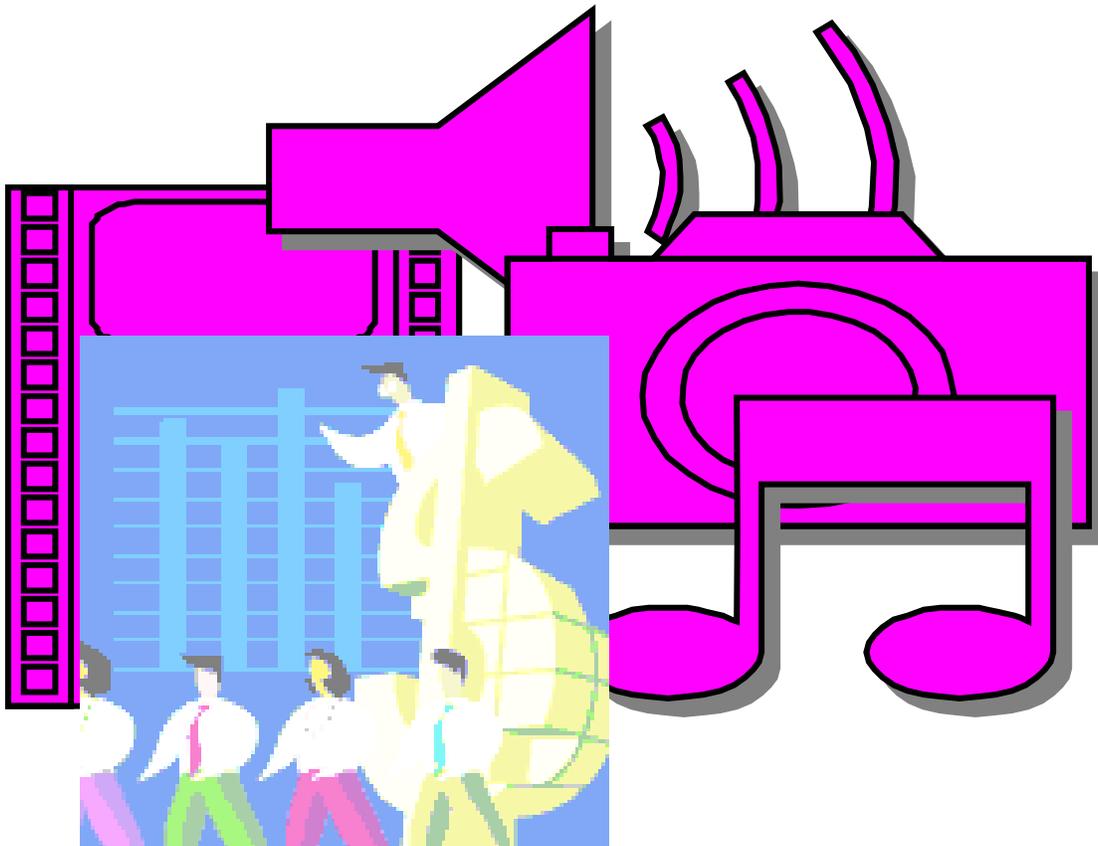


# *Leading the Way:*

## **Strategic Planning Toward Sex Worker Cooperative Development**

January 2008



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**Note: This report includes the Supplementary Rural Report written by Raven R. Bowen and data collection by Christal Capostinsky-BCCEC member-Prince George and Gracie Howse-BCCEC Member (2005-2007)-Kamloops**

## Foreword

In the Vancouver area from the 1920's all the way up until the early 1970's the sex industry enjoyed peaceful and profitable times. The industry for the most part existed in what were called "Supper Clubs" where a gentleman could be entertained with a nice dinner, an escort to keep him company, and a Las Vegas style exotic dance performance. Dancers, escorts, cigarette girls, waitresses, and bartenders all worked together under the same roof. This was a community where everyone worked within their own personal boundaries and (at risk of romanticising the past) in relative safety, within a supporting work environment.

In 1975, after a 5-month long police investigation involving 12 undercover officers collecting evidence by way of electronic eavesdropping<sup>1</sup>, the Penthouse Show Lounge was shut down and the owners, the Filippone brothers; charged with living off of the avails of prostitution for allowing the escorts to come to the club to meet customers. As a result, NO supper club owners in Vancouver were willing to work with escorts anymore. Immediately, the visible street level trade in Vancouver emerged and the first recorded murder of a sex worker in Vancouver took place as a *possibly* unintended consequence of a good intention. However, regulation activities undertaken without a clear understanding of sex industry structure, interdependence and consultation has negative effects on the lives of those most affected: sex industry workers.

In 1985 the federal criminal code law revisions governing sex work had equally disastrous effects as the mortality rates of Vancouver sex workers increased by a staggering 500%. Further, in 1990/91 the City of Vancouver threatened Downtown Eastside Hotel owners with criminal charges and the loss of their business licenses if they continued to allow sex workers to use hotels rooms on an hourly basis. The hourly room rentals provided sex workers with off street location where they could at least wash after entertaining a client. The City of Vancouver applied pressure to the hotel owners and, as a result, owners were no longer willing to facilitate the safety of sex workers and workers were 'discharged' to the back alleys of the city.

This left nowhere for sex workers to meet their clients except for the dark, isolated industrial areas by the Port of Vancouver. The number of sex workers that went missing dramatically increased in that year and three serial murderers/ rapists were arrested for killing and torturing Vancouver sex workers. Once again an attempt at social regulation caused significant harm to Vancouver sex workers and the loss of this relatively safe work environment.

Recently the targeting of Health Enhancement Centers and increased enforcement against Exotic Show Lounges has once again jeopardized the safety of Sex Industry Workers. The need for a community based process through which the sex industry can govern itself and where workers can have collective input into their future and their economic, social and political stability is all the more urgent.

We call to action all sex industry professionals, coworkers, allies and sympathizers. We have an opportunity now during this current charter challenge to ensure that adult voluntary sex industry

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<sup>1</sup> Brock, D. (2003). *Making Normal: social regulation in Canada*. Edited by D. Brock, Nelson Learning Canada INC.

workers fall within the protective potential of Canadian legislation, law enforcement and the community. Perhaps we can work toward the end to the slaughter of sex industry workers in Canada and the end to harmful policies and prohibitions.

## **Acknowledgments**

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**John Weir- BC Federation of Labour**

**Laura Friesan- Granville Island Wood Cooperative**

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**Katrina Pacey-PIVOT Legal Society**

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## Section One: About the British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Communities

The British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Communities (BCCEC) is a consortium of sex worker activists who work to eliminate the oppressive systems and forces that create harm for individuals within the sex industry. We operate under the principle that members commit to creating an environment of inclusion and change.

We support diverse perspectives and experiences except where they contribute to harm of sex workers. The BCCEW does not support enforcement or rehabilitation models that either promote the continued criminalization of sex workers or sex worker dependency on social programs.

### Our Mission

The BCCEC is a mechanism for the voices of experiential individuals to:

- influence legislation and policies that pertain to sex workers to become inclusive of their goals and desires;
- advocate for a continuum of peer driven programs, initiatives and services.

The BCCEC may also serve as a:

- consultative body of expertise on sex work issues;
- Host organization for sex worker workshops, events and initiatives; and
- Research and data collection body.

### Philosophy and Guiding Principles

The BCCEC:

- Supports and promotes experiential leadership;
- Supports development of essential services and a continuum of services for active sex workers through class advocacy, media response and public awareness;
- Creates a supportive network for sex worker activists to have opportunities for leadership and action on issues that impact their lives and the well being of their communities;
- Works to ensure the fundamental recognition of human rights for sex workers including dignity, safety, equality, and empowerment;

#### Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles reflect the collective and longstanding activism of BCCEC members who have worked and will continue to work to eradicate racism, poverty, sexism, and violence by every practical means possible. BCCEC principles are built on our experiential analysis of sex work issues and are intended to advance dialogue and activism within the coalition and within our communities.

We value, embrace and mobilize the authentic experiential knowledge, leadership and skill sets of women in the sex trade as the vehicle towards change;

We work to ensure opportunities for self-advocacy among people in and from the sex trade;

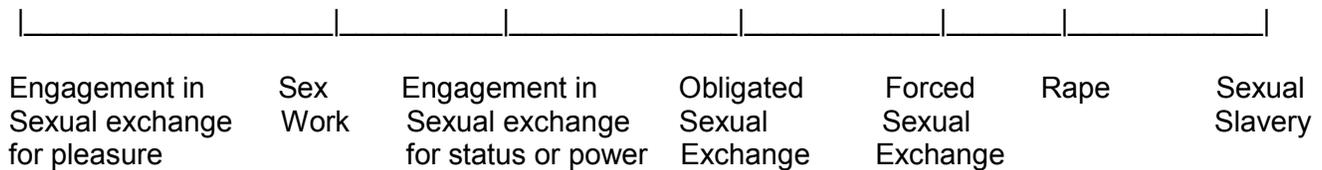
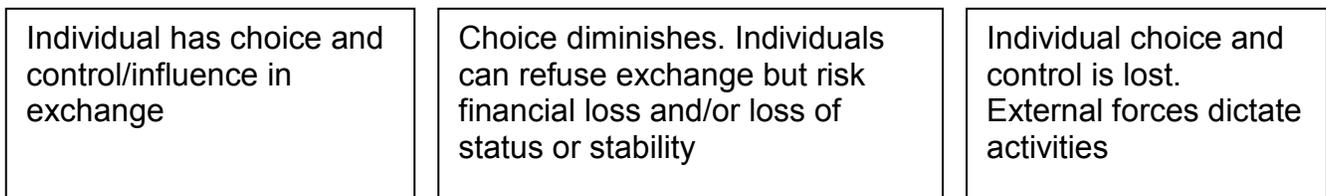
We work to open dialogue for the reduction of harm and the elimination of the social, economic, and political conditions that lead to the survival sex trade, sexual slavery and trafficking in persons;

We provide access to our expertise and our published materials to stakeholders in the BC/Yukon region and beyond!

## Section Two: Continuum of Sexual Politics

The BCCEC has developed the following definitions and Continuum of sexual politics to illustrate the breadth of sexual politics, exchange and exploitation.

- **Sex Work:** Sex work is defined as the exchange of sexual services for remuneration where both parties consent and negotiate the details of the transaction.
- **Survival Sex:** Survival sex is defined as a state in which an individual lacks the opportunity to refuse work. Consequently, a survival sex environment is one that minimizes or eliminates a workers right to refuse work and otherwise imposes emotional or psychological pressure forcing the surrender of will. Free will and choice is subsequently lost.



### **Section Three: Leading the Way: Strategic Planning Toward Sex Worker Cooperative Development Project Rationale**

Eighty-five to ninety percent of the sex industry exists off street in municipally licensed venues, trick pads, the residences of independent workers using 'in-call' operating models, and external locations through 'outcall' models. Off street Escort and Massage Parlours that are sole proprietor or operated by those other than sex industry workers are environments in which various forms of exploitation including labour and human rights violations can and do manifest. Sex industry workers are excluded from management, marketing, price and fee setting, in addition to being discouraged from prioritizing their health and safety, questioning policies or acquiring skills to reduce their risks to violence.

Some agency owners who are exploiting workers operate with impunity and subject workers to an arbitrary system of fines and often humiliate and 'starve' workers who do not abide by their rules. Many workers have noted that they have worked in multiple sex work venues and constantly migrate between indoor venues and outdoor venues according to the availability of work. They also express that the lack of safe work options has greatly contributed to violence against them and increased desperation on their part. Workers have expressed a desire to create alternative working conditions where sex workers own and operate their own businesses. This includes collectively establishing operating policies, codes of conduct, standard minimum health and safety guidelines, marketing strategies, price and service setting and support from the state for a complaints process.

#### **Philosophical Issues**

Historically, sex workers have been the target of moral panics and shame-blame campaigns based on their occupation, identity and presence in public spaces. In efforts to create community safety, those that work in the sex industry have been displaced and socially isolated. Additionally, efforts to secure the rights of women within patriarchal regimes have led to the 'othering' of women that fall outside the ideals of femininity. Abolitionism, similar to other prohibition movements, has caused harm to sex workers and contributed to their continued predation. Extremist views such as abolitionism or pure labour perspectives on sex work firstly are not realistic because they do not respect diversity within the industry and secondly are impractical, in that conditions that would allow either model to be enacted do not exist and finally, they limit individual choice and remove sex work from economic, historical and social contexts. It is time to deal with the reality of people's lives and not argue theory. We desire to increase the capacity of sex industry workers, institute collaborative working environments, educate all involved and create real options for economic security.

The prohibition of sex work as work keeps the industry underground; creates conditions of violence and extortion; and, causes survival sex, forced involvement and the exploitation of youth in addition to social isolation and predation. We reject deficit and victimization models that leave sex workers dependant and disempowered without means to organize and affect change. We believe that sex industry workers have the right to name and define issues in their own lives. For example, define what 'safe' means to them and create environments, policies and working conditions that expand their freedom and recognize their human rights.

Neo-liberal regimes aim to make all of us responsible for our inability to thrive in a market-democracy. This sex worker cooperative is an attempt by sex industry workers to regain control of our destinies: this is also an act of resistance and is aimed to be led by those who are most affected by strategies and policies enacted to protect the 'deserving' and apply sanctions to the 'undeserving'.

The following information provides background as well as brief strategic plans to implement ideas sex workers have prioritized for our cooperative.

### **The First Project: Developing Capacity for Change: Cooperative Development Exploration (2007)**

This project was based on our findings from our previous project *Developing Capacity for Change* in which we collaborated with 20 sex workers involved in on and off street sex work to capture their experiences and explore existing conditions in municipally licensed venues related to:

- \* Fees and Fines;
- \* Marketing;
- \* Working environments;
- \* Services offered;
- \* Decision-making;
- \* Structure;
- \* Security;
- \* Training and Orientation; and,
- \* Safety

Workers decided that a cooperative business structure would serve to eliminate exploitation and support workers collectively making decisions on all business related concerns including the prioritization of their health and safety. Additionally, workers agreed that existing venues should be called on to commit to and be acknowledged for committing to policies that reduce the exploitation of workers and embrace labour law and human rights legislation and practices.

This first project provided some direction as it prioritized the immediate need of off street workers, obtained consensus on a cooperative business model and identified the formation of a trade association as a way to stabilize the sex industry.

### **Second Project: Leading the Way- Strategic Planning Toward Sex Worker Cooperative Development**

This current project engaged with sex workers in rural communities and assessed on and off-street working conditions in these unique environments to expand our collective experience of off street working conditions in British Columbia. Also, Vancouver sex workers were mobilized to become the Cooperative Development Team and establish a Terms of Reference to guide our work, manage decision-making and ensure that activities hold true to our project goals. We engaged directly with sex workers and with identified community stakeholders, legal experts and professionals in the Harm Reduction movement to enhance the capacity of the Development team to:

- learn from 'best practices' in harm reduction;

- develop a strategic/action plan (inclusive of activities related to business plan development, market research, incorporation, federal exemptions, zoning etc.);
- use the strategic plan as a tool to garner further community support for a sex worker cooperative business.

This project is widely supported and reflects the diversity of sex working communities as it includes women, men and trans-individuals as well as those from different 'classes' and varying capacities and abilities. More specifically, sex workers engaged are multi-literate and culturally diverse. First Nations, Asian, Caucasian, Black workers and those of mixed race are currently invested.

This project allowed the BCCEC to:

- Formalize the Cooperative Development Team- Terms of Reference;
- Engage rural members in cooperative development;
- Hire a Cooperative Development Professional to assist in the development of the strategic plan;
- Address elements of the plan with legal and harm reduction experts;
- And explore resources within provincial and federal governments for further cooperative development.

## Section Four: Cooperative Development Team meetings

A series of five meetings were held to explore the formalizing of a sex worker cooperative and the development of a strategic plan that could support the health, safety and stability of sex workers. Focus group methodology was utilized and facilitators as well as participants set ground rules to establish a place of safety, respect and confidentiality for all group members. A conflict management strategy was also devised by members of the groups.

The following are notes from those meetings:

### Meeting One

A group of 8 sex workers were engaged and the previous and upcoming projects explained.

#### 1. Summary of Previous Developing Capacity for Change Project:

Recommendations from previous report:

- Cooperative business where workers own it
- Seek community support to develop coop
- Design operations with sex workers and experts
- Membership
- Feasibility study
- Trade association
- Community development
- Federal and municipal exemptions

#### 2. Summary of Leading the Way Goals:

1. Cooperative development team, terms of reference, code of conduct decision making etc.
2. Regional meetings in Kamloops and Prince George
3. Amnesty- law experts will come in to talk to us
4. Strategic planner re: all aspects of coop
5. Union expert-federation of labour
6. Performance art coop, consulting and community education

#### 3. Confidentiality Agreement- signed and collected by coordinator

Notes:

Overview and umbrella diagram of project displayed. Cooperative business ideas: a safe site, art, education, consulting, catering, publishing companies. Union opportunities for education, labour standards, health and safety training a complaints process are possible. Licensing amendments, a seal and rating system-like Better business bureau are goals of the trade association.

A group of 8 sex workers committed to the strategic planning process and the cooperative development process. It was agreed that the next meeting would be spent understanding and designing terms of reference to guide our work now and in the future.

## Meeting Two

8 people in attendance

Housekeeping- meetings were cut down to 3 hrs. All were in agreement and expressed that 3 hr. meetings were about as long as was productive anyway.

Introduction of contracted coop strategic planner and an overview of areas to explore:

### Why develop a strategic plan?

- A strategic plan helps us define our vision and plan the path to get us there.
- Helps us to reach our destination and identify what the destination is.

For example, the safe work site is a destination. What will be required and how will we obtain our goal?

### What do we want?

- a safe place for sex workers in the east end to work indoors that is cooperatively run and owned by all.
- the safe work site could be a web site or actual bricks and mortar location
- it could also be just a switch board and security checking service for escorts who are independent.
- various sex worker run businesses could be possible

### How will we obtain our goal?

- We must establish our rules of governance and terms of reference
- We must incorporate as a cooperative
- We must find a location
- We must deal with the legal aspects of running a Brothel- amnesty, special exemption.
- We must decide on layout and décor and implement the physical building of the site.
- We must physically build the site, find staff and open the site
- We must design and implement operational policies and figure out how many staff and scheduling.

### Financing

- figure out how to raise the funds(grants etc.)
- explore cost sharing as an option
- how will we set the fees?-based on the cost of running the site and if there were profits the month before.
- profit sharing-we must define what will be done with profits from the safe work site if any.

### Introduction of Laura Friesan- Manager of the Granville Island Wood Cooperative

- their coop is an art gallery which showcases wood products such as furniture and carvings from artisans all over the BC region
- this idea and structure could apply to a sex worker art collective if workers all over the region were to create art and crafts for instance to sell during the Olympics. Workers could send their art to Vancouver on a consignment type basis and it could be marketed and managed by a staff and business here.

- their coop hires by committee and has a director. They don't hire on volunteers or have a membership volunteer program. It creates conflict and allows an unfair advantage to members who may volunteer and sell their own wood products more aggressively than that of other artists who may not be volunteers.
- they have one director to prevent problems caused by micro managing
  - the director is responsible for staff and the board of directors responsible for director.
- they have rules for "suppliers" and these "suppliers" may not be hired to work in the gallery either because of conflict of interest.
- 50% of the price of an art piece goes to the gallery and the other goes back to the artist themselves.
- their membership is made up of other org's or coops so not individuals.
- some issues have been- how to support individual artist's needs and still support the greater coop, having a clear structure and policy in place, defining what the gallery expects of membership and what membership expects of gallery and how to choose art as there is not enough room to support all.
- they have struggled and learned as they went along and sometimes the hard way. they choose art by committee to insure there is no bias about whose art is on display in gallery
- artists have complete control of price but price can also be a determining factor in whether or not a piece of art is marketed through the gallery.
- The development of professional practice policies can lessen the possibility of exploitation of artists.

### **Should owners of sex work venues be allowed to be members?**

- No, this is about community development for sex workers. Business owners will be included in the trade association but really have no place profiting from the actions of the cooperative.

### **We must talk about membership- What are the benefits of membership?**

- being safe- not being killed on the job
- being a part of something- a community
- creating a lasting change- a legacy for the workers who come after us
- not being at the whim of government and funding bodies- we'll be able to fund the things we think are important
- opportunities for capacity building, alternative work to sex work, WCB-when workers are injured and the acquisition of marketable skills that will help all involved enjoy a higher quality of life and a sense of pride in the community we are building

All members must meet criteria laid down by the group, ie. To become a member you must have real, lived experience in the trade.

### **How can a person prove lived experience?**

- produce a copy of a sex work related arrest
- another worker in good standing can vouch for your experience
- an employer could vouch for you
- a customer could also vouch for experience.

These things can be decided as each program within the coop moves forward. The important thing is that all issues and decisions reflect the feelings of the majority of members and not are exclusive of anyone.

### **Decision Making**

There will be a board of directors consisting of at least 3 members and elected by the membership at the AGM every year. This group will have to meet frequently probably weekly at first because of the huge amount of work that will need to be done in the beginnings of our cooperative.

There will be different levels of decision making. Programs and their members will be able to vote on issues affecting their specific directions but issues affecting all programs and the entire coop will be put to a broader vote.

### **Communications**

This will be very important-within the coop between programs and to the outside world. We must have a unified message and all agree on what that is so the communication truly reflects the ideas of the cooperative membership. Program reporting to the board and to the greater cooperative will be very important.

Outside communications must respect the confidentiality of the membership and be inclusive of all voices. We will call them sex worker community press releases. One designated person will bring the message forward (sue is the temporary media liaison) and eventually it would be the best to have a communications staff.

A communications sub committee could work on the message and work with the communications staff in the future to insure the message truly reflects how the sex worker community feels. This group could work together to develop these messages as is required.

### **Policies**

Every policy should include its intention or spirit and the rationale for its development. It should also say what specifically it is, how it was decided and who will have to power to review it.

Coop strategic planner will bring an example of a communications policy to demonstrate what this looks like.

There will be an AGM every year to address financials, board representation and any other business affecting the membership. Board of directors will meet once a month. The Board will e-mail minutes from the meeting and the financials to the membership for review and scrutiny.

Professional practice policies could help to stem the systematic robbery of customers and stabilize condom use making not an option to go without.

An Ombudsman type position or committee could help with grievances or complaints within or against the coop.

### **Meeting wrap up**

Sue will bring copies of pace policy manual hiring, confidentiality, conflict management, and governance policies for review by the group and as a starting point for our policies.

## Meeting Three

8 people in attendance

The BCCEC shared its terms of reference with the group as a starting point for designing their own. The PACE Policy manual was also made available as a reference point.

The meeting began with Coop strategic planner sharing a graphic representation of the structure of strategic plans.

### 1. **Strategic plan chart** (external goals)

- Incorporation/BCCEC
- Legal status for safe site
- Communications policy

#### **Internal goals**

- Decision making, governance, membership- possible to be exclusive membership to sex workers;
- Operational policies;
- Getting financing- donations, scholarship fund
- Transition from BCCEC to Coop by march 2008.

### 2. **Incorporation process:**

- BCCEC not incorporated and we want our work to be incorporated;
- Better to be incorporated-liability is limited; E.G. if business is a store and someone slips and falls or non payment of taxes. If incorporated liability is limited to membership share of \$50. First people in line for a law suit is the Directors;
- Must get insurance, but negligence is not covered; Director's insurance will pay for lawyers' fees. But negligence is a crime. Under the umbrella of the corporation personal assets are protected.
- Members with criminal records or are seen as criminals can still incorporate.
- See attached: Incorporating a Coop doc:
  1. Memorandum of Association- need name, 1 pg doc, purpose of coop, membership share;
  2. Rules re: membership meetings etc must be signed by the Subscribers who are founding members;
  3. List of First Directors-can be the same as Subscribers-
  4. Then there is an official address;
  5. Must register name of coop;

### 3. **Governance Structure like a bow tie:**

- **Membership** elects board of directors of 7 or 9;
- Meet regularity;
- Have skills to do the work- financial management; leaders and coordinators; face and the voice of the coop; advocates, Melanie has list of necessary skills;
- Middle of bow tie is the management/ executive director/ general manager- that is hired to do the work of the org. the day to day work of the cooperative
- Who will the members be- see meeting 2 notes- only individuals or any person who can use the services of the cooperative; an organization is a person under the law

- A **member of the XXX coop** is an individual who has experience first hand experience in the sex industry;
- How will members get admitted to the coop- rules will say that anyone interested in joining has to proved direct experience in the sex industry and says how;
- Coops cannot discriminate against age, race, gender, religion, occupation and political affiliation;
- **Partners or buyers** of sex should be members? Staff can be members or non members; Outsiders can use the services, can be on a committee and can work there; Best practices from housing coops- partners can break up;
- Staff do not have to be members but can use services;
- **Membership Shares:** What are start up costs and are we going to members to get the coop going. Shares on the on time cost and fees are annual costs. Can pay overtime and as long as they are signed up they are full members.
- Some coops place **restrictions** on what members can do; Coop can have restrictions-No unsafe sex will be practiced;
- Need process to join, application etc and directors decide; bring template from BCCEC;
- **Termination of Membership:** board can decide who is terminated and member has a right to appeal. Sue will photocopy the pace policy and the BCCEC code of conduct

Next Time:

- For profit and non profit, pros and cons; Board of Directors and relationship;
- Communications policy and review minutes.
- Next meeting Sept 10<sup>th</sup>

**Summary of goals:** Incorporation- we expect to be incorporated by December 2007;

1. **Legal Status:** Amnesty may be considered or underway by 2009;
2. **Communications Policy:** Media statements will have to be created by the group so that there are no surprises as to what is said on the group's behalf to the press. A spokesperson will have to be selected. This must be done before we incorporate;
3. **Governance structure** to be discussed today;
4. **Policies for operations** of the cooperative will have to be established based on projects, but overall standards will have to be done;
5. **Financing:** Find unique sources that fund NGO's;
6. **Location:** The Drake is being considered for its potential for revenue generating activities and its history in the sex worker movement;
7. **Trade Association:** We will have a Better Business Bureau role and establish a seal of approval for businesses and workers that endorse the code of conduct, human rights and labour standards;
8. Transition from BCCEC to Coop: There are a lot of issues to consider with this. Ultimately, the BCCEC will access non profit funding to provide free community support and services and will eventually morph into the union/labour guild; The XXX coop will include all revenue generating activities;
9. **Constitution:**
  - Name: XXX Coop;
  - Members: any individual with personal experience in the sex industry as a service provider; evidence will be required; dedication to change;

*\*How to establish evidence: In ads, websites, someone vouches; criminal charges, etc.*

**More membership discussion;**

- Purchase one membership share;
- 6 months experience in work or volunteer work;
- Attend at least one coop meeting in BC

**10. Services of Coop to members:**

- For Profit: end of fiscal year Coop decides what to do with money; Dividends provided to members by way of a formula
- Membership fee is refundable;
- Fee is \$25;
- Board of directors: one meeting per month with smaller group meetings of executive board between;

11. **First Directors:** They sign the incorporation documents; a board meeting occurs within 3 months; Annual members are voted in by membership;

12. **Quorum** for Board Decisions is 4 and the board membership capacity is 9 members;

13. **Terminating membership:** Coop Act has stipulations, members in violation of the code of conduct present issues to the membership and a vote must be taken. Issue must go to a vote and can be appealed at the general meeting.

14. Members cannot transfer shares;

15. No non sex workers will be admitted to the Coop Board but can be contracted to provide services for the coop;

Next Meeting: BC Federation of Labour

## Meeting Four

After taking into consideration the huge number of the factors and stakeholders involved in bringing stability to the sex industry, it was decided that further exploration of what it would take to see these ideas to fruition was required. An initial meeting was held between BCCEW/C members and John Weir from the BC Federation of Labour to discuss how best to engage the sex industry and increase sex worker knowledge of union building, it's history and it's benefits.

The meeting wrapped up with John Weir outlining his ideas for presentation to the group as follows;

- history of unions and union building
- risks and benefits of union building
- information on a variety of industry association and trade association models so the group may decide where we must begin and our ultimate goals.

## Engagement of Sex Industry Workers

A group of 8 sex workers and 2 BCCEC members were engaged to formalize the Industry Association Development team. A meeting was held and the BC Federation of Labour Union Development specialist presented to the group.

## **John Weir-BC Federation of Labour Educator**

- Group should decide whether to form our own labor organization or join an existing one;
- Consider working and living conditions for workers;

## **History**

- Labour unions existed as early as 3000 BC
- Consists of people with a common set of interests and contribute collectively to the benefit of all involved;
- People organize around occupation, eg the Silversmiths guild who work together to improve their trade;
- In the 1500's people worked waged labour under the Feudal system. Most were part of a guild;
- They ran cities, farms etc
- They trained others through Apprenticeship-hands on learning;
- Protected Intellectual property: new manufacturing ideas; techniques and skills developed by guild workers; they also set labour rates so that there would be standard minimum rates for products and services; Benevolence: governments did not provide pensions and benefits. Guilds provided resources to elderly, widows, children and provided specialized medical services. Also provided resources for people to travel to find work.

## **What do unions do- A historical perspective**

- Apprenticeship;
- Protect Intellectual Property;
- Set labor rates;
- Benevolent services: care for the elderly; widows, children; medial services
- Travel funds for employees to find other work

## **Organizing Principles**

- Crafts- people sell a product
- Industrial- represents people in an industry;

## **Guilds**

Guilds have split into communities of interest. What do people have in common? One guild was corporate and one was trades. Guilds became the companies of the future and the ones with money lobbied the government to wipe out the guilds that represented the workers. In Britain it was a hanging offence to be part of a union. Workers would organize for collective bargaining and would set the rates for their labour.

\*Workers did not want to compete with each other for wages and not undercut others into poverty.

Employers have historically wanted to de-legitimize unions and they were illegal in the west until 1936 and would deport people. This is the time that labour received legal legitimacy.

## **Unions Today**

Industrial- negotiate standards that are based in equality of all

In Crafts- a base line wage is set for and actor but based on talent there is a rising scale. Not one size fits all solution. But everyone shared pension and meals and standard hours etc.

- Can only bargain with one employer at a time, eg. Escort agencies- would have to negotiate with one agency at a time;
- Must have continuity and members that stay around unlike farm workers because they work for a few months and leave. No membership base;
- What would define community of Interest for workers in the sex industry: decriminalization or safety is prominent issues. Other things can be of interest like retirement, medical. Can have clinics specific to health needs of workers;
- Intellectual property for things written or crafts and items created through the cooperative.

### **Membership**

- Do we want broad based membership organization: or do we want to have a small group?
- If we want to be political we need to have membership;
- Unions are not a legal entity and not incorporated under society's act;

### **Idea**

- Can eventually ask agencies to buy into “standard minimum rules” and then urge them to support workers in RRSP and nest egg for when they leave and safety issues.

### **Guild Organizing**

- Must ask what do people have in common? Some unions have special sub-organizations so that all members are in groups and have things in common.

### **Group Discussion**

Workers in the industry need safety and security. We need to do mapping of what the industry is now and what is needed.

### **The Occupational groups**

- Adult film
- Webcam
- Male hustlers
- Exotic dancers
- Trans-workers
- Urban street
- Rural street
- In call
- Out call
- Massage
- Booking human
- Security personnel
- Drivers

After the mapping process, we need to define what the needs of all groups are and discover what the commonalities are, eg. Safety. Don't want to have to spend time on fights among each other. This will hopefully demonstrate to all stakeholders that there is common ground where we can begin stabilization.

## Sex Industry

Labour Standards

-Stabilize Jobs

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Trade Association Seal of approval could promote workers who do not rob dates and agencies that provide safe places to work and occupational health and safety training. This would allow consumers to distinguish ethical businesses and workers.

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Guilds or Sub Organization for separate industry professionals

### **A Sex Industry Federation of Labour:**

- Is an umbrella organization that has craft unions under each one? For example the BC Federation of labour is organized by sect. Sue says that there should be one over all organization whose purpose is to stabilize and bring our industry together. If there are no businesses, then there are no jobs and no need for craft unions to evolve.
- The Federation can be a place that supports constituents to self-actualize and provides the bridge between different craft unions, each other and business owners.

Unions can get so general that they do not represent the issues of their workers. The Federation may focus on health and safety. Adult film may want to focus on royalties from their films; security guards may have different concerns.

Also may need specialized services for workers medical issues or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Some want to be inclusive of the men who are bartenders, drivers and security. They may have concerns or insights that are common to the industry and relevant to health and safety discussions.

**Branding** of agencies and workers by the Federation with the kiss seal of approval is useful for both buyers and sellers; compliance function.

- Agencies and workers voluntarily comply with the seal and what it stands for;
- What does it mean and what does the seal stand for. What are the standards that all agencies and workers will agree to;
- What are the consequences;
- We must have a system to investigate complaints;
- Monitor establishments that provide space for workers to work;
- then regulate the membership: but members must have certain qualifications and competency;
- Then consumers: if we were to monitor consumers there may be administrative fairness issues. Organizations have a tough enough time monitoring their own members

Check out the WCB as most of the people that are named as independent contractors actually have employment relationships. Check out what the requirements are for independent contractor.

This system of branding seems to have the potential to provide the self policing aspects of our industry association and would not likely exclude many business owners most of whom already subscribe to standards above what we would require for certification. The businesses who do not meet these standards are few and have caused wide spread harm to the industry and it's workers. Establishing which venues are ethical and which are not will be a starting point for protecting long standing safe work spaces from increased enforcement and action by the greater community.

## **Meeting Wrap-up**

The meeting wrapped up with the group agreeing that;

- The meeting wrapped up with the group agreeing that the industry itself must be stabilized first in order to insure jobs are available in the safer indoor venues.
- The group also agreed that the up coming project "Trade Secrets" (occupational health and safety training for sex industry workers and consumers) would be a great way to begin the process.
- It was decided that the Industry Association model with the craft unions or guilds underneath as members would be the best template for the sex industry.

The group discussed how in order to impact the numbers of sex workers forced to work in the dangerous street environment because of a lack of job opportunities in the safer indoor venues, we must work towards stabilizing those indoor job opportunities that still exist and try to create more. An industry Association would be an integral piece to our strategic plan.

The following recommendations/actions were formalized separately in the "Labour on the Margins Report as a way to take the industry association forward.

***Establish a consortium of sex industry stakeholders to develop an Industry Association and negotiate where there are areas of commonality. ie. violence, consumer theft, health and safety, and industry stability.***

***Develop Standardized Health and Safety Training for Sex Industry Workers and consumers in partnership with ALL stakeholders including business owners.***

***Develop and implement a certification process in partnership with all stakeholders to stabilize and promote sex industry businesses (inclusive of independent workers as businesses). Design an industry association seal or brand to distinguish those businesses that support and have received certification for the negotiated health and safety standards and training.***

***Design a complaints process and penalty system in partnership with all stakeholders to provide a system of self governance and enforcement for the sex industry.***

***Support the formation of craft unions or trade guilds for all aspects or jobs within the sex industry.***

***Establish a system of communications between the sex industry and those agencies who have traditionally had the role of policing or monitoring the industry such as the police, license inspectors and social work/ support agencies to prevent misunderstandings about safety issues within the industry.***

## **Meeting Five**

6 people in attendance

The group were presented with the cooperative incorporation documents, a draft copy of the strategic plan and the following terms of reference.

The group reviewed the incorporation documents and coop strategic planner agreed to prepare the final documents for submission to Victoria and formal incorporation. The group reviewed the strategic plan and discussed who would take on different elements of the plan.

### **Legal Amnesty**

The cooperative development coordinator shared suggestions from allies in the legal field in relation to obtaining an amnesty from the federal government.

- The process is the same as the process for making any law. A bill is written and then a member of parliament must bring it forward to the House of Commons. It goes through 3 readings. The first reading occurs when the member brings the bill to the floor of the house and then the second reading takes place 48hrs. later. Then the bill may be sent to committee for further investigation before the third and final reading and passing or failing of the law.
- Unfortunately we will likely be sent to committee but perhaps if we do a really thorough job in a broad based communications plan, we can by pass the committee process all together.
- We will have to engage all stakeholders and levels of government and lobby for support.
- The drafting and finalizing of the bill of amnesty will be a big part of the strategic plan.
- The communications strategy/lobbying campaign will also require a lot of work and planning.

It was agreed that this would have to be a separate piece of the strategic plan

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

The cooperative development coordinator shared the preliminary findings of a BCCEC project and workshop relating to post traumatic stress disorder.

- Awareness around the symptoms of and treatments available for PTSD is limited.
- In order for there to be any kind of meaningful community healing, supports for survivors of the downtown eastside disaster need to have access to therapy and on going treatment.
- The symptoms of PTSD are similar to those found in schizophrenia and many people are being miss diagnosed and sometimes given mind altering drugs that do them more harm then good.
- There are many gaps in service that make accessing treatment difficult for sex industry workers.
- We must design a plan to fill the gaps and raise awareness around these issues.

The group agreed that providing the necessary supports was also a major component of the strategic plan.

The group chose 3 options for the name of the Cooperative;

- BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals
- West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals
- BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Communities.

These three options were submitted in the form of a name request to the BC Ministry of Finance

The group reviewed and adopted a terms of reference for the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry professionals.

## Section Five: Terms of Reference for West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals

*These Terms of Reference were created to ensure future cooperative projects have the agreed upon goals and processes.*

### Terms of Reference (Draft 2007) West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals

#### Vision/ Goals:

- To create labour standards to improve the occupational health, safety and capacities of sex industry professionals as employees and contractors within a legitimized profession.
- To empower and unify sex working communities inclusive of diversities to increase the economic security of adult sex industry workers.
- To provide worker-specific training/ education/empowerment/ capacity building, ownership of skills and leadership in developing policies within the sex industry.
- Nurture community relationships, forge partnerships, identify and engage allies and external expertise in pursuit of Cooperative goals.
- Create a community where all are respected and honoured for their experiences.
- Create enterprises that reflect the dreams and aspirations of diverse groups of sex industry workers.

#### Guiding principles

- Work for the safety and respect of all sex industry workers regardless of their location within the industry;
- Ensure the inclusion of diverse communities, perspectives, capacities and expertise from the sex industry;
- Promote progressive thought, forward thinking and continual positive change for the empowerment and education of sex industry workers and the community at large;
- Keep harm reduction frameworks at the forefront and work toward social justice and social change to increase quality of life in addition to human and labour rights for sex industry workers.
- Pool resources and work together as a community.

#### Membership/composition:

- Members must be active or former sex industry workers, inclusive of: street level, bath houses, massage parlours, ads/ internet, dancers, adult film, off street, phone sex, web cam etc.;

- Must be 19 years and over;
- Must provide proof of work experience in the sex industry through one of the following sources:
  - Criminal charges, 213, 211 or 210; tickets-no go zones, etc.
  - Photos, websites, ad payments, vouched by another worker;
  - Employment history and verify work history;
  - Contracts for adult film, website, phone, escort/ massage licenses etc;
- Members must demonstrate commitment to sex worker community development through community work, (paid or unpaid), for at least 6 months. This work could include but is not limited to;
  - Outreach
  - Support work
  - Taking part in programs
  - Peers participant
  - Moderating on-line forums

### **Code of Conduct**

- Never speak in anger;
- Build positive relationships;
- Think of others and limit disputes;
- Attend meetings ready to work and ready to contribute: alert and present in mind and body. Those on medication or using harm reduction strategies must employ drug management strategies;
- No cross talking and ensure that all have an equal opportunity to speak and contribute;
- Honour everyone's opinion and be inclusive of a range of opinions;
- No hijacking of agenda;
- Be mindful and accepting of diversity and varying capacities: honouring individual members opinions, choices, experiences and knowledge;
- Respect meeting space- from set up to clean up;
- Zero Tolerance to Violence: verbal abuse, physical abuse and threats will lead to revocation of membership in Cooperative and all other BCCEC projects;
- No personal politics, leave outside issues outside and leave the street on the street

### **Confidentiality**

- Events that happen at meetings stay at meetings;
- Project membership and personal identities of members and their contact information must remain confidential;
- Intellectual property and details about projects are not to be shared with outside entities or individuals except when in the form of a communication strategy that has been designed and approved by the members;
- Confidentiality extends even after leaving project and must respect the sex workers rights of movement and the anonymity of those involved;

- Breach of confidentiality will lead to the immediate revocation of membership and exclusion from participation in future Coop and BCCEC initiatives;
- All existing and new members must sign a confidentiality agreement and sign on to the most current Terms of Reference.

### **Decision-Making**

Decisions will be made through a consensus model. All members in good standing are voting members and will enter any of the following 4 responses to issues that are being considered:

1. Agree,
2. Disagree,
3. Disagree but can live with the decision,
4. Disagree and can't live with the decision and will resign my membership (Last resort);

Note: if members choose option four, the issue at hand will be revisited and opened for discussion. Another vote will be posed to the membership.

There are 13 members of the Coop Development Team and a minimum of 7 must vote in group decisions; if this number does not vote the decision is invalid.

### **Conflict Management**

- The complainant should attempt to reconcile differences informally unless it is considered unsafe for the individuals to undertake this first step.
- The complainant shall submit a written complaint to the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals Board of Directors regarding the allegation. Upon receipt of the complaint, a committee of three people including a member and representative from the Board of Directors will engage in a process of investigation. This investigation will include interviewing all individuals affected by the incident and will result in a report to the Board of Directors. The committee will submit a report to the Board of Directors including recommendations for how to proceed on the matter. The Board will make the final decision on the status of the Board/ staff/ volunteer or member.
- If the matter remains unresolved, the Board of Directors will solicit the support of an external mediator and engage in further negotiations or appeal.

### **Meeting Structure-Minutes**

- Agenda and previous meeting minutes circulated via email prior to meetings.
- Action column and recommendations will be read at the following meeting.
- A rotating chair will facilitate meetings or an external facilitator may be hired.
- The BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals recognizes that the meeting procedures and minutes may be available to the public but will refrain from identifying members.

### **Communications/ media**

- All may speak about their own lived experiences but must also respect that our collective position may differ;
- Communications will be very important within the coop, between programs and with the outside world. Position statement will be collectively constructed and delivered by an authorized representative.
- A communications sub committee must be struck to work on messaging and communications.

## Partnerships

- Partnerships with the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals will be determined and approved by the membership;
- Partners must sign and uphold a Memorandum of Agreement which details the partnership and expected outcomes, risks and benefits.

## Section Six: Strategic Plan

The following strategic plan encompasses a number of activities that sex industry workers felt would affect their health, safety and stability as a community. It is hoped that by moving forward with these actions the sex industry will stabilize and the numbers of sex workers forced to work in dangerous environments will be decreased. For those sex workers who are not in the trade by choice, alternative sources of income and meaningful ways to contribute will be collectively explored by cooperative membership.

Note: This plan will be printed separately and used as a tool to advocate for various aspects of the plan

### Part One: Organizing Space

Physical space for sex worker organizing is essential to community and economic development. In Jan. 2007 the VPD organized crime task force began an operation aimed at dismantling gang activity in the lower mainland. This operation included uniformed police officers (sometimes 20 at a time) and licensing inspectors entering exotic show lounges in an effort to maintain high visibility and influence members of organized crime where they congregate.

This hard targeting of sex industry locations serves to displace workers in addition to closing work venues. These events prompted the sex industry community to take action. Four sex worker delegations went to the Vancouver Police Board and begged for these actions to cease. We were told we were viewed by the VPD as a reasonable casualty in the fight against organized crime and that the stability of the sex industry and some of its safest, highest paying jobs were not a priority.

Seventeen show lounges have closed throughout the lower mainland in the last few years including the Drake Show Lounge located on Powell Street in the downtown east side. The exotic dancers at the Drake suffered more than most during these inspections and were among the workers who initially had the courage to come forward and ask for help. The loss of this stable work environment was a blow the sex worker rights movement in Vancouver and left a sense of desperation as the greater community continues to destabilize the industry with total disregard for our safety.

The City of Vancouver has purchased the Drake Hotel and Show Lounge. Vancouver sex workers would like to see this space returned to us as a place for our community to come together and begin to rebuild. This is NOT the planned location for the controversial safe work site. This would be a space for the sex worker community to explore all of the ideas outlined in this plan and to come together in a place that has historical significance. It's time for the public to make room for worker's organizing and for us to reclaim public spaces.

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalize a cohort of sex workers to work on the Expression of Interest letter to the City of Vancouver Housing department.</li> <li>• Engage experts in the requirements of these applications for the sharing of knowledge and building of sex worker community capacity</li> <li>• Stream line the Strategic plan to reflect the use of the space.</li> <li>• Develop a list of stakeholders to approach for support of our occupying the space and our intended uses of the space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Finalize our expression of interest and the planned uses of the space.</li> <li>➤ Engage all community stakeholders and present the plan.</li> <li>➤ Follow up with stake holder groups and request letters of support for our plans.</li> <li>➤ Submit the expression of interest letter, strategic plan and letters of support to City of Vancouver housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex industry workers</li> <li>➤ BCCEC membership</li> <li>➤ Allies with experience and expertise in obtaining properties that are controlled or owned by the government.</li> </ul>

## Part Two: Sex Worker Cooperative

During the Developing Capacity for Change Project, Vancouver sex workers expressed their desire to explore cooperative business models as a way to generate alternative sources of income, increase health and safety, build community capacity and begin to take control of our collective destiny. This cooperative corporation will be a for profit endeavour with its membership guiding all decisions.

For the past six months Vancouver sex workers from the downtown eastside community have been working hard to create a framework for this cooperative and have finalized governance policies, decision making procedures, terms of reference, membership criteria, code of conduct, and conflict management procedures that will reflect what they envision as a community. The cooperative cooperation will enable a number of sex worker community development activities such as:

### The Art Cooperative

Sex work and art have always been intimately related. Most sex workers actively pursue art in the form of poetry, sketching, photography, fashion, painting and of course writing. This aspect of the cooperative has captured the imagination of the sex worker community with plans for the development of a play. Sex workers will engage artists from the greater community to share techniques in a variety of artistic mediums, providing physical space for sex workers to engage in art, finding a way to collectively market sex worker art and ensuring the availability of tools for creating art.

This lighter side of community development has given sex workers hope and will provide positive forms of expression outside of what they are faced with their daily lives. This will also serve to build understanding between the greater community and the sex worker community.

<b>Phase One/Planning</b>	<b>Phase Two/Implementation</b>	<b>Who will do the work?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize cohort of sex workers for arts collective development team</li> <li>➤ Adopt and refine policies for governance, decision making, and project terms of reference, vision and goals to reflect the specific program needs.</li> <li>➤ Identify mediums of art to be supported and explore how these disciplines could be available for use. Example- if a sex worker is a singer/ musician –we could set up a recording/film studio for producing that form of art or it may be as simple as space for people to paint and art supplies to paint with.</li> <li>➤ Engage artists, production experts, and those with experience in organizing and promoting artists as a collective to share knowledge and increase sex worker community capacity to engage in, produce and promote themselves as artists.</li> <li>➤ Develop a business plan inclusive of all identified mediums of art, their creation/production, promotion/sale. This plan should be in depth and describe an actual bricks and mortar space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Present final design for coop arts collective to the board of directors of the BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals for formal addition as a department of the corporation.</li> <li>➤ Secure the tools to engage in all identified mediums of art.</li> <li>➤ Agree on a starting point/ project (the play-supper club) and develop a plan to see it to fruition.</li> <li>➤ Secure funding for the development of this action.</li> <li>➤ Implement the business/ promotional plan for this action.</li> <li>➤ Work towards a public engagement / event to show case the diversity of the sex worker community’s creativity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex workers</li> <li>➤ Artists, experts in the promotion of art, experts in the production of art (live theatre)</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> </ul>

## Publishing Cooperative

Publishing rights and the laws that govern intellectual property are complex. Vancouver sex workers express a general sense of distrust of the system at large when discussing matters of ownership of their writing and other artistic creations. Through engaging experts in the publishing field, sex workers plan to design a sex worker owned and controlled publishing company that will address their concerns and ensure that sex worker publications remain the property of sex workers.

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers to form the cooperative publishing company development team.</li> <li>➤ Adopt and refine the terms of reference and governance structure to reflect the specific needs of the cooperative publishing company.</li> <li>➤ Engage experts in publishing, royalties, and the laws that govern publishing rights for the sharing of knowledge and increasing of sex worker community capacity around this business.</li> <li>➤ Design a business plan for the coop publishing company inclusive of all costs associated with running a business (wages, rent, hydro, book production, etc.).</li> <li>➤ Develop a communication/promotion strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Present final design for coop publishing company to the board of directors of the BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals for formal addition as a department of the corporation.</li> <li>➤ Implement business plan and promotion of the company.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex Workers</li> <li>➤ Allies/Experts from the business and publishing community.</li> <li>➤ BCCEC membership</li> </ul>

## Catering Cooperative

Many organizations have formed catering companies as a way to generate funds. The lack of core financing for Non Profit Societies has long been a barrier to sex worker organizing. Too often sex worker priorities are dismissed as difficult to fund because funding envelopes often are not accessible to emerging populations. It is plan that through all of these business endeavours the sex workers rights movement will be able to fund the actions we feel are a priority.

Also, the operating of this company could provide liveable wages for sex workers. Sex workers exiting the industry expressed that existing supports do not provide and opportunity for them to earn money and they are left with nothing but a resume. The experience of working and the many aspects of running businesses will give sex workers the skills and experience they need to work within the coop and compete for employment outside of the sex industry.

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers to form the coop catering company development team.</li> <li>➤ Adopt and refine terms of reference and governance structure to reflect the specific needs of the coop catering company.</li> <li>➤ Engage experts in running kitchens, restaurants, food safe, accounting, book keeping, proper food storage and preparation and promotion of restaurants for the purpose of sharing knowledge and increasing sex worker community capacity.</li> <li>➤ Examine types of training available to people interested in working in the food and beverage industry and arrange workshops for the members who wish increase their employability and to insure all standards as far as health and safety are met by the coop catering company and it's employees/owners.</li> <li>➤ Develop an in depth business plan for the coop catering company inclusive of rent, hydro, wages, menu, and all other costs associated with running the business and the possible markets or events we could host to increase our business. Ie. Dancers for Cancer, SEXPO, and International End Violence against Sex Workers Day.</li> <li>➤ Examine revenue sources for community economic development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Present final design for coop catering company to the board of directors of the BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals for formal addition as a department of the corporation.</li> <li>➤ Secure funding to open business.</li> <li>➤ Secure a location with an inspected kitchen or renovate to bring location up to code.</li> <li>➤ Implement training programs for members and begin preparing to open to the public</li> <li>➤ Implement communication strategy around the announcement of the opening of our business.</li> <li>➤ Host the opening event and continue from there running the business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex Workers</li> <li>➤ Allies who specialize in restaurants, business, food safe training, accounting, and promotions.</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> </ul>

## Consulting Cooperative

For years sex industry workers have lectured at universities, trained police officers, trained middle and upper management employees from various departments, educated secondary school students, residence in youth detention and acted as consultants to community organization and other private institution on matters related to sex work.

Sex workers desire to develop standardized curricula that incorporate lived experience, research and social theory. Experiential peoples can collectively set rates and customize workshops for various audiences and environments. This element of the cooperative will provide opportunities for industry workers to share information about the industry, share community based research findings and sex industry worker led initiatives without being 'represented' by outsiders.

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers for the development of a coop consulting firm and standardized curriculum for groups identified by sex workers as in need of training about or sensitizing to sex worker issues.</li> <li>➤ Adopt and refine terms of reference and governance structure to reflect the specific needs of the coop consulting firm.</li> <li>➤ Engage experts in the development of curriculum and collaborate with sex industry workers province wide.</li> <li>➤ Develop standardized presentations in various mediums including: Nurses, Women's studies, Sociology and Criminology depts., secondary schools, enforcement, health, politicians, Media And others identified.</li> <li>➤ Design a list of clients/community partners and develop a strategy to promote presentations and curriculum to target audiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Present final design for coop consulting firm to the board of directors of the BC Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals and other stakeholders for testing and peer review;</li> <li>➤ Implement the promotion strategy with potential clients.</li> <li>➤ Facilitate public speaking workshops with coop members who are new to public speaking to increase their skill level and confidence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex workers</li> <li>➤ Experts in curriculum development.</li> <li>➤ Academics</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> </ul>

## Industry Association

During the *Developing Capacity for Change* Project sex workers expressed that an industry association, industry stabilization and occupational health and safety training for sex industry workers would give sex workers the tools to make informed decisions about their work, health and safety.

Labour Standards and occupational health and safety has been accessible to mainstream Canadian Workers for decades, however, sex industry workers have never fully benefited from their labour by way of social and legal protections and support for grievances. Additionally, there is no process for the recognition of work places that are safe and that prioritize the health and safety of workers. The need for a community based process through which the sex industry can govern itself and self-determine and formally organize labour has never been more urgent.

Over the last six months sex workers have engaged union development experts to increase knowledge about union organizing and obtain a historical perspective on this issue. The following plan has emerged:

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers for the Industry Association Development team</li> <li>➤ Re-engage Union Experts to support ongoing information gathering re: benefits and risks of union development;</li> <li>➤ Development a draft plan for structure, vision, purpose, mandate, and implementation of: branding; the complaints process; health and safety training;</li> <li>➤ Peer review plan among Business owners, Sex consumers, Sex industry workers for their endorsement;</li> <li>➤ Develop association seal;</li> <li>➤ Design a communications strategy to promote the authority of the industry association along with list of endorsers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a list of sex industry professionals and business owners etc. who have agreed to the negotiated standards and signed on as members of the industry association.</li> <li>➤ Implement Industry association seal and name so consumers, sex workers and business owners may benefit from their recognition of the minimum standards.</li> <li>➤ Implement complaints process</li> <li>➤ Implement communications strategy so the greater community understand the significance of sex industry stabilization and what the industry association seal represents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex industry workers</li> <li>➤ Sex industry business owners.</li> <li>➤ Sex Industry consumers</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> </ul>

## Safe Work Site

Past and present enforcement strategies have served to displace street level sex work, tell sex workers where they *can't* work and cause violence, abductions and death. Sex workers in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver have expressed their need for a safe place to work. The most fundamental things enjoyed by Canadian workers such as a toilette to use while on shift are not available to the sex workers in the east end. These dehumanizing conditions and disposal of sex workers must end now.

A safe indoor location for Eastside workers is our top priority and this strategy; in combination with other sex worker designed alternative revenue generating initiatives will significantly increase choice and reduce the desperation experienced among worker in this location.

Sex workers call for an indoor venue where the conditions support their safe negotiation of their services, pricing, condom use etc. and will reduce isolation and predatory violence. Sex Workers in the downtown east side are asking for the opportunity to try something new. The BCCEC will organize a formal evaluation and measurement of these and other variable to establish the evidence required to sustain a safe site.

During the Living in Community Project, residents and business owners shared that the sex industry affected their communities in the following ways:

- Garbage- condoms and other garbage present;
- Public violence- every one agrees that the level of violence endured by sex workers is unacceptable;
- Sex in plain view- looking out your window and seeing sex workers and customers 'completing transactions'
- And their children being confronted with sex workers on the street, while out in the community or on the way to school.

Bringing the trade in off the street will address these issues and have far reaching benefits for all affected. This Safe Work Site will be run cooperatively and completely by active workers in this location. A priority will be to find an appropriate location, develop operating principles and codes of conduct with users of the site and enlist public support for Amnesty or a moratorium from the Criminal Code of Canada, or at the very least, an opportunity to operate like any other escort agency. Unlike sole proprietor agencies, the cooperative model will reduce potential for exploitation and the tendency to put profits before people. Our plan for a collaborative mode will ensure that sex workers who use the site make all business related decisions and benefit from the profits of their labour.

The following is a brief sketch developed by sex workers in the DTES:

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize cohort of sex industry workers for the safe work site development team</li> <li>➤ Adopt and refine terms of reference and governance structure to reflect the specific needs of the coop safe work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Present final design for coop safe work site to all national and international stakeholders;</li> <li>➤ Secure lease on site.</li> <li>➤ Oversee construction of the necessary facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex Workers</li> <li>➤ Experts in harm reduction</li> <li>➤ Health professionals</li> <li>➤ Legal professionals</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> <li>➤ Construction/building experts.</li> </ul>

<p>site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engage experts in business planning, design and construction to share knowledge and build sex worker community capacity.</li> <li>➤ Develop a communications strategy to reduce radical feminist extremist propaganda aim to keep sex workers dependant and disempowered in addition to sharing project vision with the community;</li> <li>➤ Develop a business plan inclusive of construction costs, costs of materials, rent, utilities, employee costs and a design for staffing the site.</li> <li>➤ Identify and secure investors and contributors;</li> <li>➤ Site exploration</li> <li>➤ Collaborate with national and international legal experts on issues of amnesty;</li> <li>➤ Engage researchers within and outside of the BCCEC to design evaluation plan for the safe site</li> <li>➤ Develop policies for operation, security, HR etc.</li> <li>➤ Obtain amnesty or support for site a pilot project</li> <li>➤ If the is unsuccessful implement 'plan b'</li> </ul>	<p>and ensure opportunities for sex worker employment in construction;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Secure partnerships for a continuum of supports to be available through the safe work site (health, legal, supplies, laundry, support services etc.)</li> <li>➤ Implement operating policies</li> </ul>	
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### **Amnesty for Safe Work Site**

To obtain amnesty from the criminal code of Canada requires an Act of Parliament through the same procedure as law making. We will be requesting amnesty from section 210 of the Criminal Code of Canada because unlike other venues, we are aware of what the rooms will be used for and we are supporting safe and negotiated transactions between adult sex professionals and consumers.

Sex workers agreed that an amnesty limited to within the walls of the safe work site would be our goal. This limited amnesty could allow the greater community to revoke the amnesty or re-examine the benefits of the safe work site based on empirical evidence through research and evaluation of the site and not reject the idea because of Victorian idealism. ALL relevant stake holders

(including sex workers, residents, enforcement and business owners) will be engaged in the design of the amnesty bill and its limitations.

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers for the “Bill of Amnesty” development team</li> <li>➤ Engage law makers and experts in criminal law to share knowledge and increase sex worker community capacity and knowledge of how laws are made and government works</li> <li>➤ Draft a “Bill of Amnesty” for submission to parliament.</li> <li>➤ Design a communications plan to ensure all stakeholders are included in disseminating the draft bill to ensure all voices and concerns are addressed and the limitations of the amnesty negotiated with all community members including:            VPD            Community Policing            Residents            Business Owners            Diverse Sex workers            Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Politicians            Sex worker support agencies            Religious organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement communications strategy and present strategic plan, draft bill of amnesty to the greater community by way of public forums;</li> <li>➤ Finalize the bill of amnesty ensuring stake holders concerns are recognized</li> <li>➤ Obtain letters of support or signed petition for the finalized bill for amnesty.</li> <li>➤ Submit to parliament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex workers</li> <li>➤ Allies in criminology and law</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> <li>➤ Political allies</li> <li>➤ A broad-based group of residents in Vancouver proper;</li> </ul>

## Communications

In order for sex workers to rally the support necessary to see these actions through, a broad and in depth series of strategic community dialoguing needs to take place. Gaining public support for innovative initiatives can be extremely complicated so sex workers agree that answering questions and explaining our plans are the only way for us to find support within the greater community and

support a greater understanding of the context in which the idea for cooperative businesses within the sex industry came about.

The following is a brief plan to develop capacity among sex workers to engage in public dialogue:

Phase One/Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Work with communications experts already committed to supporting this initiative and sex workers interested in public education;</li> <li>➤ Collaboratively design presentations on the sex worker cooperative inclusive of: the history of sex work; the political context; the coops' vision, purpose and expected outcomes.</li> <li>➤ Develop specific presentation regarding the controversial safe work site and the amnesty needed for it to operate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Contact and arrange presentations among interested community parties.</li> <li>➤ Engage community in public forums and present the strategic plan.</li> <li>➤ Record all comments and concerns</li> <li>➤ Prepare a report detailing all of the concerns, ideas, and support from sex industry stakeholders and the greater community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex workers</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> <li>➤ Allies and experts in health, enforcement, academia, community members, etc. for panel discussions during community engagements.</li> </ul>

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

The BCCEC hosted two Post Traumatic Stress Meetings among sex workers and front line staff July 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 facilitated by a noted Canadian psychologist. The July 26<sup>th</sup> meeting was attended by over 20 front line workers from Vancouver, Richmond and Surrey, inclusive of health and sex worker organizations and experiential professionals working on the front lines. The July 27<sup>th</sup> meeting was intended to be exclusively for experiential professionals and active or former sex workers. There were 12 individuals in attendance. The purpose was to develop skills around the effects of trauma and complex post traumatic stress disorder. The physical and emotional symptoms of being a trauma survivor were shared with the psychologist well as ways supporters and those with lived experience cope with the aftermath. All of the sex workers participated were living with the symptoms of complex post traumatic stress disorder.

Very little research has been done to explore the levels of PTSD or acknowledge PTSD as experienced by sex industry workers. Sex workers expressed that the environments that they work in, especially street level environments are akin to a war zones. Hyper-vigilance, the constant threat of violence, the lack of safety and constant ridicule from citizens in addition to the pressure to make money to survive and surveillance/enforcement all contribute to this 'war zone' definition. The level of PTSD among sex workers is a topic that requires attention and one sex workers have chosen to prioritize as part of the cooperative education initiative.

Phase One/ Planning	Phase Two/Implementation	Who will do the work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formalize a cohort of sex workers to become the PTSD awareness campaign development team.</li> <li>➤ Engage experts in PTSD and provincial victims services to explore next steps and develop a comprehensive plan;</li> <li>➤ Develop a research project to capture and measure prevalence of PTSD</li> <li>➤ Identify and influence current treatments to reduce barriers to sex worker access;</li> <li>➤ Based on findings design an awareness package for support agencies;</li> <li>➤ Develop a list of support services/agencies that will be targeted for the awareness campaign.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement research</li> <li>➤ Use recommendations to launch the awareness campaign</li> <li>➤ Promote the awareness package with all support providers in a broad communication strategy;</li> <li>➤ Implement the actions necessary to fill the gaps in service and remove the barriers that have prevented sex workers from accessing support in the past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sex workers</li> <li>➤ Victim's Services</li> <li>➤ BCCEC members</li> </ul>

## **Section Seven: Leading the Way- Rural Cooperative Development**

Our report, *Developing Capacity for Change: Cooperative Development Exploration* (2007) documented the working conditions experienced by sex workers in urban settings. In the following documents, sex industry workers in two rural settings shared details about their working conditions, participated in a cooperative information workshop and assessed whether cooperative business models will support their collective goals.

### ***Developing Capacity for Change Part II:***

#### ***Rural Supplementary Report***

**Regional Engagement Focus Groups  
Prince George and Kamloops B.C.**

#### **Data Collection by:**

**Christal Capostinsky**  
BCCEC member-Prince George

And

**Gracie Howse**  
BCCEC Member (2005-2007)-Kamloops

#### **Written by:**

**Raven R. Bowen**  
Regional Coordinator  
BCCEC

**December 2007**

## Acknowledgements

The BCCEC would like to thank the 16 sex workers that agreed to participate in cooperative development and an exploration of current working conditions on and off street in rural communities. We recognize that you have taken great risks to come together as a group in a small community and even greater risks in refusing to be viewed as victims. The BCCEC (your fellow active and former sex worker allies) extend our heartfelt thanks to you and your sisters for sharing your thoughts and feelings with us. We live in an unsafe world that has been structured to ensure that certain kinds of people are successful and others are doomed from birth. Sex industry workers are strong and resilient and together we hope to restructure our societies so that we too can influence over our destinies.

We would also like to thank Grace H. and Christal C. for their data collection and unmatched dedication to improving the lives of sex workers and their investment in sex worker projects in their home communities.

Finally, we would like to thank our project funders Van City Community Foundation, for choosing to invest in sex worker driven initiatives that serve to unite our communities, increase collective and experiential leadership, support our goals toward income diversity and income security for sex industry workers, expand our engagement with stakeholders and outside experts; and increase our capacities toward sex worker praxis and our harm reduction goals.

## Note to Readers

This report is supplementary to the *“Developing Capacity for Change: Cooperative Development Exploration Report”* report published March 2007, that focused on working conditions and cooperative development strategies among on and off street sex industry workers in Vancouver BC. Please view this report for further background. This supplementary report provides a rural perspective, engaging sex industry workers from Prince George and Kamloops British Columbia.

## Methods

Sixteen active sex industry workers participated in two workshops; eight workers from each rural city. Focus group methodology was utilized and facilitators as well as participants set ground rules to establish a place of safety, respect and confidentiality for all group members. A conflict management strategy was also devised by members of both groups. This investigation was conducted in keeping with established research principles. The document entitled *“Research Ethics: A Guide for Community Organizations”* Bowen et al. was used to ensure that participants in this process would be protected<sup>2</sup>. Informed consent was obtained as participants were made aware of the purpose of the focus groups, the risks

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<sup>2</sup> This document was created by sex workers and is based on the work and support of Drs. John Lowman, Ted Palys and the Tri Council Policy Statement and is available at [www.bccewc.ca](http://www.bccewc.ca)

and benefits to participation and the publication plans for this report in addition to their right to withdraw their consent at any time. Participants were paid \$40 each after their consent was obtained. All focus groups in both cities took place in November 2007. Nutrition and refreshments were provided.

As part of BCCEC capacity building and knowledge development goals, all project participants took part in a Cooperatives 101 session using information provided to us by a Vancouver-based Cooperatives Development Specialist. The rural focus groups that followed were administered in the same fashion as the original groups among Vancouver-based sex industry workers where an initial focus group was conducted to capture current working conditions off street then a Cooperatives 101 information session followed. Participants were able to apply newly acquired knowledge of cooperatives to their lived experiences and determine whether a change in business structure and a shift in power from owners to workers would affect their current working experiences and in what ways.

In the proceeding report, focus group questions will be presented in italics followed by a summary of group responses along with direct quotes from participants where appropriate. Direct quotes were not censored.

**Please Note:** In order to increase the anonymity of participants from these small communities, comments from respective cities were collapsed allowing respondents to speak with one voice.

## **PART I WORKING CONDITIONS: Responses**

### **Section One: General Questions**

1. *Have you ever worked in an indoor sex work venue?*

1. Thirteen of the sixteen participants worked in indoor venues;
2. Eleven currently also work at street level;

2. *What kind? Massage parlor, escort service, independently at home?*

- All participants worked either at home independently or in clubhouses and escort agencies

3. *If not, what do you think prevented you from being employed in the safer indoor businesses?*

- For those who worked out of their homes, barriers to employment in agencies included the following:
  - Addictions and visible evidence of drug use, e.g. needle marks and scars;
  - Mental and physical health issues;

- Fear or shyness to apply to agencies;
- Not feeling pretty enough;
- For six of the sixteen participants criminal record check requirements for licensing were a barrier;
- No time to explore agencies;
- No start up money for cell phones and clothes.

### Participant Comments:

“I was really nervous when I went into my interview. I had just started using drugs again. Was I too fat, not pretty enough?”

“Oh my god she’s [the Madame] going to recognize me from the streets and she’s not going to want me there. They look down on the people on the streets”.

“The more the madam likes you, the more calls you will get. Good luck in getting regular work if she has something against you”.

### Summary

Overall, workers in these rural settings have had exposure to off street work and have also worked from their homes. For those who had not worked within licensed agencies the barriers to their involvement varied. Most notably rumors of bad management at particular agencies prevented some women from applying and the involvement of Pimps in the lives of workers also prevented their exploration of off street venues.

### Section Two: Structure

1. *How were the licensed venues you have worked in structured? i.e.; who was in control, who sets the rules?*

1. Overwhelmingly a Madam was in charge of off street venues. This individual set the rules for the organization and all workers are answerable to her;
2. Participants shared that in other circumstances a secretary or ‘favorite girl’ was in direct control of day to day operations. Payments were made by workers either directly to the Madam or to her named assistant.

### Participant Comments:

“It’s up to us to bring the money back to her and she watches you like a hawk”

“She sets all the rules, She has total control”

“The madam interviews the women in a private setting”

2. *Who educates or orients the new workers? Does anyone tell them their rights? The law (210,213)? What they are or are not allowed to say or do?*

1. The majority of workers received no training whatsoever, many were left to learn best practices on their own through trial and error;
2. There was no orientation to the legislation for any of the participants in our sample, some were told what to say to police if they were ever approached;
3. A small portion were educated by other workers in the establishment but this was expressed as being a very rare occurrence;
4. Workers also expressed that the goal of the agencies were to make money and they didn't feel that the welfare of workers was prioritized.

#### Participant Comments:

"It's school of hard knocks – you learn by being beat and fined"

"You're basically on your own"

"No one told me my rights or about the laws"

"Sometimes other girls let you know rules & shit"

"it was never really explained, the law I mean – you got in shit for doing or saying the wrong thing"

"What orientation?"

3. *Who set the rates for service and time?*

1. All sixteen participants expressed that the rates were set by their agencies and that they had no input into pricing for services;

#### Summary

The structure, staff orientation and rates within urban off street venues were the domain of the agency owners. No participants in our sample had any opportunity to influence these elements of their work.

#### Section Three: Health and Safety

1. *Were you ever given information about safe sex and safe sex practices? Tricks to put on condoms or how to negotiate condom use?*

1. The majority of participants were encouraged to use condoms and most were supplied with condoms and lubrications;
2. No one in our sample received any training and suggestions around negotiating condom use or what to say or do if customers resisted;

3. Five of the sixteen participants stated that condoms were not provided nor was there any discussions on information about safer sex practices provided by their agency.

#### Participant Comments:

“Fuck no, never!”  
“We were given condoms and told to always use them”  
“I already learned from working the street”

2. *Did you receive any training or advice on how to deal with angry customers or how to de-escalate potentially violent situations?*

- None of the participants in our sample received any de-escalation training;
- Participants stated that all of their dates in off street venues were screened by the agency/Madam prior to their contact with these customers;
- Many participants had never had a violent experience with customers.

3. *Were you informed on how to protect yourself both emotionally and physically as far as your health is concerned?*

- None of the participants in our sample had received any information about how to physically protect themselves.

#### Participant Comments:

“Who would ever say yes to this question...I’ll work with them!”  
“The only thing I was ever really informed of is how much money I would make, and that turned out to be a lie”

4. *Knowing what you know now, what information or support do you think would have been useful in making you safer at work?*

- Responses to this question were varied, some would have benefited from having safe transportations, and others suggesting that video surveillance inside the indoor venues would increase safety.
- Access to counseling and medical services and having another person around was also noted by participants

#### Participant Comments:

“Having it in a place where all the dates have to go”  
“That we were allowed to say no”  
“How to give head without them knowing I’m using a condom.”  
“If they all would have been honest about the rates and my cut, I would have respected them more.”

## Part Four: Security

### 1. Do you have security? In what form?

1. Some respondents felt that they had no security, others stated that having the agency call them periodically (out call) or turning dates in a location where they are seen by others increased their sense of safety.
2. Those that worked out of their homes felt relatively confident.

#### Participant Comments:

*"If you're comparing it to the streets you have more security because the men have to go through someone else before they see you"*  
*"I was still alone when I was with the guy, so no I didn't have security"*  
*"There's security, a phone and other girls right outside the door"*  
*"I feel confident working from my home."*

### 2. Was the security effective when you needed it?

- Most participants said *'no' to this question;*
- *Some indicated that they had not experienced violence from a customer so they deduced that security was effective.*

#### Participant Comments:

*"I guess so because I didn't have any bad dates"*  
*"No – I got the fuck beat out of me"*  
*"Only for minor shit"*  
*"I wouldn't call it security, cuz the cops were never called"*  
*"I haven't needed it since I started working from home"*

### 3. Are you charged for this security when you use it or whether you use it or not?

- The majority of respondents paid for security by way of built in fees or tips.

#### Participant Comments:

*"I tipped the guys"*  
*"It was like a built in charge"*  
*"It's part of the fee"*

## Part Five: Fines

### 1. *What kind of things are workers fined for?*

- In one of the rural cities workers did not experience a system of fines, however, they were subject to high interest charges;
- In the other city workers were fined for being late, being intoxicated, not having hair and make-up done or not providing regular customers with 'extras' or free services.

### 2. *Have you ever been fined for choosing to protect yourself?*

- Most participants answered 'no' to this question with the exception of one that was charged if the customer was unhappy.

### 3. *Have you ever been fined for things outside of you control?*

- Fourteen of the sixteen workers interviewed answered 'no' to this question;
- One respondent was fined because her customer was nervous and left.

### 4. *Where do you think the money from the fines goes?*

- Overwhelmingly, the respondents shared that money from fines would go directly into the pockets of the agency owners. Some were told the money was used to buy supplies.

## Part Six: Agency Fees

### 1. *What kinds of fees are associated with your work day/week? How much are they?*

1. Answers varied in response to this question. Fees paid by workers included agency fees of more than 50% of what workers made per call, room charges, administration, attire, transportation (taxi or drivers) and commissions.

### 2. *Are they the same for everyone, or different?*

- Most respondents indicated that the fees varied by agency and by worker and a minority of our sample were not sure.

## Participant Comments:

"Different agencies have different prices"  
"They have favorites where the rules don't apply for everyone"  
"Every girl pays the same, I think..."

### 3. Do you think the fees are fair or justified?

- Most workers in our sample believed that operating costs were expected but that the fees were not justified.

#### Participant Comments:

*“Definitely not”*

*“Costs are yeah, like the phone and driver and shit, but not the other fees”*

*“That’s why I said, you might as well throw in another 20 bucks and get medical or dental or something”.*

*“That’s what it is like working in this profession...it’s just the way it is”.*

*“The advertising and marketing should not come out of my money”*

*“Fees are never fucking justified.”*

### 4. Where do you think the money goes?

- Participants stated that all moneys go into the agency’s bank account and they didn’t see evidence of their labour in the form of improved facilities or reduced agency fees.

#### Participant Comments:

*“Up their nose”*

*“A business license is not THAT expensive”*

*“Sure the fuck not to renovations”*

*“Definitely not in my pocket” (Laughter)*

*“Her bank account”*

## Part Seven: Shifts/Hours of Work

### 1. How many consecutive days do you work on average?

1. The number of consecutive days worked ranged from 5 to 7 days a week. Some participants were on call 24/7 and were expected to be available for work at any time on any day.

### 2. What are your average daily hours?

- Hours worked per day ranged from 5-24 hours and was determined by the individual for independent off street workers and by the agency for indoor workers. Agency workers had less flexibility and are expected to be available to work from 10-24 hours per day.

3. *Were you ever forced to work on your day off or when you felt you were unable to work?*

- Respondents who worked as independents set their own schedules and were their own bosses. Agency workers had to be available for work at all times as workers would be ostracized for refusing to work.

**Participant Comments:**

“I’m guilty or threatened to be put out of work”  
“I worked up until I had my baby – I had too”  
“If I wasn’t a favorite I wouldn’t get used”  
“Even when I had strep throat”  
“Nobody forced me...I am my own boss”  
“Sometimes it was a long time between calls, so yes, you took what you could get”

**Section Eight: Customers**

1. *How were you encouraged to treat the customers?*

1. All participants stated that they were encouraged to treat customers with respect; firm but kind. They noted that their job was to make customers happy and to be polite to avoid complaints.

2. *Did you receive any training or advice on how to negotiate with the customers?*

- No participants in our sample were provided with negotiation skills or de-escalation training.

3. *If the customer refused to pay or wanted something more than what was agreed upon, could you safely stand up for yourself?*

- Respondents that currently work for themselves could negotiate terms in relative safety and deal with aggressive customers. Others that worked in agencies stated that customers were respectful at times, especially those that wanted to continue to access the services of the agency, but drunk or high customers were more challenging to deal with.

**Participant Comments:**

“For the most part, I think that the men were respectful because they went through an agency”  
“No – not with the violent customer”  
“Not if they are drunk or high”

4. *Were you ever blamed for the actions or inactions of the customer? I.e. - if the customer was unable to reach orgasm, were you still paid?*

- Responses to this question varied. Some participants were never blamed for customer dissatisfaction and others had the opposite experience, expressing that not only were they blamed but they were also fined.

#### Participant Comments:

“Yeah – especially when the client would lie and say I told him he could have this and that, when it was never agreed to”.  
“There were times I know the customer was happy. But I was fined by the owner who was lying and said my client was dissatisfied”.  
“I was given shit and fined and other times when the client was blamed. It depended on how the management was feeling”.

#### Section Nine: Licensing

1. *Do you have a license? How did you get it? How much was it?*

1. No members of our sample of rural sex industry workers held independent escort licenses. They worked on and off street and within agencies and via personal ads without licenses.

2. *Do you agree with the municipal licensing of our industry?*

- Participants had mixed responses to this question. Some supported the idea of licensing by municipalities; others felt that the industry should be regulated by a body chosen by sex industry workers. The majority of respondents felt that the city should not be involved in regulating licensing or the sex industry as a whole.

#### Participant Responses:

“No, not until they decriminalize or consider legalizing prostitution”  
“The city ain’t my pimp”  
“It all depends on whether the city would allow us to be legitimate.”  
“Fuck that, it’s my pussy”  
“Yes it needs to be controlled to some extent”

- Respondents indicated that they would like see a reduction in agency fees which would increase their take home pay. Additionally they would like to see women running escort agencies, an end to fines and the implementation of incentives and bonuses.

## Participant Responses :

“All the street sex work be moved inside where it is safe”  
“More respect from within the agency”  
“Good and decent owners”  
“Madams who really care”  
“More social functions”  
“No fines and Lower company fees”

## Section Ten: Environment

### 1. *What elements would make sex work safer? On or off street? (Security, other workers, physical environment?)*

1. Focus group participants from both cities listed a range of ideas to make sex work safer.

## Participant Responses:

11. Partnering up
12. Spotters
13. Phones
14. Traveling to calls in pairs
15. 24 hour safety phone line
16. More support for sex workers
17. Safe injection sites
18. In door places, that are clean, safe and warm
19. Real security
20. Legitimizing prostitution as real work and professions
21. Community and city support

1. More awareness
2. Better screening of the men
3. Better lighting
4. Red light districts but only if the cops leave you alone and it is in a safe area
5. More camaraderie among the girls and women
6. Girls watching out for each other
7. Fair payment for services
8. No more street prostitution.
9. Brothels
10. Drug free working girls

### 2. *Describe the best working environment you have ever experienced.*

- Most participants described their best working environment to be one in which they worked indoors; worked with others; kept the money they made and felt in control of their jobs and their lives. Others in our sample indicated that their involvement in the sex industry is forced due to a drug addiction.

## Participant Responses:

“When I worked through the paper and had my own place”  
“When I had someone else with me in the room”  
“When I got to keep all of my money”  
“Body Rub – I didn’t have to suck or fuck a client, and I got paid for it”  
“Before my addiction, I worked for a few madams, they were better than the street”  
“Having my own place and someone protecting me”  
“Working indoors because it just felt safer”  
“What I do now is okay...I work from my home”  
“When I had a real job and didn’t have to have sex to pay the rent, of course I didn’t have an addiction then either”

### 3. Describe the worst working environment.

- Participants shared that street level work was the worst working environments due to the treatment they received from the community. Those working off street in licensed and unlicensed venues shared instances of working for people that would not allow them to leave.

## Participant Responses:

- The street because you never know when your going to have a bad date and get “dicked” around
- People throwing eggs and judging you.
- Having to work when its light out and kids are driving by staring at you
- Penny throwing and liquids
- Not having security or protection
- Being high and working outdoors

- *Having someone tell you who to date and knowing that you don't feel safe doing it.*
- Stuck in XXX City for two weeks at a time, without being able to leave
- Working for fucking Chinese in a basement
- Outdoors in the winter with no hotel
- Having to work with my kids in the house”

### 4. Do you think there should be a complaints process for workers to report dangerous businesses and work environments? What could cities do to help?

- Respondents felt that a complaints process would be helpful providing that there is follow up on complaints and that sex industry work is treated like any other profession. Some were not hopeful that a process to protect them would ever come to fruition.

## Participant Responses:

“Yes because the cops don’t listen to you, they don’t care. You are the underdog. They don’t take you seriously”  
 “Yes Just like any other professions there is a process, why should we be any different”  
 “Only if there is follow up...and not follow-up that involves the cops [RCMP]”  
 “Cities could stop arresting us and blaming us for trying to make a living”  
 “You’re going to work wherever the money is so a [violent] date line would be nice”  
 “I think that it is important to have a complaints process but not many people report, we just tell each other”  
 “No – the city should stay out of it”  
 “Sure, if the cops [RCMP] are willing to follow-up and fine the agencies”

## Section Eleven: Marketing

### 1. *How do you market yourself?*

1. Participants in our sample that worked off street utilized news papers, bulletins and online resources to market themselves, in addition to word of mouth.

### 2. *Have you ever run an ad and worked via telephone at home entertaining clients?*

1. Fourteen of the sixteen participants have run ads and worked from home.

## Section Twelve: Future

### 1. How can workers gain more control over all of the above areas of concern?

1. Participants listed a number of diverse strategies to gain control over their working conditions.

### Participant Responses:

- *Work where the conditions are best*
- *Getting involved in sex worker organizations*
- *Go with your gut*
- *Come together and talk about it*
- *Support each other*
- *Open a sex worker treatment center*
- *Work more together*
- *Stay clean and sober*

- *Make sure you feel safe when working*
- *Making your voice heard*
- *I haven’t really thought about it*
- *Use the Coalition*
- *Do more research*
- *Open a brothel*
- *Form allies with indoor and outdoor workers*
- *Tell one another about the shitty agencies, the rip-offs*

2. *How can we support businesses that DO provide safe, healthy work spaces and stable incomes for workers?*
  1. Participants felt that good work places should be accessed more by workers and word of mouth can be used to tell other workers about safer places to work.
3. *Are there any concerns you have that weren't included in the questions above?*
  1. No one had any additional comments.

## PART TWO COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT: FINDINGS

Participants were provided with a Coops 101 workshop that shared the history of cooperatives, structure, purpose, benefits and risks. Participants also explored examples of cooperative businesses e.g. food coops and homecare coops and were asked to apply their newly acquired knowledge of cooperative principles to sex industry business. Below are their thoughts about whether and how the cooperative business structure would affect working conditions and workers in the sex industry.

1. *Do you know what a coop business is?*
2. Participants responded positively to having basic knowledge.

### Participant Responses:

"It sounds too good too be true"

2. *How do you think coop business models could support your health and safety?*
  1. Participants noted that they had no experience working within cooperative business structures. Many stated that it would be great to work as a team with equality and in an environment that they create for themselves. Also, some participants identified that the 'product' marketed within the coop could be anything that they chose.

### Participant Responses:

- I would be invested in something that would support me I would be a part of something ~ an equal partner
- I could be a part of setting the rules around safety
- We could work safe for the first time
- No agency fees and shit, yeah it's a good thing
- Could treatment be involved?

- *I've never worked in a coop so I don't know how it would support me*
- *Maybe they would give me more of a voice*
- We would have control, not pimps or men
- I like the idea of some sort of security
- *Maybe it would give us an opportunity to make money without being a sex worker*

3. *How do you think coop business models could support sex workers in building their own future?*

- Participants stated that a cooperative model could increase safety among workers and expand their opportunities to earn money outside of traditional sex industry work. They noted that a cooperative would increase their income security and choices to either continue engaging in sex industry work collectively managed by sex workers or come together to do other kinds of work.

**Participant Responses:**

“You are investing in something and yourself”  
“Get me off the streets”  
“Make it safer for me”  
“It would help us exit”  
“I could have two businesses going, hoing and baking...eventually it would just be baking”  
“We would make decisions that would support our lifestyle”  
“I’d feel damn good about myself”  
“Maybe I could buy a condo if I could keep working and have a legitimate job doing what I want”

4. *How do you think coop business models could support community development for sex workers?*

- Participants indicated that working collectively with a unified voice would develop sex working communities and increase their credibility in the eyes of the public through a safety in numbers concept. Some felt that issues and concerns of sex workers would be taken more seriously.

**Participant Responses:**

“Create more awareness around issues on sex work”  
“One sex worker puts an opinion in the paper and it doesn’t matter because it’s the only one person. If you are backed by a coop then more people will listen because there is a group of you”  
“We could be seen as regular citizens of society”  
“We would have more productive opportunities”  
“People might take us seriously then”  
“I don’t know, all this coop stuff seems confusing and I’m just trying to survive”  
“If there managed properly, then the community might start respecting prostitution”  
“What if everyone opens one then?”

5. *Does a co-op of sex workers who manage their own work space, where they share expenses and define what safe work means interest you?*

- An overwhelming number of participants were supportive of a cooperative work space. A few had concerns about if their involvement in a cooperative work space would support their drug use or help them get off drugs. Other concerns included how expenses would be shared among workers.

### Participant Responses:

“Wow”  
 “Yes everyone has an equal investment”  
 “We would really have to define sharing expenses”  
 “Could I still be involved if I have a drug addiction?”  
 “Everyone is like partners”  
 “I don’t know enough yet”  
 “How would it help me get off drugs?”  
 “Sure, why not!”

### 6. *What other sex worker community development activities could be supported by coop business models?*

- Participants noted that there are no sex worker community development activities going on in their home communities and listed a number of business ideas primarily centered around housing, fundraising and business initiatives beyond sex industry work.

### Participant Responses:

- We don’t have sex worker community development activities
- I would like to see more safe houses in town
- Second stage housing for sex workers that is coop
- Brothels
- Any kind of fundraising initiatives
- Music
- Bakery

- Hair dressing salon
- Maybe a treatment program that involves working at the coop
- Supporting each other in things like housing
- ...running a business program for some of us that don’t know the ropes
- Seamstress services
- Publish poetry or books about our experiences

### 7. *Would you be willing to help start and manage a sex worker co-op?*

- Most focus group participants were willing to start and manage a cooperative within their communities but noted that they wanted to learn more about coops and start the process slowly and with support. Two of

the sixteen members of the focus groups were not interested in participating.

#### Participant Responses:

“I want to learn more first”  
“Yeah if it helps us out in smaller towns”  
“I would need help”  
“I wouldn’t want to just jump into it”  
“Yes I would try it out”

#### 8. *What questions or concerns do you have about how a co-op could benefit you as a member?*

- Participants wanted to know how much of their earned income they would keep; how much support would be provided; benefits to street level workers, micro lending and incentives.

#### Participant Responses:

- How much money would I make?
- How would I be supported?
- Does it benefit street level sex workers? How?
- How could it help my addiction or support me in my recovery?
- If I were to become a seamstress, where would I get the loan, a bank won’t give it to me?

- What benefits could you give me that would make me want to be in a coop?
- How are fees regulated and who really sets the price
- What about us workers here in [XXX] City, would we have to move?
- All these new projects always seem to happen in the cities
- Could it eventually have a school program?

#### 9. *What questions or concerns do you have about co-ops generally?*

- Participants were concerned about commitment requirements within the coop; if they could leave if they chose; how to start working on a coop and if there were any legal or other barriers.

#### Participant Responses:

- Am I locked in?
- [Need to] know more about liabilities and legal repercussions
- What are the fees like?
- How do I start one?
- How much work is involved in it?
- If it is legit, what about taxes?

- Can I leave a coop at any given time?
- [Need to] know more about it in general
- What are the commitments?
- If there is a bad date, can he be charged without me being charged?
- Could one happen in [XXX] city?
- Would straight folk be involved?

## PART THREE      RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The idea of cooperative development among sex industry workers is a new concept for most workers. Within indoor venues, workers indicated that a ‘madam’ or other sole proprietors exclusively managed all aspects of off street sex industry work including: price setting, working environments, operating principles, marketing, fees and penalties. Sex industry workers, similar to findings in Vancouver B.C., did not benefit from the profits made collectively in off street venues and in rural communities workers experienced increased agency fees and fines. Project participants shared that profits made were ‘pocketed’ by agency owners and very little structural improvements to working venues did not occur, nor did any reduction in agency fees take place even as profit margins were ever expanding for agency owners.

It is clear from our consultation that rural sex workers require more information about cooperative development and support with implementation. We were pleased to see that sex workers understood cooperative models to mean that they can collectively choose products or services that they wish to market and work in collaboration with others to design and implement a business within or outside of sex industry work. Micro lending was a topic that came up for project participants as they explored whether revenue/ profits from a collective business venture could be accessed by individual members of a cooperative to launch other businesses.

### Next Steps for the BCCEC in rural communities will include:

- Support BCCEC members in rural home communities to inspire and motivate active sex industry workers toward expanding and diversifying revenue streams; developing a continuum of judgment-free programs and services to support the transitioning of workers in survival environments out of the sex industry; and advocate and create sex worker run working environments. Service expansions include advocating for diverse and individualized recovery and treatment options for alcohol and drug dependent workers; ensuring that affordable, non stigmatized housing options are attached to any and all emerging support initiatives; advocating for the safety and respect of sex industry workers who remain in the industry; exploring alternative options for income security based on the unique skills and in the dynamic lived experiences of sex industry workers;
- Complete phase two of cooperative development project entitled: ***Leading the Way: Strategic Planning Toward Sex Worker Cooperative Development***;
- Utilize strategic plan developed within the above project to educate and advocate within urban and rural communities more broadly to dispel myths about sex worker cooperative development and collectively resist radical feminist extremist strategies to deny sex workers agency; eliminate opportunities for community development; undermine collective efforts toward income security; reduce choice and politically sabotage sex worker freedom of association and rights to self determine;

- Access and share resources and stakeholder expertise garnered within Vancouver cooperative development project in attending and supporting cooperative development among rural workers.

## Section Eight: Incorporation

Vancouver sex workers have incorporated as the ***West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals***, the first sex worker cooperative in the Western world in 2008. Below is an excerpt of our memorandum.

### COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION ACT

#### Memorandum of Association

#### WEST COAST COOPERATIVE OF SEX INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

1. The name of the association is **West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals**.
2. The purpose of the association is to provide a means for its members to come together to develop their individual abilities and their capacities as leaders; to create meaningful change facilitating the economic growth, safety and stabilization of the sex worker community in British Columbia; and to utilize community development and other support to nurture ideas and initiatives.
3. The authorized share capital shall consist of an unlimited number of membership shares with a par value of twenty dollars (\$20.00) and an unlimited number of Class A preferred investment shares with no par value.
4. The liability of a member is limited in accordance with the Cooperative Association Act.

We, the persons whose names and addresses are listed below, desire to be formed into an incorporated association under the *Cooperative Association Act*, and by our signatures subscribe to the number and class of shares set opposite our respective names.

## Section Nine: Recommendations/ Next Steps

### Local

Here in Vancouver the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities and the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals are working together to move forward on various elements of the strategic plan.

The project to design the occupational health and safety guidelines and training is already underway with support from our health department. The City of Vancouver Business Licensing Office has expressed interest in distributing the guide book “Trade Secrets: Occupational Health and Safety Guides for Sex Industry Professionals” with applications for escort licenses, etc.

The *History of Sex Work* Project is at a business planning stage and all the reviews have been positive. The project is made up of a multi-media museum installation, scrap book and book created by and owned by the sex workers who took part in the project. Plans to further develop this project will fall under the Arts Collective Cooperative and will be part of a larger plan to market sex worker art.

Preliminary plans for a play in the historical supper club style would support both the catering cooperative and the arts cooperative. Development funding for these activities will be explored. Ultimately sex workers expressed that the Olympics would be an excellent opportunity to market sex worker art and would like to be ready with the play, a historical walking tour, dinner and a show(catering), and souvenirs for visitors to purchase.

Our Member of Parliament has agreed to work on the draft design for the bill of amnesty in partnership with sex workers and legal experts. This draft will be used as a starting point for the community dialoguing.

Community support for these actions is strong and we feel confident that the city will allow us to occupy a venue as an organizing space for our newly formed cooperative. We plan to share this report with stakeholders and discuss the tenets of all project ideas within the strategic plan with allies, including issues around the safe site.

### Regional/ Rural

The findings in the regional engagements clearly demonstrate the repeating problems and issues facing sex workers throughout the entire region. Sex workers are interested in exploring these ideas within their own communities and having control over their lives.

Every single little community in Canada has By-laws to govern the sex industry and these laws vary from place to place. Cooperative business designs allow each collective of sex workers to decide what they need the most and design actions specific to their needs on a

local level. The BCCEC will share this strategic plan with others to mobilize and stabilize sex workers on a local level.

The project to design the occupational health and safety training and guidelines will include guides for working in rural locations based upon the best practices and expert experience of rural workers. The BCCEC members who live in rural areas will lead this process.

The BCCEC and the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals plan to undertake a formal regional membership drive with a focus on inviting sex industry workers from unrepresented locations and under-represented niches within the industry.

## Section Ten: Resources and Works Referenced

The document entitled “*Research Ethics: A Guide for Community Organizations*”, Bowen et al, was created by sex workers and is based on the work and support of Drs. John Lowman and Palys and the Tri Council Policy Statement and is available at [www.bccewc.ca](http://www.bccewc.ca)

The *Living in Community Report/Action Plan* can be downloaded at [www.livingincommunity.ca](http://www.livingincommunity.ca) and was written by Lisa Gibson and Tiah Goldstein in partnership with community stakeholders.

The *Developing Capacity for Change Report* was written by Susan Davis and Raven Bowen in partnership with sex workers. The full report can be seen at [www.bccewc.ca](http://www.bccewc.ca) .

The *Labour on the Margins Report* was written by Susan Davis and Raven Bowen in partnership with sex workers. The full report can be seen at [www.bccewc.ca](http://www.bccewc.ca)

Also check out our blog at: [www.bccec.wordpress.com](http://www.bccec.wordpress.com)



B.C. Coalition of Experiential Women

## Section Eleven: Graphic representation of Strategic Plan

**Sex Industry Standards, Health, Safety and Stability**  
with focus on decreasing the impacts of de stabilization on the most vulnerable sex workers at  
the street level and  
**with the ultimate goal of ending the survival sex trade.**



### *Localized Stabilization* *West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals*

In municipalities all over Canada the sex industry has been regulated in many different and complicated ways. Cooperative Business Models Provide an opportunity for small communities of sex industry workers to identify what they need most on a localized level.

Vancouver sex workers expressed their desire to explore cooperative business models as a way to generate alternative sources of income, engage in art, increase our health and safety, build community capacity, and begin to take control of our collective destiny.

For the past six months Vancouver sex industry workers have come together and created a framework for this cooperative and have finalized and formalized governance policies, decision making procedures, terms of reference, membership criteria, code of conduct, and conflict management procedures that will reflect what they envision as a community.

The West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals was formally incorporated on February 5, 2008 and is the first sex worker cooperative in Canada.

### *Regional/National Stabilization* *Sex Industry Association*

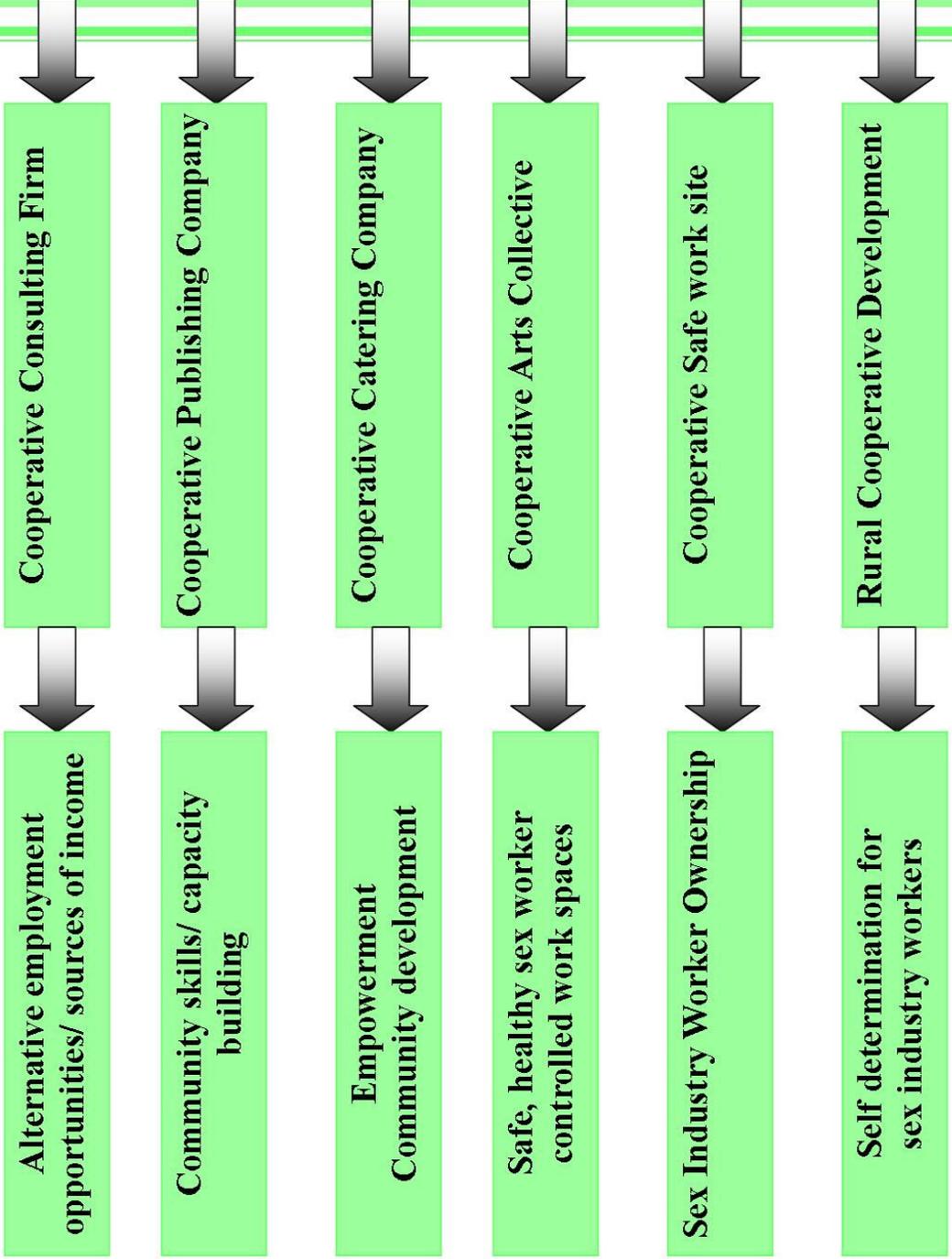
The lack of Industry wide health, safety and labor standards and the desperate need for a community based complaints process has lead to the exploitation and harm of many sex industry workers. Also, safe work environments are seldom recognized as such and are often lumped in together with less honorable business owners under targeted blanket enforcement actions.

These actions taken by the greater community have historically caused wide spread harm and it's clear that these decisions were made without clear understanding of the broader impacts they may have. This lack of respect for the knowledge and experience of the people most affected, sex industry workers, has had disastrous results for Canadian sex industry workers.

Vancouver Sex Industry workers have designed a plan to implement occupational health and safety training, a complaints process, a system of branding or certification and to form a national industry association to stabilize our health and safety and to ensure we have safe places to work.

Sex Industry Workers in Vancouver have also recently made history with a first of it's kind sex industry stakeholders meeting including workers from the adult film industry, exotic dancers, escorts, massage, web cam workers, street level workers, male, trans gendered, female, white, black, and business owners all at one table.

**Localized Stabilization**  
*West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals*



**Regional/ National Stabilization**  
***Sex Industry Association***

