be ashamed of my past. Now I realize my survival is beautiful.

I used to pray for death. Now I can't wait to live.

I used to live in fear. Now I live in faith.

I used to be a soul scared, a body abused. Pain no more. Thanks to many, I have become whole, my soul renewed. Now I am free.

I used to take my life and children for granted, until it was taken away by addiction. Now each day for me is a blessing.

I used to dread the sound of a phone ringing, because it was the sound of my soul being sold. Now I rejoice when I hear my children singing, because it is the sound of a family, whole.

I used to be hungry. Now I cook for a living and feed others.

I used to have no reason to get up. Now I have a beautiful baby girl.

I used to feel all alone in the world, with nobody I could count on to help me with my problems. Now I have a whole community of wonderful people that I can call on, count on, and trust to be honest and supportive with me, whenever that may be.

I used to feel all alone in the world. Now I share my experiences, strength and hope with those who still suffer.

I used to misunderstand people who were homeless and on the streets, until I lived there myself. Now I look into the eyes of people there and offer a hand or a hug.

This is the beauty of us.



# 2013

## The Seed of Life: A Collective Poem

### 2013 Participants

Extraordinary women changing,  
Opening new doors every day.  
Mapping out our lives, stress free, have fun.  
This is the year.  
Every day matters.  
We want to know  
what is going on.  
Support, gain confidence.  
Lift spirits. Take control.  
We are back in control of our lives.  
Real life triumph.  
Gain the tools of life  
from our tool guide,  
between friends in the community.  
Sisters, it's what is on the inside that counts.  
Change the world.  
This is the road to recovery...  
It is beautiful with purple flowers.  
The leaves have fallen  
but the summer heat still radiates.  
We are music, pure and natural,

a new generation for the future.  
The truth, share our deepest secrets,  
chemical crystals, how painfully passe.  
The pain of the past is but yesterday.  
Stay in the present, focus on the now.  
Make an impression: the seed of life.  
The seed of recovery blooms  
into beautiful: trees, plants, green heavens  
that give us the oxygen we breathe.  
This is home; the innocence of a child  
reading so pure and natural,  
protection of a mother's love.  
Always fight the disease because every day counts.  
We want to make it great.  
We can keep the past and present organized  
with the success of our lives.  
We are the women who drink  
from the fountain of purity together.  
Together we journey recovery.  
This is our recovery.

## Truly Live

### BH, 2013 Participant

By allowing yourself  
To forgive, letting go  
Of every thing. Putting to rest  
Anything that has forced  
You to seek lack, instead of wholeness  
For now it is time to take back  
With a forgiveness that unpeels  
All thick layers of hurt  
To reveal my soul  
Bringing you back together  
With a restorative power  
That makes you whole

## Light of Hope

### NC, 2013 Participant

A victim that asks for help becomes a survivor... The  
Survivor becomes strong willed... The strong willed  
becomes a positive role model to others in need... The  
role model becomes hope of light to others stuck in the  
dark... The light of hope makes others see... To see is to  
believe... This plants the seed... There is a way to change...  
The light shining on change will make a full circle... The  
more change... The brighter the light shines... More lives  
can be changed... The future shall shine bright for the  
next generations... Change is the key to the future... Let  
the light shine brighter than ever!!



# 2013 – 2015

## Becoming Brave

SG, 2014 Participant

He left me alone. I had been playing with the idea of running for so long. Fear held me back - never believing I could actually get away. But now, bruised and broken, fear of staying overcame me. I knew I would die. I could see it in his eyes, whatever value I once held was used up. I was just baggage now.

We were docked at an American marina. He was careless leaving the passports out. His expectation was that I would never run. He had put more than the fear of God into me. I closed my eyes, heart beating, shaking, without even realizing what I was doing at first; I grabbed my passport. I ran up the dock, through the gates, out of the marina. One of the girls I left behind screamed that there would be repercussions. Dressed in boots and a little dress, I just kept running toward the border. Tears streamed down my face. I didn't look back. I was terrified I would turn and he would be right behind me.

The border guards were concerned. I just cried and begged for them to let me cross. Don't ask questions. Just let me go - and for some odd reason, maybe an act of God - they let me through. I ran and walked for hours, until my feet would not carry me. I returned to a place where I knew I could die. For days I stayed high in a dirty room in an old hotel. I was scared of my shadow. My soul was broken.

God was on my side. A man came up into the room, a wad of money in hand. I asked if he'd put me to work. I needed money to continue my self-imposed death sentence. He said he could get me whatever I wanted. Then he looked at me. Really looked at me and said, "You don't belong here. Do you want out?"

I started crying. I was so scared. My heart and body screamed no - hope is hard. Hope kills. But I heard a small voice say 'yes'. He made a call. "I got a girl for you."

I thought he was going to sell me - but I had nothing left to lose. I couldn't go back. I was too exhausted and broken to fight back. Instead, he took me to an angel, who called a local rape relief shelter and got me a bed.

They took me to the hospital to heal from his assaults. Then Child Rescue Association of North America stepped in, even though I was 25, and bought me a plane ticket to SAS in Calgary. Far from his reach. He wouldn't find me there. SAS, I was told, helped girls like me, helped girls escape the ugly snares of sex traffic. I was told they would take me right away. So still bruised, very broken and afraid, I boarded the plane.

## Part of a Solution

RB, Board Member

My father raised me and my brothers to respect women. Unfortunately, we live in a world where hostility towards women often prevails. I sense this attitude again and again, and we see how it impacts the women who come through our doors. People very close to me have been abused or sexually exploited and I see how difficult that burden is to carry. To be able to provide the facilities that help women put that damage aside, so we can see who they really are - the precious people that they are - that keeps me coming back.

Over the eight years that I have worked with this organization in a volunteer capacity on the Board, I've come to appreciate the staff and volunteers. For them, it isn't about money. Like me, they are here because they are committed to the cause. It is a really energizing environment to be in. Of course there are challenges, but we persevere because we want to be a part of the solution.

"In the classroom, there was so much that needed to come out so I could heal. To open up about all that with the girls and women in class was really hard. But I looked around and saw that I wasn't the only one that was exploited." – AM, 2013 Graduate

## The Strength of Sisterhood

AM, 2013 Graduate

During my first week in the Program, I attended the funeral of my son's father. This man had arranged for my release while I was held captive by a gang. After I had suffered years of unspeakable abuse while locked in a camper, he managed to negotiate my freedom. His sudden death in a motorcycle accident was devastating, and my whole grieving process (and so much more) happened at RESET.

One of the most important things to me when I came to the Program was knowing that nobody knew where I was, and that I was safe. In the classroom, there was so much that needed to come out so that I could heal. Not just grief for my son's father, the remaining trauma from my experience with the gang, and all the pain that comes with years of addiction. There was also the very first monumental abuse that changed the trajectory of my life when I was 14 years old. That's when a 29 year old drug dealer confined me, sexually assaulted me, and coerced me into smoking crystal meth. That's how my life became about feeding an addiction.

To open up about all that with the girls and women in class was really hard. But I looked around and saw that I wasn't the only one that was exploited. I wasn't alone. I initially came because I was told they could help me get my son back after he was apprehended. I got that, and so much more. Sharing built a sisterhood between us. The love that comes from the SAS community is unbelievable. They gave me my life back. They gave me my son back. They helped me heal inside and out. Today, I look in the mirror and I see a beautiful, confident, young woman who loves herself, and has so much strength.

There are no words to explain the gratitude I have for this Program. I am now 30 years old, and have two years of continuous sobriety.

## Quilt of Belonging

JE, Quilter, Volunteer since 1995



Upon graduation from the Program, Participants are presented with a Quilt of Belonging to symbolize that they always belong to the community. I am one of a group of ladies at the Grace Presbyterian Church, who lovingly and prayerfully make the quilts. We try to choose each one so that it suits the personality of a girl who will receive it.

The quilt gifting evolved many years ago, after a friend of mine who was a hairdresser wanted to do something for the girls who were graduating. I would gather them up, and she would do their hair and give them a manicure. That was her gift to them to help make their graduation day special. Grace ladies started making quilts for the hundredth anniversary of the church in 2005. I thought they would make a special graduation tradition. Making quilts for the Participants then became a major priority.

It's very emotional for me when I present the quilt, because I feel really close to the girls. For the most part, I got to know them really well and so it's just part of me. The girls are very special. They are like an extension of my own family. I see them as extra daughters, so there is great personal impact for me as well. With RESET, the women are always a part of the family. They can always come back for support after they have graduated. The quilt is a reminder to them that they are part of the family. These quilts hold them close within that family.





# 2015 – 2016

"Before RESET, I used to live my life day to day, merely surviving. Now, I'm very focused on and excited about going back to school this fall. I'm also nervous! What I dream about most is giving back to youth and women." - TS, 2016 Graduate



## A Message to Women Still Experiencing Exploitation

### 2016 Participants

"Hey ladies. I'm one of the girls in the SAS program. I'm 18 years old and I'm three months clean. I am beautiful and powerful. I love myself and I'm happy to be alive. I have been in Servants Anonymous for 11 months. This program has changed my life. You are an amazing woman. You are loved, and you are wanted. It feels so good to finally love myself again." - MP

"I am 29 working since 18, never thought I'd stop. It was my financial security blanket and was hard to step away from not knowing how you're going to survive. But there is a way! You can do it. I did it and so did a lot of other women. Your hopes and dreams can come true! We can help and not want anything in return. I just want to say it's possible. Your dreams can come true!" - Anonymous

"For the last 25 years I've been an escort. I started working on the streets of Calgary at 15 years old. For the last 5 years I was supporting my boyfriend. Then on August 20th, 2016 he died of a Fentanyl overdose. I have now been in Servants Anonymous for two months. I receive \$204 a month and I'm happier now than when I was making \$12,000 a month! I can go to school, or do whatever I like! I can find out who I am and what I like. Please take care of yourself! Much love, MAI."

"There is nothing wrong with money, and if you ever start believing you are priceless... there is a place for you here! Remember God in your travels because he can carry you. Best wishes. You deserve all. You are worthy. What's best for you? You are loved always." - Anonymous

"Hi. I know you must be pretty overwhelmed right now but I just want you to know this program is changing my life. I have been here a week. The transition and change is scary at first but it's so worth it. Please give it a chance. You're worth it and deserve so much more." - JS

"This program saved my life. Every year I said I just wanted to save money to go back to school and have nice things. 10 years later I ended up a drug addict with a pimp even though I said it would never happen to me. Today I'm sober and getting ready to go to college, thanks to the help from SAS. I never thought I could be this happy without money and drugs. You can have the life you have always dreamed of without any of the fear and problems you are going through. Exiting the sex trade was the hardest but best decision of my life. The unknown is scary, but with the help of SAS you CAN walk away, you will succeed! I exited four years ago. I now have a full-time job, I'm going to school fulfilling everything I was told I couldn't." - Anonymous

"I worked in the trade for 10 years, coming into Servants I wasn't sure I could ever walk away from the money and lifestyle, even the first bit in Program I struggled, soon the staff and other women made me realize there is much more to life than money! I got my family back! I had self-worth, and confidence to move forward. I got my family back. My morals changed. Recovery does not mean "fully recovered". It may mean that you can pick yourself up faster than the last time. It may mean that you don't beat yourself up as severely. It may mean that you still manage to do the bare minimum on a bad day. It may mean that you can recognize the signs of relapse now and have better steps in place to face it. I wasn't a working girl. But loved the lifestyle. I often stayed with working girls. After I was beat and raped at a party, I wanted to make sure the girls were safe. SAS is a safe place. It's a great program. Even if you're not sure if it's for you, come give it a try. Hope to see you in the classroom. It isn't easy, but the best things in life aren't easy." - Anonymous



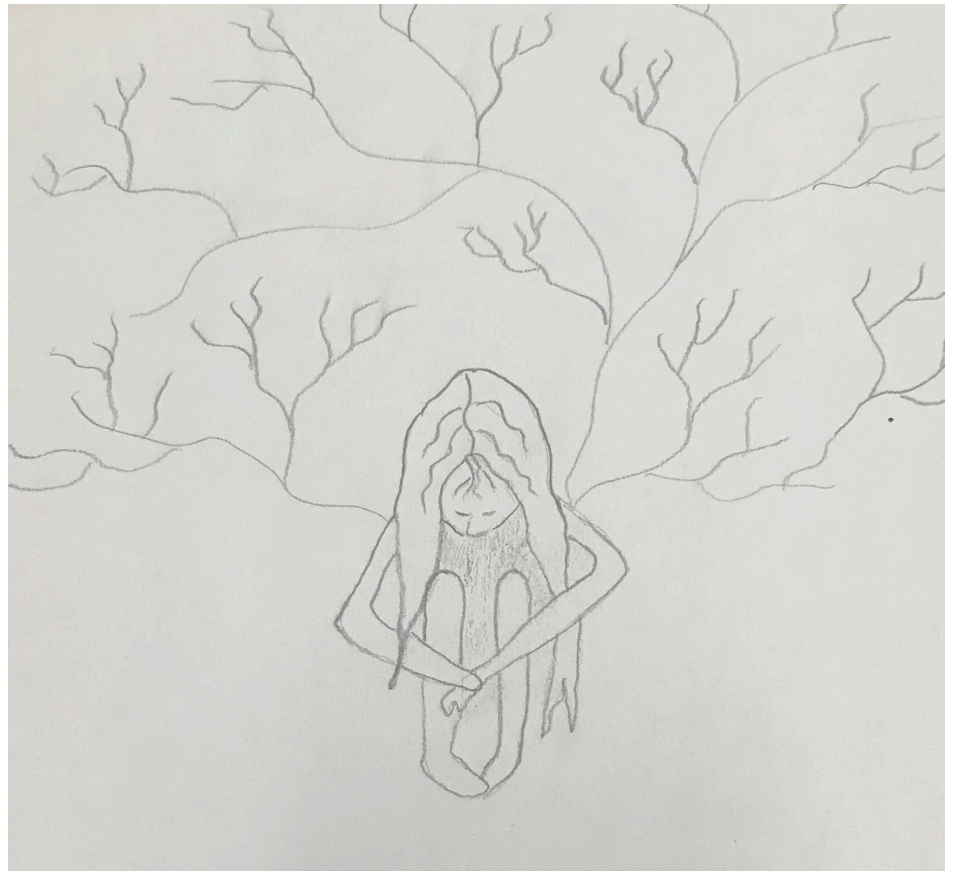
# Today...

## The Long Bike Ride

CL, 2019 Participant

In my life, I was sexually abused by my step mom and dad. I was abandoned by my mom and I lived in a Residential School from the ages of 10-17.5. I worked the streets when I was in my 20's to support my kids. I married two abusive men, and just left a 17 year old marriage. I went to a women's safe house shelter. I left there, started drinking, started going with lots of guys, started taking lots of pills, and started going with rougher guys off of the internet. I started posing for pictures on the internet. I was drinking too much. Things were spiraling out of control and I met an abusive guy who stalked me. I ran to family for help, but family was so caught up with gang life I had to run away. So one day I bought a bike at the thrift

store for \$35.00. My freedom was bought with \$35.00. I rode my bike to the next city and told the shelter what was happening in my life. They bought me a ticket to leave the province. I didn't look back. I got to my destination where I had a breakdown, and tried to take my life but did not succeed. I lived. In the hospital, I heard of RESET. I was told RESET could help women like me, in my situation. So I phoned Liz and RESET. It was RESET that saved me. I am now working on myself and working on bettering my future. Everyday I wake up with a new outlook on life.



"There's a lived and learned saying in my head – do not replace the ones and things/talents in your life with an addiction – normal is just a setting on the dishwasher. Taking physically and mentally exhausting incentive towards and in the goals of your wellness a success to see this major change for greatness.

A touch so heavy with love; just an only, a single touch in a moment upon time, that can give/show at times most needed so much."

- BG, 2019 Participant



## In the Beginning...

TP, 2019 Graduate

I used to think (until just recently) once I graduate, my life is going to start. I was wrong.

I've come to humbly realize that my first day in this Program was the start of my life. I made the choice to live and not merely survive.

Before coming to this Program, I was broken, incomplete, chaotic, and empty. I hid my shame, my scars, and my face. I hated who I was, what I'd done with my life, the loved ones I wasn't there for, and my powerlessness to stop the self-destruction. I was lost... alone... at rock bottom. I couldn't even do wrong to get by anymore... I now know that was God whispering in my life "you are done".

So the big choice to come to RESET was decided by fate, God sent me some angels in my darkness to show me the way. I arrived with fear, a lot of fear... fear of the unknown... What will this look like? What was I giving up? What will I gain? All these questions... All this fear. I remember being asked why I was crying during my intake... For me to even admit I was scared was the first shred of honesty I'd spoke.

When I arrived at the i-EXIT safehouse, I was kind of excited. I hadn't slept in a bed for months, I came in with a half a suitcase of clothes that didn't fit, and my typical "lug around" duffle bag that seemed was always attached to me.

The relief I had was very powerful, for months I struggled to want any better for myself. I believed I was worthless. Why bother being any better when all I ever did was make mistakes? Now that I was through the door, making that first step, surrounded by safety, I took out a pen and wrote my first journal entry:

March 14, 2018

*This is my first day living my brand new life. There's been so much pain the last 2 years...through it all I've known this moment would finally happen. For weeks now I have said "Wait for it, any minute now-here comes the boom, and my whole life will change" Well today is that day! Thinking of how relieved my mom is that I'm finally back in a program brings tears to my eyes. I know that she will have tears of her own, although they would be tears of relief for both of us, only mine are tainted with guilt and shame. I wish I could have gotten to this point without hurting myself, my kids, my family, and my friends, but that's not how life works. This pain I've felt for so long has finally turned into hard lessons instead of ongoing problems. Thank God I am here. For the first time in so long, I finally feel like I'm on the right path, doing the right thing. I've felt lost for so long, I'm excited that my life will be worth living again. I have so much gratitude for this moment, now just one day at a time and I will be on my way to greater things I know I am meant for. I'm going to be the best mother to my kids, I am going to be an inspiration for others, and best of all I'm gonna be the ME I know I can be. NOTE TO SELF: Whatever happens - don't give up, no matter what.*

The seed of hope that was planted within myself that day was nurtured over the next 12 months in the RESET Classroom. Throughout program I blossomed into a woman that I never thought possible. I discovered my own self-worth, beliefs and values, boundaries, and what a healthy lifestyle even looks like. I've gained life-skills that are a solid foundation for bettering my life in all aspects. Today, I am proud of the woman in the mirror. My hope is for other women that have been where I have to plant their own seed of hope, and take the opportunity for RESET to help them grow.





## Finding Hope

JM, 2019 Participant

Being a chronic relapser, I was in a mess of my addiction again. I knew someone who had helped me out as a close mentor in sobriety, and had gone through the RESET Program. Having a similar background as her, I thought RESET would be a good fit. I was on the streets of Calgary and Vancouver in my full blown intravenous heroin, crystal meth and crack cocaine addiction. I was pimped out a few years back and got out of it. Crime wasn't enough to support my drug habit that I eventually began to do it on my own; prostitution. Death could have happened as I've been close, and been through numerous rehab facilities, jail and juvenile detention.

Since I came to RESET, my life has changed drastically. I am clean off all dope and currently on the methadone program. I have a safe home to go to and I attend class during the day. I have made good friendships here that care about me and that I can trust. I'm eating regularly and getting both healthier and stronger. I have a relationship with my Father today and am dealing with my legal issues.

I am learning that my mistakes don't define me. I am capable of so much that I never had imagined before. Finding hope within myself has been very difficult as failure is what I had in mind for a long time, it was comforting to me. Getting clean time in was a struggle as well as the urge for fast cash and doing crime. I work a Program today and reach out when I'm struggling. I give back to others. I have days where I have such deep self hate, and days that I can say "I am okay with myself" and that is super rewarding.

To those beginning the EXIT Program, stick it out because it gets better. So much better. The women and staff here at RESET are all amazing. You have a safe place and you are loved and understood and if I can do it, so can you! There is no excuse and you are not different.

## Power of My Own Voice

PA, 2019 Participant

Before RESET I was lost, broken, unable to trust, and completely shut down inside. I had no way of knowing if or how to survive everyday. RESET brought me within the week of talking to them. I never had people who truly cared about me like that. Coming into RESET I was untrusting of everyone especially opening up to other girls due to the situation I was in. I was given the power of my own voice back. RESET helped me learn my self worth, find my confidence, and helped with my self-esteem. On top of it all, I was given a safe, non-judgmental space to learn who I was and the things I wanted for myself.

"She is trying, trying at life, another chance is her gift to herself, a prize to be alive. She is trying, it doesn't come easy, she found flaws she didn't know she had and she accepts herself daily. She is trying. Another day sober is another day to start over. She is trying. The more confidence she grows the more success she owns. This is her trying."  
FS, 2019 Participant

## Commitment

FS, 2019 Participant

I grew up in the foster care system and that is where most of my trauma comes from. I was abused physically, sexually and mentally. My younger and older sister were with me but my younger sister was too little to remember. My older sister and I tried to run away one time because we couldn't take the abuse, but the RCMP drove us back and our windows were boarded shut with plywood and our door dead bolted. We were starved, beaten, and some days I slept outside in the middle of winter. My sister was successful in another runaway at school and because of that my little sister and I were moved. After that my little sister's dad got her out of the system and I moved in with my older sister after not seeing her for years. Our mother stole us and we moved to a woman's shelter in B.C. I remember my mom telling us that we would be poor living with her but we didn't care. At the age of 11 I started smoking weed, then at 15 years old I was smoking crack with my mom, I was also an alcoholic by that age. At barely 18 my mom pushed me towards her drug dealer who was 22 years older than me, I became pregnant with my first child.

I was 19 when I first came to RESET, formerly known as Servants Anonymous. I believe I was extremely naive, also told by one of my old Key Workers. I know I've grown so much every time I come back to RESET I learn something new, either about myself or how to cope with stress, triggers, anger, trauma, and relapse prevention. I am now 11 months sober/clean and 11 months in the Program. This is the longest I have ever made it and I plan on graduating in the fall. I am a peer mentor in the classroom.

The hardest part, I think is being fully committed to a 9-4 p.m. year-long program, but I remind myself every day of where I came from and why I want to better my life.

The most rewarding part is building friendships with girls/women that have the same goal, to stay clean and sober. I know I didn't get it right a few times, but I will always come home and they have always welcomed me back.

## Reflection in a Mirror

MA, 2019 Participant

What it was like...

I always felt alone. My body ached, my soul was weak. Moments of belonging were fleeting, the sickness grew deeper within me. I was dirty, I was lost, I was cheap. The mirror reflected a stranger. I was once a girl with hopes and dreams. Yet here I was, a failure as a mother, daughter, sister and friend.

What happened...

My heart was racing, my hands were sweaty. I walked into RESET fulla of fear. I gave up complete control. I didn't believe I was worth it. People welcomed me, the girls were happy and genuine. My man hugged me a bit tighter, my daughter smiled when she saw me. I felt hope. I stayed.

What it's like now...

I wake up in the morning at peace now. My laughter is real. I am safe. I gave this program a chance, and RESET gave me a life worth living. I am surrounded by inspiration. My daughter has a real mother today. My heart is happy. Take this leap of faith.



## Tree of My Life

SH, 2019 Participant



The glass and my life all encompassing  
My fragility, how easily I can be broken  
Foundation of all the rocks which I broke upon,  
solidity of which now I stand

Moving upwards, the trunk and branches...  
my ability to grow and reach out

To expand and reach for the sky

The dead moss that lies  
The underbrush, my dark tendencies  
Old habits that don't define my character

The growth upon that underbrush,  
showing my life, new state  
of mind, body and soul

## My New Journey

LM, 2019 Participant

I had no idea what to do next or where to turn – for once I was ready to get clean and give up working the streets, I had finished a 6-month treatment program but I felt I needed more. I was finally sober and in a headspace to deal with my shit ... where was I to go? I thought of 10 years earlier when I attempted a program known then as Servants Anonymous. I was real young at the time and had not yet travelled deep enough down the dark path to even have a clue at how much further I would need to go to until I would reach rock bottom, but here I was 10 years later at that rock bottom. I was in Vancouver far from Alberta where I got the idea to come back, I had no idea how I would do it but after I called to inquire I knew it was where I needed to go. When I called I found out it was now RESET Society and most important I found out they would hold me a bed.

Bringing in the New Year with RESET is one of my favourite memories in my life time. Christmas events, dinners and parties... AMAZING gifts! And the best sober sleepover for New Year's Eve created moments I longed for over the last years. My family was blessed knowing I was safe over the holidays unlike the years before. Not long after settling in my favourite time in Program rolled around... Graduation week. It's a week in which we have time to create a project reflecting our last six weeks. I love this time because it's a time to reflect on all I have accomplished and a time to celebrate my peers' accomplishments as well. It's a time when all of the appointments I made come together, all of the "little" tasks I completed tie into something bigger – a time to notice all the changes in my relationships. When it's time for my grad I will be able to look upon all of my grad projects and really see how much I completed and how far I've come. I'm at a point now in which my "basic" goals have grown to be goals that wouldn't be possible if not for my recovery. I can start making longer term goals that reflect my hopes and dreams. I've been able to address my physical health and maintain some stability with my mental health.

There's still a lot of work to be done surrounding my family and even though it's not where I would like it to be I have hope that in the future that will change. I'm finally starting to feel like I'm walking the path that God has set out for me. I'm still figuring out a lot of things but with RESET supporting me I feel like things are possible.

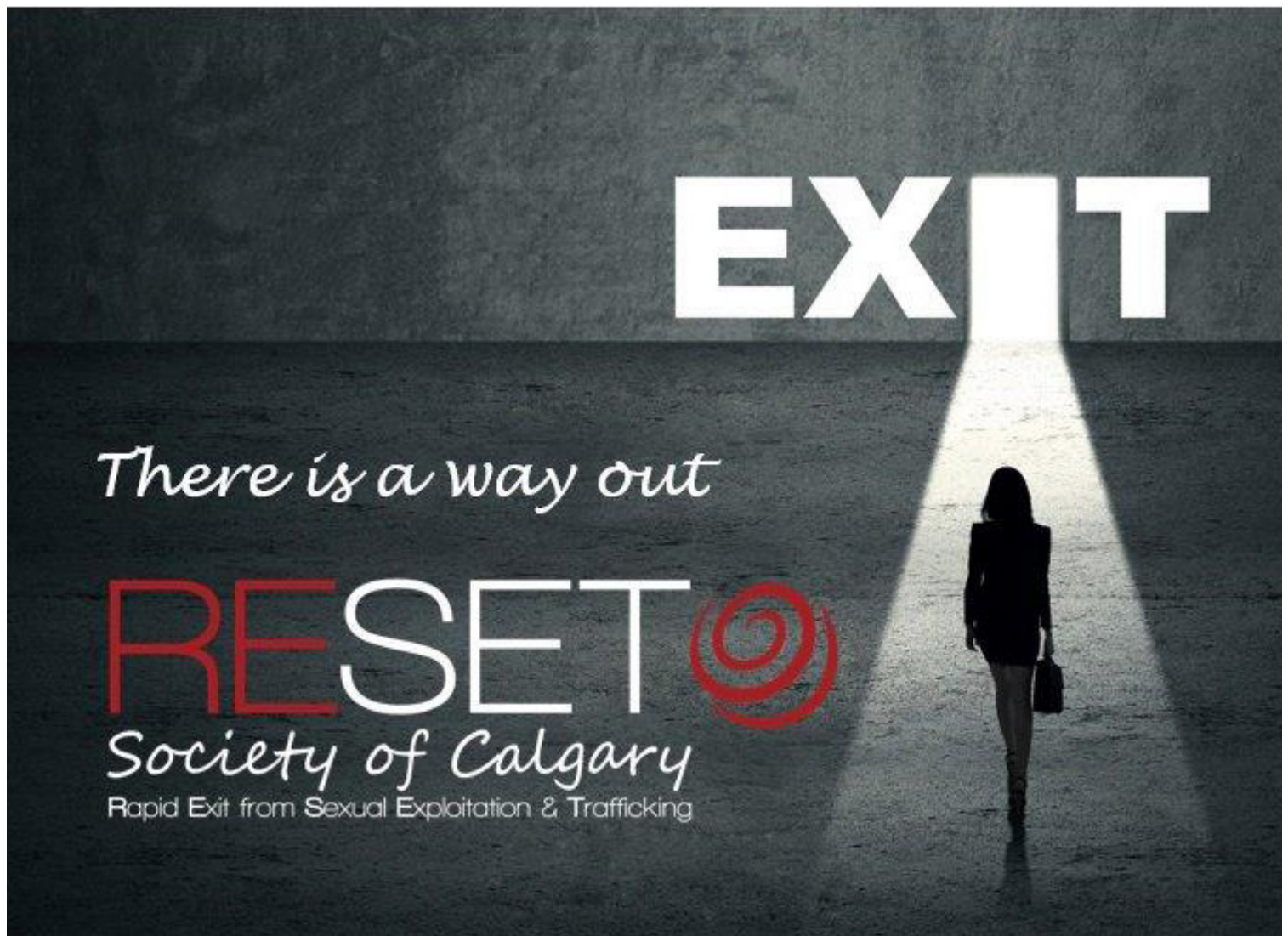
I am so grateful to be on this journey.





*"In loving memory  
of  
those we've lost"*





**Vision:** For sexually exploited women and girls to know there is a way out.

**Mission:** To provide comprehensive, individualized support and safe housing to women and girls aged 16 and over exiting sexual exploitation and trafficking so that they may transform their lives.

**Need help?**  
**Call 403-918-7311**

# RESET Society of Calgary

Through one-on-one, intensive case management, the **EX**ploitation, **I**ntervention and **T**ransition Program at RESET supports women as young as 16, and their children, as they exit from sexual exploitation. RESET provides immediate, safe and supportive housing allowing women to stabilize and begin the process of healing, and supports each woman's progress through transitional housing to independent living as the women graduate through the EXIT Program.

Since its inception in 1989, RESET has supported over 900 women and girls and provided them with the tools and resources to rebuild their lives. RESET is the only organization in Canada that provides 24/7, non-time-limited support and safe housing through a three-phase continuum of services.

## Phase One

When women first come to RESET, they are housed in the i-EXIT safe house for 30 days where their immediate basic needs are addressed, and they can begin to stabilize and begin a process of healing. Participants are provided with access to medical care, counselling and legal assistance.

## Phase Two

In the next stage, Participants move into supportive housing and begin attending the Life-Skills Classroom from Monday-Friday. The Classroom delivers trauma-informed, relationship-based and recovery-oriented curriculum, providing Participants with skills and opportunities that enable them to live healthier lives. Lessons in class focus on healthy relationships, addiction and relapse prevention, money management, co-dependencies, therapeutic recreation, empowered employment, nutrition, academics and women's health issues. Each Participant is supported by a 1:1 RESET Key Worker during their time in the classroom, which typically lasts 12 months.

## Phase Three

The third phase of the Program is Community Support, where Graduates of the Program (Alumnae) are supported in obtaining employment, educational opportunities and scholarships, and housing to secure long-term independence.

# RESET 30<sup>th</sup>

Society of Calgary  
Rapid Exit from Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking Anniversary  
*There is a Way Out*



## Reset Society of Calgary

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