

# Creep Off Text-Based Harassment Reporting Tool

Pilot Project Report

(creep off...))



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2018 (June 15 to August 15, 2018), Good Night Out (GNO) Vancouver offered Vancouver residents the ability to anonymously report witnessed or experienced harassment via text messaging. This report will summarize the design and implementation of the reporting service, results, and will highlight lessons learned and next steps. The primary goal of the pilot project was to determine if confidential text-based reporting is a feasible solution for reporting non-criminal harassment that is :

- 1.) Equitable (those most in need have the means to engage),
- 2.) Actionable (that reports can be used to enact change, not merely become a suppository of unused information), and
- 3.) Adaptable (push messaging, alerts, real-time responses by RCMP or GNO volunteers).

WelTel offered the adaptation of a bi-directional communication platform with promise of an anonymous reporting service. This system was first adopted for use in Vancouver Coastal Health's RADAR drug reporting and alerts system. The harassment hotline offered the general public an ability to text CREEP OFF, prompting a series of questions to answer regarding witnessed/experienced harassment. WelTel was co-founded by Gabby Serafini and Dr. Richard Lester.

## Summary of Activities:

- Stakeholder meetings to inform design promotional campaign and reporting service with representatives from City of Vancouver and other

safety organizations

- The creation and implementation of an anonymous harassment hotline serving Vancouver
- Analysis of pilot data & dissemination to key stakeholders to determine next steps

## Results:

A total of 115 (N=115) reports of harassment were received during the 2-month pilot. Of the 115 reports, 19 or 16.5% were reports of witnessed events and 96 or 83.5% were reports of experienced events.

This may be the first pilot of a text-based harassment hotline in North America or globally. Given the short time-frame for completion of activities and limited budget, this project depended on countless volunteer and in-kind resources. Next steps include leveraging resources for expansion, refining the question tree, and trialing this service for real-time response at events or with the Granville Street Team.

This pilot was funded by the University of British Columbia Centre for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) Innovation Grant that supports student and non-profit partnerships to solve social issues using innovative and unique ideas with no fear of failure. Alissa MacMullin (MPH) currently enrolled in an MSc at UBC's School of Population & Public Health, worked alongside GNO and WelTel on the project to meet key learning objectives.

GOOD NIGHT OUT VANCOUVER SOCIETY, 2018



## BACKGROUND

The 2017 House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women report, [Taking Action to End Violence Against Young Women and Girls in Canada](#) indicates that there are currently no formal mechanisms for victims to report behaviors of a harassing, but not necessarily criminal, nature.

Recommendation #6 of this report states:

**“That the Government of Canada fund initiatives, including research, that address street harassment and sexual harassment in public spaces and its effects on women, and that the Government of Canada take action to create secure, confidential and anonymous reporting systems that have appropriate sensitivity and support mechanisms.”**

### “But what is harassment, exactly?”

This is one of the most common questions that Good Night Out is asked. However, we believe that harassment is not simple to define as a list of behaviours, but it can be anything that makes someone feel uncomfortable, most generally either verbal or physical sexual behaviour towards a person without consent.

It often includes unwanted whistling, leering, sexist, homophobic, racist, or transphobic slurs, persistent requests for someone’s name, number or destination after they’ve said no, sexual names, comments and demands. It is important to acknowledge that harassment is a form of power based violence, and people can be targeted for a variety of reasons, many of which intersect.

“Power based personal violence is rooted in the assertion of power, control and/ or intimidation with the intent to harm another.”

Harassment therefore can be rooted in ableism, racism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, transphobia, slutshaming, body shaming, islamophobia , or any variety of combinations.

\* [Florida State University. Know More. What is Power-Based Violence?](#)



# HOPES FOR THE PROJECT

Good Night Out's over all vision for the project was inspired by the aforementioned recommendation from House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Good Night Out wanted to create and trial a reporting system that could be adapted at the community level to something in line with the recommendation.

Within this, Good Night Out hoped that the service to create a local data set that gave insight to the nature and frequency of harassment in Vancouver, which would help contextualize the work of Good Night Out, help with future programming and grant applications and to also share with other organizations doing anti-violence work.

**With this in mind, we identified following goals for Creep Off:**

- **To promote the reporting** of violence and sexual harassment by both victims and bystanders, promoting preventative and reactive actions beyond the onus placed on the victim
- **To shift the culture of the space** (Greater Vancouver and beyond) away from tolerating violence and harassment to enhancing safety and supportive networks
- **To increase the accountability** of night venues and the City of Vancouver, emphasizing their role to improve safety of establishments and public spaces for all through operations, policy, and targeted interventions.

- **To determine if confidential text-based reporting is a feasible solution** for reporting harassment that is:

- **Equitable** (those most in need have the means to engage),
- **Actionable** (that reports can be used to enact change, not merely become a suppository of unused information),
- **Adaptable** (push messaging, alerts, possibility for real-time response, cost effective, could adapt to include WIFI compatibility using Vancouver WIFI hotspots).



# LEGAL

“[Know your Rights.](#)” the first ever global legal resource on street harassment, by anti-harassment organization [Hollaback!](#), provides a comprehensive overview of the legal context of harassment in Canada.

**“Street harassment, defined to mean unwelcome words and actions by unknown persons in public places which are motivated by gender and invade a person’s physical and emotional space in a disrespectful, creepy, startling, scary or insulting way, is not, as such, against the law in Canada.**

However, some areas of Canadian criminal law, as set out in the **CRIMINAL CODE, RSC 1985, C C-46 (“CRIMINAL CODE”)**, may touch on and prohibit some types of street harassment. For example, under the criminal harassment provisions of the Criminal Code, it is illegal to engage in certain types of harassing conduct which causes a person to fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know.

Furthermore, some types of municipal by-laws, the penalties for an infraction of which is usually a nominal monetary fine, may also touch on and prohibit some types of street harassment in particular contexts and situations. For example, certain municipalities have by-laws prohibiting

**specific types of harassment in public parks or when riding on public transit and prohibiting nuisances or noise disturbances on city streets.”**

The Canadian courts have defined harassment as the state of being “tormented, troubled, worried, continually or chronically, plagued, bedeviled and badgered.” Further to this, the Criminal Code of Canada has established 4 criteria that must be met in order for the behavior in question to constitute criminal harassment.

1. The target must feel harassed by the conduct;
2. The perpetrator of the conduct must know or ought to know that the target feels harassed;
3. The perpetrator’s conduct must be one of the acts listed in the section, including repeatedly following the target, repeatedly communicating with the target, besetting or watching places where the target frequents, or threatening the target or someone the target knows;
4. Lastly, the target of the conduct must have a reasonable fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know.



Good Night Out recognizes that given the construction of masculinity under patriarchy and within a broader context of rape culture, it is not uncommon for the perpetrator to behave in a way that makes the target feel harassed, without the awareness that it is making them feel badgered, unsafe or harassed. This lack of awareness around the impacts of cat-calling or making unwanted comments on the target, unfortunately amounts to the act(s) not resulting in “threatening conduct” within the meaning of provision 264(2)(d) of the Criminal Code.

While not always illegal under the Criminal Code, harassment that takes place inside a business, organization, public institution, or workplace may fall within the jurisdiction of the [Canadian Human Rights Commission](#) and /or workers legislation bodies such as [WorkSafe BC](#). The Fall of 2017 saw the launch of #MeToo, a powerful international movement to end harassment\* in the entertainment industry and beyond, which placed increased pressure on employers and public institutions specifically to implement reporting mechanisms for harassment. Currently, there is no standardized means to do so, nor any parameters around transparency or data sharing with the public.

Harassment and violence in the public realm is often dismissed as a normalized aspect of urban living. It is Good Night Out’s position that just because behaviors are normalized and / or are not illegal, does not mean that they are without consequence. Given that sexual violence is a continuum of acts, data on the prevalence of all points of the continuum is required to both implement and evaluate anti violence and sexual consent programs that aim to address the root causes of sexual violence. Harassment is a form of

power-based violence and therefore we believe that giving voice to targets of harassment and violence, helps to reclaim some power back and challenges the cultural acceptance of sexual and public realm harassment.

\* The #MeToo movement was an initiative first launched over ten years ago by activist and founder of Girls for Gender Equity, Tarana Burke and saw a revival in Fall of 2017.

## PREVALENCE

There is inconsistent data on the nature and prevalence of street or public realm harassment in Canada, particularly on a municipal level, in part due to the legal grey area of the law it is sometimes situated in, as mentioned in the previous section. The limits of data are also impacted by under-reporting of sexual violence more broadly. Sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes and research has attributed this to a wide range of reasons, including the shame, guilt and stigma of sexual victimization\*\* the normalization of inappropriate or unwanted sexual behavior, and the perception that sexual violence does not warrant reporting.\*\*\*

In 2014, Hollaback! undertook one of the largest studies of public-realm harassment to date, connecting with 16,600 respondents overall. This in-depth study highlights the global and regional state of harassment, including age at first experience of harassment, nature of harassment experienced, behavioral changes as a result of harassment, and the emotional impacts of harassment.



## Some findings of previous research that are relevant to the context of the Creep-Off pilot are:

- Globally, most respondents first experienced public-realm harassment during puberty.

Among the 620 Canadian Women sampled:

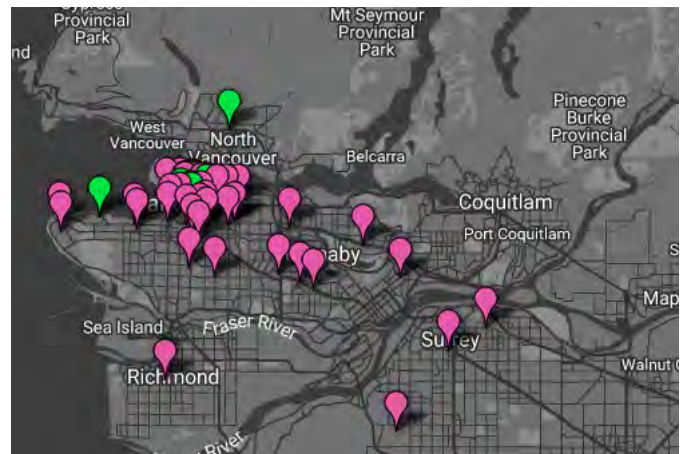
- 88% report their first experience with street harassment before age 17.
- 70% report their first experience before age 15.
- 5% report that it happened before they turned 10.
- Verbal and nonverbal harassment are the most commonly experienced types of harassment, and few women report not experiencing this behavior at all during the past year.
- City spaces, in the street, and on the way to an event were the most common situations in which verbal “cat-calling” behaviors took place.

[Check out the full Hollaback! Cornell Study here!](#)

## MEANS OF REPORTING HARASSMENT

As previously mentioned, the 2017 House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women has identified a secure, confidential and anonymous reporting service as a needed tool in working to end gender based violence. As of the time of writing this report, we have been unable to find any text-based reporting services being used for this purpose that do not require one to download an app, or create an account.

There are several web or smart phone based apps for reporting street harassment. One of the original harassment reporting smart-phone apps, was created by Hollaback! in 2010, and has since gone on to earn distinction as a top safety app for women. Hollaback! allows app-users to share their story in narrative format, and mark the location using their phone's GPS (in cities where there is a local chapter of Hollaback!) A moderator then receives the story and makes it visible on the page for the public to see.



Screenshot of the [harassment mapping feature](#) on the Hollaback! app.



# WHAT WE DID

## Stakeholder Information Session

On May 9th 2018, Good Night Out hosted a stakeholder meeting, to discuss the Creep Off Pilot, and get community feedback on the tool itself, including the questions to be asked and how the pilot was going to be advertised. The full invite list for this meeting is available in the Appendix. Attendees to this information session were also invited to sign up to advertise the pilot project in their circles.

## Promotion & Media

Good Night Out started promoting the tool on the launch date, June 15th. The original Facebook post from the Good Night Out that announced the project was shared 133 times, and had an engagement reach of 13 498. Four weeks into the pilot, Facebook advertisements were purchased for the remainder of the campaign. The following media outlets covered the story. A full list of press coverage is included in the Appendix.

- CBC
- The Georgia Straight
- Global
- Lynda Steel Show
- Vancouver Courier
- Metro News
- CTV

## Project Website

The Good Night Out website was updated to include a [page for Creep Off](#). This page include further details about the project, Frequently Asked Questions, Trouble shooting and post- harassment resources.

## Ambassador Outreach

Good Night Out hired a local feminist graphic designer to finalize graphics for the branding of the project, and create postcard sized flyers and posters for the project. Good Night Out Volunteers were given an honorarium to drop of posters and flyers in their neighbourhoods. Project ambassadors were also used to distribute flyers and promote the pilot at festivals, club nights and at other events during the pilot.

## Ambassadors did outreach at:

- Summer Tings at the Waldorf
- Sunday FunBae - UBC
- Current Feminist Music Festival nighttime programming Friday & Saturday
- Current Education Sessions Sunday
- Bass Coast Music Festival
- Red Room - Shades show
- Diversity Music Festival
- Bass Camp 2018 Music Festival
- Fvded in the Park
- Red Room Shades
- Phoenix 2018
- Electric Love Music Festival
- Pride Premiere
- Vancouver Folk Fest
- Shambhala Music Festival
- Faded in the Park Music Festival





## HOW CREEP OFF WORKED

WelTel is an evidence-based digital health intervention, used in a variety of clinical settings in the province. It was designed by Dr. Richard Lester and Gabby Serafini to address health needs East Africa. It's a web-based platform automatically sending, receiving, and triaging text messages between patients and providers (bidirectional communication). Providers can view all incoming messages on their computers, tablets, or phones and respond to patients with medical advice. Cellphone connectivity and use of short-messaging service (SMS) in East Africa is ubiquitous, allowing outreach workers and clinical staff reach those patients furthest from care.

More recently, it has been adopted into the Canadian context and customizations to the platform have allowed for its expanded use beyond healthcare delivery to address emerging public and population health issues. It was adopted by Vancouver Coastal Health and the BC Centre for Disease Control for their RADAR service during the recent opioid crisis.\* The public can provide information about bad drug sources via text message, which are synthesized into alerts pushed to participants signed up for alerts, optimally reaching community health workers and people who use substances.

The Good Night Out "Creep-Off" project used an automated text message system. The WelTel platform, did allow for real-time moderation of and reports to text message, however as the primary purpose was data collection, and Good Night Out has limited capacity, an automatic system was preferential for the pilot.

Using feedback from the stakeholder meeting, Good Night Out and WelTel revised the text messages that would be sent by data collection tool. The pilot launched on June 15th, 2018. It remained open until August 15th. The final version of the question tree used for the pilot and rationale for each question is on the following page.

\* Bad Dope Alerts. [Available here.](#)



User Sends	System Sends	Rational
Texting the words "Creep Off" sets off the question chain.	<p>This project is for data collection and is not an emergency service. If you need emergency services, call 911 or get to a safe place.</p> <p>Did you witness or experience harassment?</p> <p>Answer W or E</p>	<p>Reminding users that creep off cannot provide real time assistance during harassment or in case of emergency.</p> <p>Collect data on the role of bystanders</p>
<p>W if they are sharing details of something they witnessed</p> <p>E if they are sharing their own experience</p>	<p>Where did the harassment take place? E.g., at a festival, event, venue or location?</p> <p>Be specific but do not send personal / home addresses.</p>	<p>Will allow GNO to analyze:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Where people are using the project effectiveness of advertising / outreach where harassment happened potential trends</li> <li>-Venues / events to reach out to</li> <li>-Reminder to not send home addresses will help prevent privacy violations.</li> </ul>
<p>User shares where the harassment happened by typing in a brief location description.</p> <p>Open-ended, limited character count</p>	<p>What was the nature of the harassment? E.g., sexist, homophobic, racist</p> <p>Answer S, H or R or type the description (people could indicate more than one)</p>	<p>Will allow GNO to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Be aware of type of harassment taking place in the venue / area of the city</li> </ul> <p>Target outreach to venues / events</p>
<p>User shares the nature of the harassment they experienced.</p> <p>Open Ended, limited character count</p>	<p>What is your gender, identity and age?</p>	<p>Will allow GNO to analyze who is using the service</p>
<p>User can send demographic information if they wish (not required). It is an open ended question to allow for self-description of demographics</p>	<p>Thank you for using the Harassment Hotline Service. For more information, including support resources, go to our website <a href="http://goodnightoutvancouver.com/harassment-hotline">goodnightoutvancouver.com/harassment-hotline</a></p> <p>To receive alerts about harassment in Vancouver or event and festival-specific messaging related to a safe night out, type 'Alerts' to 1-888-555-5555</p>	<p>Offers users some support resources related to harassment and bystander intervention, as well as more information about Creep Off.</p> <p>Once signed up to alerts, users will receive texts sent out by GNO reminding them to use the service and other safety tips.</p>



# WHAT CREEP OFF HEARD

This section describes the data collected from the submissions.

After tests and demos were removed, there were 115 submissions to the pilot.

83.5 % of reports were submitted by the target.



16.5 % were submitted by people witnessing the harassment of others.

Men / Masculine people were more likely to report witnessed accounts of harassment than experienced.



(creep off)

## Who submitted to Creep Off:

80% women and femme-identifying

13% men or masculine

4% non-binary or gender non-conforming

3% did not state their gender identity

(creep off)



Most (56%) people submitting reports fell into the 20 -30 years old range.

7% were 19 or younger.

14 years old was the youngest user.

56 years old was the oldest.

(creep off)



# WHAT CREEP OFF HEARD

Harassment of a sexual, sexist or "cat-calling" nature made up the majority of the reports (92%).

2% indicated the harassment was racial.

2% of reports did not specify the nature of the harassment.

The remainder were "other."



The majority (44%) of the incidents submitted to Creep Off took place in the street, a park or public realm.



4% of reports came from outside of lower mainland.

Toronto was the furthest.



14% took place within a business such as a grocery store.

9.5% took place at a music festival.

8% happened on public transit or taxi.

5% of reports were of harassment at work or school.



## PRIVACY

The service has met privacy and security approval for use in research and within health authorities for voluntary data sharing. Privacy concerns when using WelTel as an anonymous reporting service have been considered in accordance with Information [Privacy & Security Acts & Regulations \(FOIPPA\)](#). WelTel partnered with GNO Vancouver to take the RADAR iteration of the platform and use it for a harassment reporting hotline. The primary goal of the hotline was to collect anonymous data related to harassment trends in Greater Vancouver. This influenced the questions asked by the system and the relevancy of WelTel's platform for a community health issue. The kinds of data that can be collected were in accordance with FOIPPA (e.g. no names) and the system and questions used to prompt reporting were adopted to suit these legal specifications.

During the pilot, Good Night Out was contacted by the Privacy Commissioners Office to discuss Creep Off policy about receiving 3rd party reports that contained identifying information. Although all promotion of the project included a reminder to not send personal information about the person making the report or others, it was decided that all reports containing 3rd part disclosures of information would be deleted by the administrator and not used in the final analysis. No reports of this nature were received.

## CONSIDERATIONS & APPLICATIONS

Good Night Out feels that the data generated from Creep Off could be of continued use to antiviolence organizations, in helping plan, implement and evaluate programming. Good Night Out sees value in using the data to identify "Hot spots" of harassment that could be addressed through interventions such as targeted, education, outreach teams, or other neighborhood based safety initiatives. Data could also be of use in cities such as Vancouver that have established indicator around public safety (for example the Women's Equity Strategy has a target of increasing women's sense of safety by at least 10%).

16 % of the reports were from people witnessing harassment, which highlights an opportunity to continue to teach bystander intervention strategies in the community. The majority of witnessed accounts were from men / masculine identifying people, suggesting one demographic to cater this education to.

Although Good Night Out did not monitor the reports in real time, WelTel does have this capacity, and one use that was discussed was to promote the reporting line at an event such as a large music festival , or on university campuses and use it to dispatch outreach teams.



# PROJECT CONTACTS

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## ABOUT GNO

Good Night Out is a local chapter of an international campaign to address gendered and homophobic harassment on nights out, and in public life more generally. Based out of Vancouver British Columbia, Good Night Out is a nonprofit society and federally incorporated not for profit organization. Good Night Out runs a nightlife street team in Vancouver's club district on the weekends, to provide active and engaged bystanders and support the safety of more vulnerable patrons. They have training programs for bars, pubs, music festivals and event promoters,

which helps build capacity to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and violence in their space. They also run an education program that teaches young adults about consent culture and sexual assault prevention.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU: UBC Centre for Engaged Learning for selecting this project and Good Night Out for this grant. Alissa for her grant writing magic! Dr. Richard Lester and Gabby Serafini for sharing WelTel with us, as well as Helen and Cate for support. Wendee Lang for her organizational support in the stakeholder preparation, and pre-launch groundwork. Kyla (Kinskies) for the amazing graphic design. Made In Print for the deal on postcards. The project ambassadors who helped spread the word. Lucy Lau, for always being the one we can trust to share our work with the city.

**Endless thanks to and acknowledgement of the survivors and targets of harassment and violence, whether you share your experiences or not, you are brave, you are strong and we see you.**

Good Night Out carries out this work with the acknowledgement that it takes place on the unceded and occupied traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, and are committed to challenging the colonial systems we as settlers benefit from, that have allowed for a ongoing national crisis of [missing and murdered](#) Indigenous women and girls.

