

# Taking Action: Canadian Sex Worker Organizing

A Report prepared for





**Author:** J. Clamen  
**Editor:** Chris Bruckert  
**Images Courtesy of:** Stella; Sex Professionals of Canada; Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers; W.H.O.R.E.  
**Report designed by:** Glenn Crawford - [www.jackofalltradesdesign.com](http://www.jackofalltradesdesign.com)

*Thank you to the sex worker groups who took the time to fill out the questionnaire that informed this report and attached chart.*

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**POWER** (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau, Work, Educate and Resist)  
POWERottawa@gmail.com  
(613) 482-4133 · [www.powerottawa.ca](http://www.powerottawa.ca)  
[www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=25239492838](https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=25239492838)

# Taking Action: Canadian Sex Worker Organizing

A Report prepared for POWER (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau, Work, Educate and Resist)

The following report is intended as an overview of sex worker organizing for members of POWER in order to guide POWER in its mandate and future actions. It outlines the types of actions that sex workers across Canada have undertaken in order to address their most pressing concerns as they fight for sex workers' human and labour rights. While it is not exhaustive, it attempts to give sex worker activists an overview of different ways to respond to human and labour rights violations, discrimination, and stigma. It is also to be made available to other sex workers seeking inspiration from the scope of initiatives undertaken by sex workers and groups across Canada.



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## **PART ONE:**

### **Canadian Sex Worker Groups**

The sex worker rights movement is comprised of service-providing associations, advocacy groups, state-mandated agencies, autonomous collectives, and dozens of other possible configurations. Because sex workers' organizing is so varied, the movement itself intervenes at different levels, including health, citizenship, work conditions, safety, human rights, and other pressing issues. Action strategies include: combating HIV/AIDS; violence prevention; the redefinition of sexuality; providing referrals and peer-support services; and political lobbying. This diversity addresses a wide range of sex workers' priorities. In addition to creating a community where sex workers can address these issues, the presence of both grassroots and funded sex worker organizations has publicized sex workers' challenges and facilitated education and community building.

For the purposes of this report, "sex worker group" is defined as a collective that is made up of current or former sex workers whose mission is dedicated solely towards sex workers. It does not speak to the political mandate or beliefs of the organization, nor does it suggest that their use of the term sex worker necessarily means they are part of the sex worker rights or decriminalization movements. There may be groups that are distinctly abolitionist in philosophy, but whose services are geared towards sex workers. This list does not include other service organizations that provide services to sex workers, as part of their mandate.

*NB: Mission statements have been copied directly from organization websites.*

The following is a list of sex worker groups across Canada.

## **NATIONAL**

Canadian National Coalition of Experiential Women (CNCEW)

<http://www.cncew.ca/>

A group of women committed to the advancement of equality and human rights of sex workers, and to the improvement of their living conditions. They support diversity in experiences and do not promote harm to any women in sex work.

They facilitate the involvement of women in and from sex work on issues of direct impact. They are working to provide opportunities for women to communicate their ideas directly to legislators, policy makers, and the public towards the improvement of living and working conditions and to combat conditions of violence, abuse, exploitation, slavery and coercion related to sex work.

North American Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)

<http://www.nswp.org/>

In 1991 an informal alliance of sex workers and organizations that provide services to sex workers formed as the Network of Sex Work Projects. NSWP is a legally constituted international organization for promoting sex workers' health and human rights. With member organizations in more than 40 countries, the Network develops partnerships with technical support agencies to work on independently-financed projects.

## **NATIONAL WEB-BASED**

### **Sex Trade Workers of Canada**

<http://www.sextradeworkersofcanada.com/>

Sex Trade Workers of Canada provides support, resources, and programs for past and current sex workers – male or female – as well as help with current information, advocacy, and public education around sexual exploitation and the issues of adult sex work. Sex Trade Workers of Canada provides current information on missing and murdered victims, sexually transmitted disease outbreaks and much more.

### **Women Helping Ourselves to Rights and Equality (W.H.O.R.E.)**

[http://www.cafepress.com/WHORE\\_Chic.271999874](http://www.cafepress.com/WHORE_Chic.271999874)

Provide information for sex workers on health, safety, and working conditions.

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

### **Vancouver**

#### **BC Coalition of Experiential Communities**

<http://www.bccec.wordpress.com>

The BCCEC is a mechanism for the voices of experiential communities to influence legislation and policies that provide sex workers with inclusion; advocate for a continuum of peer driven programs, initiatives, and services to support those who are forced into the sex industry to transition safely; advocate for the rights of sex industry workers to work free from harm and enjoy the benefits of their labour.

The BCCEC may also serve as a consultative body of expertise on sex industry work issues; host organization for sex worker workshops, events and initiatives; and research and data collection body.

#### **Committee to Unite Prostitutes (CUP)**

<http://www.walnet.org/cup/index.html>

A new organization aimed at helping prostitutes get together to identify common concerns and make their voices heard. Anyone committed to promoting sex-worker solidarity can join.

#### **HUSTLE**

Outreach and support program for male hustlers and youth in Vancouver communities. An outreach and support program housed out of PEERS Vancouver and allied with many existing community based organizations and programs. HUSTLE is designed and implemented by experiential men who see a need for or a needed increase for specific front-line support services for male hustlers and youth who may be at risk in Vancouver communities.

#### **Naked Truth**

[www.nakedtruth.ca](http://www.nakedtruth.ca)

The Naked Truth Entertainment strives to encourage, support, inform, and advocate for adult entertainers through connecting community members and allies; challenging stereotypes; providing ethical employment opportunities; and collaborating with other businesses for a thriving adult entertainment industry.



## PEERS Vancouver

<http://www.peersvancouver.org/>

PEERS Vancouver was founded in October of 2001 by two former PEERS Victoria employees. PEERS offers three full-time exiting programs to assist leaving sex work and offers drop-in services. The PEERS Vancouver staff consists largely of former sex workers: They find it is important to maintain a grass-roots approach in offering employment services and counseling to sex workers.

## Prostitution, Awareness, Counseling and Education (PACE)

<http://www.pace-society.ca/>

By, with, and for sex workers - PACE Society promotes safer working conditions by reducing harm and isolation through education and support. They believe that sex workers are valuable members of our community and are entitled to the same rights as all other human beings.

## Sex Workers Alliance and Vancouver (SWAV) (disbanded)

<http://www.walnet.org/swav/>

The Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver (SWAV) was founded in 1994 to fight for sex workers' right to fair wages and to working conditions that are safe, clean and healthy. Its members are people who work or have worked in the sex industry, and their friends. They met informally to develop and implement ways to make the sex trade a safer and healthier occupation. SWAV disbanded in 2005.

## Sex Workers United Against Violence Society (SWUAV)

<http://www.pivotlegal.org/Issues/sextrade.htm>

The Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence Society, formed by the Pivot Legal Society in 2007, is asking the courts to find laws that govern selling sex for money unconstitutional under a number of Charter of Rights and Freedoms sections. They were created as a group to ensure anonymity during the trial process for the Charter Challenge to prostitution laws.

## West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals

<http://www.wccsip.ca/>

During the *Developing Capacity for Change Project* (2007), 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 endeavor with its membership guiding all decisions. 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 was formally incorporated in February 2007 and is known as the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals.

## Victoria

### PEERS Victoria

<http://peers.bc.ca/>

Provides PEERS Victoria support, resources, and programs for past and current sex workers—male or female—as well as help with housing, training, and volunteering opportunities, advocacy and public education around sexual exploitation and the issues of adult sex work.

## ONTARIO

### Toronto

#### Canadian Guild of Erotic Labour (CGEL) (Toronto and Montreal)

The Canadian Guild for Erotic Labour is a labour organization that promotes the rights of women and men, including transsexual/transgendered individuals, in the sex industry in Canada.

#### Exotic Dancers Rights Association of Canada (EDRAC)

The Exotic Dancers' Association of Canada promotes setting standards in the exotic entertainment industry to ensure a better quality of life.

#### Maggie's

<http://www.maggiestoronto.com>

Maggie's is an organization run for and by sex workers. Their mission is to assist sex workers in their efforts to live and work with safety and dignity. They are founded on the belief that in order to improve their circumstances, sex workers must control their lives and destinies.

#### Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC)

<http://www.spoc.ca>

SPOC is a political and social group whose main objective is to work towards the decriminalization of sex work through political activism, community building, and public awareness. SPOC is a grassroots, volunteer organization made up of current and former sex workers and allies.

## SWAT

Sex Workers Alliance of Toronto

[http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/swat/about\\_swat.html](http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/swat/about_swat.html)

The Sex Workers Alliance of Toronto (S.W.A.T.) was founded in 1992 to fight for sex workers' rights to fair wages, and safe and healthy working conditions. S.W.A.T. opposes any law that criminalizes sex work. S.W.A.T. provides health and legal information, and free condoms. Volunteers provide support for others working in the sex trade by doing outreach and court watch. S.W.A.T. also educates service providers and policy makers about the needs of sex workers. S.W.A.T. is NOT an agency of the government.

### Ottawa

#### Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist) (POWER)

<http://www.powerottawa.ca>

POWER is a non-profit, voluntary organization founded in 2008. Membership is open to individuals of all genders who self-identify as former or current sex workers. POWER envisions a society in which sex workers are able to practise their professions free of legal and social discrimination, victimization, harassment, and violence and in which sex work is valued as legitimate and fulfilling work making an important contribution to society.

## QUEBEC

### Montreal

#### Stella

<http://www.chezstella.org>

Stella is the only funded organization in Montreal run for sex workers by sex workers. Stella provides support and information to sex workers so that they may live with safety and dignity, as well as sensitizing and educating the public about sex work and the realities faced by sex workers. Stella fights discrimination against sex workers, promotes the decriminalization of sex work, and favours empowerment and solidarity amongst sex workers.

#### The Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers

<http://www.montrealcoalition.com/>

The Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers is a rights group comprised of people from different areas of the sex industry, allies and other representatives from community groups. The Coalition is a proud ally and member of many social, legal, and political solidarity movements. The Coalition is particularly focused on sex workers' working conditions and the decriminalization of sex work as a solution to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling sex workers' human and labour rights.

## NOVA SCOTIA

### Halifax

#### Stepping Stone

<http://www.steppingstonens.ca>

Stepping Stone was founded in 1987 and is the only organization in the Maritimes that deals specifically with street life and sex work from a harm reduction model. Their offices and drop-in centre are located in a modest, non-residential house, where many of the staff members are former sex workers. Their support is crucial to the well-being of hundreds of female, male and transgendered sex workers. Stepping Stone believes that all individuals have the right to self-determination. They do not interfere with or attempt to stop their work; rather, they assist them in making their life choices as safe and positive as possible.



## **PART TWO: Sex Worker Activities and Projects in Canada**

Sex worker organizations, among other things, encourage and support the collective action of sex workers and attempt to create a platform for exchange. Most groups promote sex worker leadership as a guiding principle for social change at the local, provincial, national, and international levels. Visibility of sex worker groups and sex workers' voices has, over time, shifted public understandings of sex work.

Fulfilling and protecting sex workers' human and labour rights has been the focus of the sex worker rights movements and sex workers across Canada have, through community initiatives, created mechanisms and resources to further these human rights. The following examples of activities and projects address different strategies sex workers employ in their fight for their human rights at the same time as it highlights the importance of community involvement in creating social change.

### **A) HEALTH AND SAFETY**

*Sex workers are often scapegoated for the HIV pandemic based on misguided perceptions that they are inevitably carriers of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. This prejudice has heightened discrimination and stigma against sex workers and sex work. At the same time intersecting oppressions, known in this context as social determinants of health (including such things as poverty, gender, race, class, and other social factors), also impact on the overall health outcomes of sex workers. The implications of these social determinants are further exacerbated in the context of criminalization. It is worth noting that the criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers is compounded by the criminalization of HIV.*

*The following is a list of projects and activities initiated by sex worker groups with the intention of increasing the health and safety of sex workers in their work and private lives.*

#### **HIV Prevention**

Most sex workers groups that do outreach, have an extensive HIV prevention program, and may receive funding from health care or HIV prevention organizations. This work can include condom distribution, safe injection equipment, and information on work safety. Rather than focusing on an individual's identity or profession, these groups typically approach HIV prevention from the perspective of addressing the social determinants of health that may increase susceptibility to HIV and STI infection.

#### **Hepatitis A and B Vaccinations**

Projects may also offer sex workers free Hepatitis A and B vaccinations. Some agencies claim this is a good way to make initial contact with different groups of sex workers while also providing them with strategies to maximize their safety at work by for example, sharing information and safety tips. This type of project requires linking up with a medical professional and can take place on site at an organization, in strip clubs, or on porn sets.

## Medical Clinics for Sex Workers

Clinics specifically tailored to sex workers' needs are useful in a climate of hostility and moral judgment, as sex workers will often not receive appropriate care or direct services if they do not disclose their profession to medical personnel. Stella (Montreal), for example, has joined forces with *Médecins du Monde* to provide a free and anonymous health clinic for sex workers directly in Stella's safe environment. The clinic does not require health cards, which means it is accessible to undocumented migrants or anyone without identification papers. The doctors and nurses are also educated about sex work and sex workers' realities to minimize the prejudice and stigma that so often arises.

Making sensitization training available to medical professionals is another good way of minimizing the harm that some sex workers may face with medical staff, and an obvious mechanism that can improve access to appropriate and relevant health services for sex workers. Often in these clinics sex workers are able to get free and anonymous HIV testing, as well other tests and procedures associated with sexual and/or general health.

## Breast Health Awareness

Some organizations plan activities around breast health, which also serve as a networking opportunity. British Columbia dancers who make up the Naked Truth, have Breast Cancer fundraisers while sex workers in Montreal at Stella hold Breast Examination Workshops which teach female and male-to-female (MTF) transsexual workers how to maintain good breast health. Stella's activities are coupled with an artistic plaster cast project where moulds of sex workers' breasts are mounted on their Breast Wall.

## Massage Clinics

Massage clinics can offer an important physical respite for sex workers. Professional masseurs can be used but finding student or trainee massage therapists can be a good way to create a space for volunteers in the organization, and provide an affordable alternative for the organization. Of course sex workers can also provide general or erotic massage classes for work or leisure.

## Health and Safety Guides or Websites

Sex workers across Canada have developed various documents outlining strategies for sex workers to stay healthy in their work and private lives. Notable is Stella's XXX Guide, where you can find information on condom use, STIs, the laws that can impact on health, different ways to use toys, and strategies to communicate needs to clients. Other organizations provide information on safe anal sex, toy play, and safe sadomasochism.

Guides and web-based information on the following health and safety issues have been created:

### For Clients:



Information for clients on health, safety and the law, as well as 'tips' on how to be a good client (other professions would benefit immensely from their own, no doubt). This can also be a very useful tool for sex workers in their negotiations with clients.  
« (Stella, Montreal)

### For Sex Workers:

Guides that give basic information to sex workers on rights, health, and the law are very useful when first starting out in the business. Stella currently has their Guide XXX, and a similar guide called "Trade Secrets" is forthcoming from Vancouver sex work activists.

### For Drug Use:



As some sex workers and clients consume substances during a rendezvous, it's best to know what 'cocktails' to avoid. Stella's "Dope Guide" is a great example of a booklet that provides information about particular drugs, their effects, and how to minimize workers' risk on the job.  
« (Stella, Montreal)



## For Dancers:



Provincial regulations and municipal by-laws differ for dancers across the country. As such, the different sex worker groups that work with dancers offer written documentation on work health and workers' rights. Stella (Montreal) currently offers "Striptease" that is specific to dancing in Quebec.

« (Stella, Montreal)

## Cookbooks

Some groups whose mandate includes general health have taken this educational opportunity to create cookbooks. Notably, PACE (Vancouver) has created: *A Taste of This Life: Recipes and Reflections from People Living with Hep C*.

## Web-based Services

The internet has expanded sex workers' ability to organize and share information, some of which is health information. Blogs, email, and websites are great tools for sharing health and safety tips amongst sex workers. It also allows for anonymity and confidentiality, for those workers who do not want to be affiliated with the sex worker community or activist groups. There are many sex worker blogs based in the United States:

- Bound, not Gagged  
<http://deepthroated.wordpress.com/>
- SWOP Diaries  
<http://www.swopdiaries.blogspot.com/>
- Audacia Ray  
<http://www.wakingvixen.com/blog/>
- Tracy Quan  
<http://www.tracyquan.net/gossip/blog.php>

Others in Canada include:

- Ickaprick and Ironpussy  
<http://ickaprick.blogspot.com/>

## Magazines

Magazines (or 'zines') are often used as a method for educating the public around health and other issues while also providing resources to sex workers. They can also be sold to raise funds.

Current magazines written and produced by sex workers: include

- \$SPREAD (New York, USA)
- Constellation (Stella)
- Provision (Sydney, AU)
- Espace P (Belgium)



## **B) VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

*The precarious and informal nature of sex work makes sex workers more vulnerable to violence. Prostitution law plays a large role in this; while exchanging sexual services for compensation is not illegal in Canada, virtually every activity associated with sex work is criminalized. This ambiguous and contradictory legislation makes it nearly impossible for sex workers to work safely and without risk of intimidation from clients, police, and residents. In practice, sex workers lack the protection of the law (for example their experience of violence is often not taken seriously) and are also vulnerable to police abuse and maltreatment when they experience violence. Sex workers and clients may also experience extremely oppressive responses from neighbours and members of the public.*

*The following list highlights some of the ways sex workers have played a vital role in violence prevention in their own communities.*

### **Bad Tricks/Dates/Aggressors List**

Formally written and distributed “Bad Tricks/dates/aggressors lists” was an initiative that began in Canada in the 1980s. It was originally intended to be a communication tool between sex workers - a document circulated amongst sex worker communities and groups that work with sex workers that allowed them to share information on crime and violence without necessitating an official police report. At the very least it was believed that workers could warn each other of violators. Over time, some groups have changed the format of the list to include bulletins and activities from sex worker organizations. In some cases, sex worker groups may share truncated versions of lists (without addresses and locations of workers) with the police in order to help speed the process for those cases that have been officially reported. These lists have received much recognition and appreciation across Canada and the world: In 1996, Stella’s (Montreal) list for Bad Tricks and Aggressors received the Prize for Security of Women given by Montreal’s Action Committee for Women and Urban Security (Comité d’action femmes et sécurité urbaine).

### **Police Liaisons**

Some sex worker groups collaborate or create liaisons with the police in order to develop a more harmonized approach to prostitution. In some cases police may even hand out flyers and information for a particular sex worker group. Other organizations have forged informal connections that allow sex workers to report crimes against them without the risk of being arrested on prostitution charges. The underlying issue with any alliance with the police is that sex workers often distrust groups who work collaboratively with the police. The ability of a group to liaise with the police will also depend on a group’s relationship with the police or prevailing attitudes towards sex work within a given community.

### **December 17th Marches/Vigils/Activities**

As a memorial and vigil for the victims of the Green River Killer in Seattle, Washington, sex workers across the world stage actions and protests on December 17th, marked as International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. Originally founded by San Francisco’s Dr. Annie Sprinkle, in collaboration with the Sex Workers’ Outreach Project (USA), this day has empowered workers in cities across the world to come together and organize against violence and discrimination, and to remember and honour victims of violence. Some groups have elected to use this day for a vigil, while others have chosen to focus on lobbying government for political change. In any case, all actions are focused around eliminating all sorts of systemic and physical violence against sex workers. Over time, these marches have incorporated the symbol of the red umbrella to take to the streets and demand government action against violence against sex workers. The red umbrella was first used by sex workers in Venice, Italy in 2001. On the occasion of the 49th Venice Biennale of Art in 2001 they walked the streets together, out and proud, in a Red Umbrella March.



## Presence at Court Houses upon Arrest and Trial

One of the main preoccupations of the sex worker rights movements is to fight against legal systems that entrap and continue a cyclical barrage of legal repercussions for all sex workers. Accordingly, groups undertake a variety of activities including contesting unnecessary court orders and trials for sex workers. Many groups will also actively dispute tickets and/or be present at criminal trials for sex workers in order to show solidarity and lend the credibility of an organized group when in court. This can be effective since the judiciary sometimes affords a registered group more legitimacy than it does individuals. At times, sex worker groups may also collectively protest against particular policies or the application of certain laws. For example, in December 2008, Stella (Montreal) held a demonstration outside the *Palais de Justice* when one of several accused serial rapists of sex workers was due to be arraigned before the court. This was intended as an act of solidarity for the sex workers who had been assaulted, as well as to highlight the injustices of the current laws and how they make sex workers vulnerable to violence.

## Self Defence Classes

Sex worker groups will often offer self-defence classes tailored specifically to sex workers. Such a specialized approach is necessary since the typical strategies offered in traditional self defence classes are not necessarily useful for sex workers and do not address sex workers' needs or realities: For example, is it really useful to advise sex workers not to walk alone at night to reduce vulnerability to violence? Or to not wear high heels so they can run faster? These classes also facilitate the release of physical tensions and offer the opportunity for community members to network and share working tips. Classes are typically held in the safe space of a sex work centre in collaboration with a self-defense instructor who is sensitive to sex workers' realities.

## Violence Prevention Workshops

Workshops are another option for sex workers. These can be organized around a particular skill (i.e., confrontation skills), provide information (i.e., sex work laws), address specific concerns (i.e., stigma and discrimination), or offer advice and the opportunity for sex workers to share their collective knowledge. Workshops can also give sex workers a chance to create safety plans and strategies for their work.

## C) EDUCATION

Educational programs about sex work are varied and can include education by and for sex workers, or public education by sex workers for the wider community. They focus on the realities of sex work, on policy change, on advocacy, or any issue that concerns sex workers.

### Public Education Programs

Some successful education programs across Canada include Stella (with UQAM)'s (Montreal) education program entitled "Sex Work: Everything You Want to Know but Never Dared to Ask" (2006). This program was designed using a 'bottom-up' approach, informed by sex workers' needs and experiences, to facilitate better access to service, reduce stigma, and generate awareness around sex workers' realities.

### Parades and Protests

Parades and protests are often used as a way to mobilize already organized sex workers, and sex workers not yet part of the sex worker rights movement. There are many different occasions that can attract a crowd. Some notable days for parades are:

- Labour Day/May Day (for workers' rights)
- Gay Pride/Lesbian Pride
- Refugee Protests
- National Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers (December 17th)

Many sex workers also hold their own Pride Parades and marches.

### Workshops



Workshops can take many forms. They can be one or multiple-day events and can be focused on a particular topic or be about sex work in general (from sex worker experts themselves). Some groups rely on trained sex workers who can give these presentations with confidence and from an experiential point of view.

« (Stella, Montreal)

### Festivals

Sex worker groups sometimes organize festivals, either for sex workers or for the general public, as a means of educating the public on sex workers' realities, and to garner support for the fight for sex workers' health, human, and labour rights. Some examples of this are the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers (Montreal) "C'est Chaud/Turn Up the Heat" Festivals in 2003 and 2004.

### Films



Some sex workers produce films on various topics not only to express artistic creativity, but also to serve as an educational tool. Some notable films are:  
« (Stella and Séro-Zéro, Montreal)

- *Putain Compile* (Pink Panthers, Montreal)
- *eXXXpressions* (Stella, Montreal)
- *Madame Lorraine's Transsexual Touch* (Independent QC and ON)
- Mirha Soleil's films (Toronto)
- And many other films that are used as part of the San Francisco Annual Sex Work Film Festival



## D) RESEARCH

*There is a plethora of research relating to sex work and sex workers yet workers' realities are underrepresented and misrepresented in research. In order to counter many of the myths and stereotypes surrounding sex work, to produce research that is relevant to the sex worker community, and to ensure that sex workers' realities are accurately represented some groups may produce their own research reports. Others may choose to work in collaboration with allied university researchers. Research that has been useful over the years include studies that explore the impact of prostitution laws on sex worker, and those that support the issues important to sex workers: the need to end violence, safer working conditions, etc.*

### Community Based Research

Many sex worker groups undertake their own research from a Participatory Action approach in order to maximize the number of sex workers included and to be able to strategize around community needs. Some of these projects are listed below:

- PACE (Vancouver): Violence Against Women in Vancouver's Street Level Sex Trade and the Police Response (2001)
- West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals (Vancouver): Developing Capacity for Change (February 2007)
- POWER (Ottawa): Needs assessment of Ottawa-Gatineau sex workers (2009, in progress)



### Academic Research

The production of knowledge in academic settings can be relevant for the sex worker community. It can, for example, have a huge impact on the way that people view sex workers and counteract some of the stereotypes that are pervasive about industry and workers. In addition, since academics are often called upon as “experts” on prostitution and sex work related issues, it is of utmost importance that those who are allies are closely linked with sex workers and are knowledgeable about their realities. It is also crucial that they take direction from sex working communities on what is important. Academics can also provide sex workers with the language, tools, and evidence that can be used for political arguments in sex worker activism.

Many academics partner or collaborate with sex work projects. The following are a few examples:

Leslie Jeffrey and Gayle MacDonald recently published their book *Sex Workers in the Maritimes Talk Back*, that showcased the rarely visible lives, realities, and voices of sex workers in the Maritimes. This book was a culmination of research (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) that aimed to explore and make visible the lives and work of sex workers.

Maria Nengeh Mensah (Université du Québec a Montreal) has not only been instrumental in facilitating fiscal support but also in helping sex workers gain political power so that sex workers can be recognized in both the academy and the public sphere. She is a great example of how academics can use their position to support groups that are working towards knowledge production and education. The Forum XXX and the training “Everything you Wanted to Know About Sex Work But Were Too Afraid to Ask” are but two examples of this work.

Frances Shaver, Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, and Jacqueline Lewis undertook a 5-year project, *Sex Trade Advocacy and Research (STAR)* in 2001 that sought to improve the health, safety, and well being of sex workers through research, information, programs, and policies. These researchers have been called upon numerous times to present their findings to other academics and, to parliamentarians during the study of the House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, which reported in December 2006. They also produced two reports that highlight the realities for dancers in Ontario: “Exotic Dancing in Ontario: Health and Safety” and “Safety, Security and the Well-Being of Sex Workers: A Report Submitted to the House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws (SSLR).”

Viviane Namaste (Concordia University) has worked tirelessly over the years to bring attention to the issues that transsexual and migrant sex workers in Montreal face with regards to health, police repression, and policy. She has produced many books that speak to this research, namely, “Invisible Lives,” and “C’etait du Spectacle!”

Chris Bruckert and Colette Parent (University of Ottawa) have actively drawn attention to the workplace realities of sex workers. Their labour approach and emphasis on working conditions have provided empirical support regarding the changes that need to take place in order for sex workers to achieve the health and safety conditions they need and that are a precondition to fully realizing their human and labour rights.

## **E) LOBBYING FOR LAW REFORM**

*Sex workers’ leadership has proven instrumental to organizing around sex workers’ rights and policy development.*

*An intense debate, here and elsewhere, is carried on in federal governments, international forums and organisations, diverse interest groups, and of course, the women’s movement. At the same time, people working in the sex-trade all over the world are positioning themselves as actors, amongst others, in the discursive universe. In our opinion, it is of vital importance that our views be visible, audible, and credible (Stella 2002; 1).*

*While the question of law reform is the subject of lively debate within the sex worker activist community, decriminalization (and subsequent self regulation) is typically touted as a means to ending much of the violence, exploitation, and human rights violations that result from laws that do not protect sex workers or address problematic working conditions.*

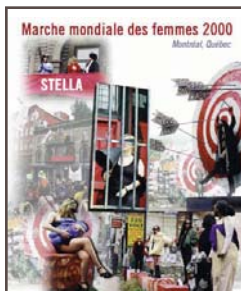
### **Press Releases**

Ongoing arrests, discussion in the political sphere and a flurry of interest and preoccupation with sex work necessitates a response from people who work directly in the industry. Press releases to popular and alternative medias (including print, radio, and television) are one of the ways that sex workers can relay important messages to the general public. Formulating a list of known and allied media can facilitate a quick and fast response. Writing and editing of press releases typically need to happen very quickly and many groups do not have either the time or resources to create their own media response or strategy: joining with other sex workers across Canada can also alleviate some of the workload. At times, releasing a jointly signed press release can be useful.

## Letter-Writing/Postcards/Petitions to the Government or Local MPs

Whether or not letter-writing is effective in attracting the attention of parliamentarians is uncertain. They have, however, been useful in educating the public, mobilizing communities, and consolidating political messages. Many groups have used letters and postcards with signature campaigns as a method of lobbying public, parliamentary, or governmental officials. Signature campaigns may also be used during events or at moments of shifting of political power, for example, during upcoming elections, or to ‘welcome’ a new mayor, MP, or prime minister. Letter writing has given the general public an opportunity to demonstrate their support for sex workers’ rights. Appendix 1 is an example of a letter writing campaign by the Sex Professional of Canada (SPOC) in Toronto upon the election of a new MP (see Appendix 1). Appendix 2 highlights examples of postcards that Stella (Montreal) used as part of their December 17th activities (see Appendix 2).

## Presence at March 8th Events and other Anti-Violence Events



Sex workers are but one group affected by prejudice, stigma, and discrimination that result in violence. Some sex worker groups ally with others in the anti-violence movements as a means of showing support, but also to make links and highlight intersecting oppressions. In addition, joining women’s movements may help abolitionist feminists understand the connections between violence against women, and violence against sex workers.



## Network Creation

Provincial and national networks in Canada have arisen as a means of creating a stronger and more robust voice for legislative reform and general advocacy for sex workers. Networks can have a strong collective voice and represent various groups and messages at the same time. They also make space for sex worker leadership and a global or national platform for sex workers’ rights. Of course, sex workers need to identify networks whose mandate parallels their own. Networks have also been used as a way strategy to maintain global contact amongst sex workers and contribute to strategy and community building in local movements.

Some examples of networks in North America:

- NSWP North America:  
<http://www.nswp.org>
- Canadian National Coalition for Experiential Women:  
<http://www.cncew.ca>
- BC Coalition for Experiential Communities:  
<http://bccec.wordpress.com/>



## F) FUNDRAISING

*Funding can be a contentious issue for sex worker activists; whether or not to receive funding is a question that is fraught with important considerations: should groups receive government funding that can potentially restrict their actions? Are there certain religious groups or managers that groups should not receive funding from? How can groups maintain their vision if funding is specific to projects? These and other matters are things that sex workers take into consideration when deciding how they will raise funds for their activities.*

### Shows and Benefits

Sex worker groups use shows and benefits to raise funds and awareness. The examples below are of posters from benefits put on regularly by the Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC) in Toronto. Choosing a sex work friendly venue, with a sex work themed party is typically a way that sex workers mobilize other workers and generate interest in the movement.



« (SPOC, Toronto)

### Sticker Campaigns



In the late 1990s, the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers (Montreal) launched a sticker campaign that listed prices for sexual and other services that sex workers offer. These stickers were distributed in the downtown area as a way of mobilizing sex workers towards business and personal solidarity and against pressure from clients looking to bargain for unsafe services. Other groups have created slogans and distributed them to other sex workers or the larger public.

« (Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers, Montreal)

## Merchandising



Funding for sex worker groups is limited, and funding for sex workers' rights is scarcer still. Moreover some groups prefer to receive their funding through self-organized events, rather than be obligated to restrain their activities to a funding body's mandate. As such, many sex worker groups will use merchandise as a means of financing their actions and activities. This merchandise also serves to educate and increase the visibility of the group. Mugs, t-shirts, pens, notebooks and lipsticks are but a few ideas. Some groups opt to sell merchandise items that are relevant to workers such as lipstick, makeup cases, and matches.

« (W.H.O.R.E., web-based)

## G) COMMUNITY BUILDING

*Community building is one of the most important ways to create solidarity and strength in the sex workers' rights movements. A community of large numbers can effectively influence policy makers and the wider public; the visibility of this community also helps to educate the public on the realities of sex work and to break down popular myths and stereotypes.*

### Community Suppers

Many groups use indoor and outdoor meals as a way to mobilize sex workers. Some opt for thematic nights while others use these as a forum for discussion, organizing or addressing pressing issues.

### Conferences and Forums

Over the last decade, sex work conferences and forums organized by and for sex workers have become a significant source of support, community building, mobilization, and education. These conferences are both funded and non-funded, and differ in topics and scale. They are held provincially and nationally. The last national forum for sex workers rights was Stella's Forum XXX, held in Montreal in 2005.

### Discussion Groups

Many sex worker groups hold discussion groups (in Quebec dubbed a 5 à 7) to mobilize sex workers around particular issues and to provide a platform for knowledge exchange. Groups may be organized according to sector of the industry or issues pertinent to particular groups of workers.

### Book Clubs

PACE (Vancouver) offers book clubs as a way of mobilizing sex workers, networking, and offering respite from the everyday.

## H) LABOUR RIGHTS

*Sex workers are also fighting for labour rights, including the right to work without violence, exploitation, and towards access to labour standards as well as their rightful place in the labour movement. There are many different strategies that sex workers employ.*

### Working with Unions/Gaining Labour Support

In some instances, sex worker groups choose to enlist the support of established trade unions to gain official recognition of sex work as work, and to access labour standards. While no trade union in Canada has given full support for the decriminalization of sex work, a few have made minor strides in broaching the subject. For example, in 2003 CUPE worked closely with the Canadian Guild for Erotic Labour (CGEL) to try to establish a resolution that would help legitimize sex work in the labour movement. Unfortunately, their progress was blocked by women's committees, and the Sex Work Committee is now defunct, (or at least no longer taking guidance from sex workers). Similarly, CSN (Quebec) was approached in 2003, though internal politics also prevented full support.

### Forming Unions

Forming unions for sex workers in Canada is difficult given that most Canadian unions do not organize autonomous workers and most sex workers do in fact work independently. However, some sex workers have succeeded in forming unions in other countries like Argentina, United Kingdom, and Kolkata (India):

- IUSW  
<http://www.iusw.org>
- AMMAR (Argentina)
- DURBAR  
<http://www.durbar.org>

## Slogans for Workers' Rights

Punchy lines and slogans are used often during campaigns or rallies. Some popular ones used globally by sex worker groups are:

- “Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs”
- “Nothing about Us, Without Us”
- “Sex Workers are Part of the Solution”
- “Sex Workers’ Rights are Human Rights”.

## Occupational Health and Safety Work

Some sex worker groups are committed to improving the physical work conditions for sex workers by communicating with bosses or establishments and with sex workers themselves. Where there are formal contracts, like some dance clubs, sex workers can negotiate directly with bosses to adhere to provincial occupational health and safety standards. While there are no official standard set in Canada for the sex industry, a good example of what can be produced in the context of decriminalization is Australia’s Work Cover (NSW, AU) that was developed by sex workers in collaboration with their local government.

## I) HOUSING SERVICES

*Sex workers are often refused housing because of their profession. Transsexual sex workers are refused on these and gender related grounds. This stigma puts all sex workers, and particularly trans workers, in the dangerous position of not having accommodation, protection, and security. Moreover, limited access to housing in private spaces forces sex workers to use public and semi-public spaces to live and survive which puts them at further risk of criminalization.*

### Referrals

Funded organizations use outreach workers to liaise between the sex working community and mainstream services. When these outreach workers are sex workers, services and referrals are typically more relevant and respond more directly to the workers’ needs.

### Committees

Most boroughs and municipalities have committees dedicated to housing issues for those who are or at risk of being homeless. Joining these committees ensures a voice for sex workers at the table. This is especially important during times when policies, like the SCAN legislation (which puts sex workers at risk of homelessness) is being debated within Ontario. Appendix 3 discusses SCAN in greater detail. Please note that SCAN is already implemented and practiced in a number of Canadian provinces.



## J) POLICE REPRESSION

*Police repression, in the form of harassment and abuse, is a major problem for sex workers, particularly for those who are the most visible. This harassment can take a number of forms: officers may give sex workers needless tickets—for jaywalking, loitering, and other infractions—that are not usually dealt out to the general public, and sex workers can be subject to physical, verbal, and sexual harassment and violence as well as forcible confinement. Though sex workers have little recourse due to the quasi-legal status of the industry, there are many actions that sex workers across Canada undertake to address this repression.*

### Joining Associations and Actions

Sex workers, along with other marginalized groups on the street, experience a disproportionate amount of police repression. Cities across Canada have coalitions and organizations that fight this repression at the local (and sometimes provincial and national) level. In Montreal, there is the Coalition Against Police Brutality (COBP) that unites many different marginalized groups in a protest each year.

### Committees

Strategic placement on city committees is one way that some sex workers have made their realities and needs visible. Most municipalities and neighbourhoods have community meetings that sex worker groups or individual sex workers may join to protest police repression or other issues in the neighbourhood.

### Letter writing

Some sex worker groups use letter writing as a means of highlighting police injustice. Some have ‘called out’ chiefs of police and other officers on their behaviour and followed the public complaint process to report unlawful and discriminatory behaviour.

### Community Liaison Projects

Groups that work with the police have set up projects that work and/or negotiate with police for safer communities. Others elect not to take this approach as it can make some sex workers weary of the group and may prevent them from accessing activities and services for fear of being reported or being in close proximity to law enforcement. Sex workers who are known to law enforcement may be particularly resistant to participating in a group that has aligned itself with the police.

### Arrest Tips for Sex Workers

Police may take advantage of their authority (by, for example, threatening to use condoms as evidence, physical and verbal harassment) and sex workers’ rights are often not protected through the arrest process. In light of this, sharing experience about law enforcement is one of the most useful things that sex workers can do. Some sex worker groups opt to do this with pamphlets, web-based information or blogs. Groups may also offer information and tips on what to do in case of arrest. Appendix 4 is a wallet-sized example of tips upon arrest produced by PIVOT Legal Society (Vancouver).

## **K) WORKING WITH ALLIES**

*It goes without saying that the sex worker rights movement benefits from the work and unwavering support of allies. The role of allies in any movement that favours community leadership is however a contentious and often confusing issue. One of the issues how to maintain sex worker leadership and ensure sex workers are at the forefront of actions. Many allies, however, are willing to offer their hard work to help secure sex workers rights and recognition while respectfully taking direction from sex workers themselves.*

*Below is a sample of allied groups currently active in Canada.*

### **FIRST Advocates**

<http://www.firstadvocates.org/>

FIRST is a coalition of feminists who have come together to support the rights of sex industry workers and advocate for the decriminalization of adult sex work. They are guided by the fundamental principle that sex industry workers should have equal benefit of the human rights protections that are available to all members of Canadian society. Some of their actions to date have been:

- Media strategies to denounce violence and poor working conditions for sex workers
- Creation of an email list for sex worker groups and allies across Canada, with a few members in other parts of North America
- Conferences on the topic of sex work.

### **Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

<http://www.aidslaw.ca>

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network works towards a world in which the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and those affected by the disease are respected, protected, and fulfilled; and laws and policies facilitate HIV prevention efforts, as well as care, treatment, and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network has been supportive of sex workers' rights over the past decade and has been instrumental in bringing sex workers' voices and perspectives to different tables. Some of their joint actions are listed below:

- Two year consultation project on prostitution laws
- Working with sex worker groups to promote visibility of sex worker issues
- Joint press releases and media strategies around sex worker issues
- Publications: "Sex, Work, Rights: Reforming Canadian Criminal Laws on Prostitution." July 2005; "Not Up to the Challenge of Change" (December 2006) with Maggie's (Toronto) and Stella (Montreal).

### **Pivot Legal Society, Vancouver**

<http://www.pivotlegal.org>

Pivot Legal Society is a non-profit legal advocacy organization located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Pivot's mandate is to take a strategic approach to social change, using the law to address the root causes that undermine the quality of life of those most on the margins. They believe that everyone, regardless of income, benefits from a healthy and inclusive community where values such as opportunity, respect, and equality are strongly rooted in the law.

- Publications: *Voices for Dignity: A Call to End the Harms Caused by Canada's Sex Trade Laws* (2004); *Beyond Decriminalization: Sex Work, Human Rights and a New Framework for Law Reform* (2006).
- 2007 Vancouver Charter Challenge
- Ongoing advocacy for the sex working community.

## L) MISCELLANEOUS/VARIOUS

*The following describes other activities that address some of the goals defined above and others that are specific to the creativity of different groups.*

### Drop-ins

Many organizations offer drop-ins, some of which are open 24 hr/day while others have fixed hours of operation. Drop-ins are typically used for advice, referrals, or distributing working materials (condoms, pamphlets, clean injection equipment, etc). Drop-ins may be staffed by sex workers or by allies.

### Mobile Vans

As an alternative to drop-ins, some sex work projects bring working materials to sex workers by driving a van throughout the city. This can be for both indoor and outdoor workers. These vans may also be accompanied by a nurse who can do on-the-spot vaccinations for Hepatitis A and B.

### Welcoming the New Mayor

In 1999, the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers (Montreal) held a creative and colourful action by welcoming in the new mayor of Montreal with a spaghetti puttanesca supper. It was a great way to let the mayor know who he can expect to see at City Hall meetings, while still showing good faith.

### Mural Project

In 2002, a collective of sex workers and native community members, known as the Living Monument Project, came together to honour the 63+ murdered women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DES), many of whom were Native and Inuit. The result was a beautiful community mural in the heart of the red-light district of Montreal. It was a great opportunity to bring various communities together with the same goal.

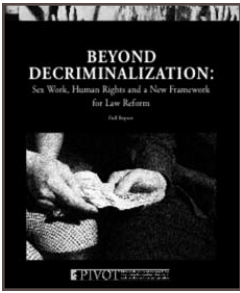
### Political Parties

The *Parti Populaire des Putes* (PPP) was a political party founded in 1999 by a group of sex workers in Montreal who felt that a political party could best represent the needs of sex workers in parliament. While no seat was won, the PPP served as an educational tool, an empowering community mobilizing effort, and a political message to government about the importance of including sex workers in political debate and policy reform.

### Prison Work

Prisons are currently over-populated with sex workers serving short and long term sentences for prostitution-related offences as well as offences related to unpaid tickets. Most organizations that do prison outreach are funded organizations that have worked hard to gain access to sex workers inside prison walls. Some projects include visiting sex workers in prison with general information on health and rights, offering direct support and services to incarcerated women and transsexual sex workers, Hepatitis A and B vaccinations, Hepatitis C and HIV-related materials, and general health information and services.

## Media Strategies



The media is a popular source of information on many issues, and sex work is often a popular topic. Moreover, much of the general public's understanding of sex work comes from media, and unfortunately much of the representation is either

sensationalized or not representative of sex workers' perspective. Sex worker groups are therefore often forced to react to media images or journalists looking for a 'saucy' story or who have a particular angle on sex work issues. To avoid being reactive, instead of proactive, some groups elect to have a strategic plan for media efforts and common messages. Others will also actively seek out sex worker friendly media for particular issues and specific events for sex workers. Alternatively, some sex workers will create their own media. Blogs, 'zines, and radio shows are common examples:

- The Lusty Lady Radio Show (defunct) (Toronto, ON)
- W.H.O.R.E., web based information
- Blogs:  
<http://www.yonilicious.blogspot.com>





## **PART THREE:**

### **Learning from Innovative Sex Worker Projects in Other Countries**

*Sex workers around the world have been organizing for decades. While priorities and realities differ across the world, many of the preoccupations are similar and are used by sex workers in Canada to inspire and inform actions and projects. Some innovative projects are listed below.*

#### **India**

##### **DMSC, Kolkata**

<http://www.durbar.org>

##### **Bank Cooperative**

A collective of over 65,000 sex workers and their family members, the DMSC established a sex workers' cooperative bank as a safe place for sex workers to save their money and get low-interest credit and help sex workers build income and budget their finances. Sex workers were often taken advantage of with high interest rates and often threatened with violence. The sex workers bank is run by sex workers, which have allowed sex workers to buy their own house, support their children through schools, and pay for other family needs. It provides a much needed support to sex workers who cannot otherwise get this support from mainstream institutions.

##### **Trafficking and Underage Self-regulatory Boards**

The DMSC developed 33 self-regulatory boards project to enable them to recognize and support underage women and girls who were forced into the sex industry. The current programs that exist worldwide to combat trafficking and underage prostitution have been extremely violent and abusive. These boards help sex workers find resources such as shelter, skills, and training. Sex workers are best placed to help other sex workers that they come into contact with and to stop coercion within the industry.

#### **USA**

##### **Prostitution Education Network (PENET) (California, US)**

<http://www.penet.org>

The Prostitutes' Education Network is an information service about legislative and cultural issues as they affect prostitutes and other sex workers. The service is comprised of information for sex workers and activists/educators who study issues of decriminalization, human rights in the context of prostitution, violence against prostitutes and women, sex workers and pornography, as well as current trends in legislation and social policy in the U.S. and internationally.

##### **Measure Q Ballot for Decriminalization, by Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), 2004**

The *Angel Initiative: Measure Q*, by sex workers in Berkeley, California, was put forward to the city and its members to vote for decriminalization in November 2004. The Angel Initiative provides an example of an organized sex worker community action for decriminalization. On November 2nd 2004, sex workers in Berkeley, California, put forward a ballot item for decriminalization of prostitution, claiming their rights as California citizens to recommend legal changes. While the demands for reform are different, this initiative is a good example of how sex workers articulate their desire for law reform.

##### **Bill Proposals: Prop K, 2008**

San Francisco voters had an opportunity on Election Day to voting yes on Proposition K, a bill put forward by a group of sex workers (SWOP-USA) to decriminalize prostitution. The decriminalization of prostitution was the main recommendation of the citywide San Francisco Task Force on Prostitution more than 10 years ago.



## Eastern Europe

### Sex Worker Advocacy Network (SWAN)

<http://www.swannet.org/>

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network is a network of civil society organizations engaged in advocating for Human Rights for sex workers in Central and Eastern Europe, CIS, and South-East Europe. This united front allows sex workers all over Eastern Europe to break the isolation, share information and strategies, and address some of the discrimination and stigma that sex workers face. It also provides a united voice for sex workers to be able to respond to issues publicly.

## United Kingdom

### The International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW)

<http://www.iusw.org>

The International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) collective was born in March 2000 in the wake of a sex workers' strike in Soho, London. In support of the local strike, the new collective of sex workers and allies took to the streets. The IUSW was, at first, a grassroots organization that demanded decriminalization of the sex industry and full labour rights for sex workers. Their goal of joining a trade union, and having sex work publicly recognized as labour, was met within two years. In April 2002, the IUSW opened a branch of the GMB union entitled 'Sex Work and Fantasy'.

Where union recognition is not possible, individual workers can benefit from joining the union; free legal representation and advice is often sought by its branch members. Also available and often requested is the service of the union's tax advisers. Empowering sex workers and members through access to training has also resulted through unionization. Training for sex workers, (e.g. training in self-defense or in a new area of the industry like pole dancing) or finding alternative employment (e.g. training in IT skills, CV writing, union organizing, etc) are two benefits of union membership.

## Brazil

### DASPU by Davida

<http://www.daspu.com.br/>

In the wake of financial crisis and a much needed sex worker group, Brazil's sex worker group, Davida, created DASPU, a Clothing Line that they could showcase and sell. This project served various extraordinary functions. First, it mobilized sex workers into action, while gaining much needed public attention to their demands for human rights. It also served as an education campaign in Brazil. DASPU is now internationally recognized and called onto the Brazilian runway for Fashion Week every year.

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# APPENDIX 4

## Know your legal rights Keep this card handy!

outside

# STATEMENT FOR POLICE

roduced by Pivot Legal Society  
**PIVOT**  
604 255 9700 www.pivotlegal.org

YOUR LOGO  
HERE

---

**My Rights:** ① Silence (see over). ② I can say "NO" if the police ask permission to search me or my things. Saying "NO" does not mean I have something to hide. ③ I can leave unless I am being detained or arrested. ④ If I am being detained or arrested, I have a right to know why, and a right to speak privately to a lawyer without delay - even if I can't afford to pay. ⑤ I can only be strip-searched in private and by officers of the same sex. ⑥ I have a right to know a police officer's name and badge number. ⑦ I can report a police officer who abuses me, swears at me, or violates my rights.

Your logo here. The price of \$225 plus GST (plus PST in B.C.) for 1,000 cards includes two colours, black and red. If you would like another colour it will cost a little more.

← GIVE THIS TO  
THE POLICE →

← fold and  
perforation →

← KEEP THIS  
PART OF  
CARD →

inside

**Officer, if I am under arrest or being detained, please tell me so. If I am free to go, please tell me so. If I am not free to go, please tell me why. I wish to exercise all my legal rights including my right to silence and my right to speak to a lawyer before I say anything to you. I do not consent to be searched. I wish to be released without delay. Please do not ask me questions, because I will not willingly talk to you until I speak to a lawyer.**

**Thank you for respecting my rights**

---

### POLICE ARREST: Silence is Golden

Each situation is different and you must use your common sense. Stay calm and remember everything that happens. **Remember your rights!**

**① Silence:** I can refuse to talk to police or answer their questions, unless I am in a bar or a cinema, driving a car, or they say I broke the law. In those cases, I must give my name, birthdate and address, or show my ID, but I do not have to say any more.

If **you are stopped by police against your will**, give them the top part of this card or read it out. Then, **do not say anything** until you talk to a lawyer.

For Legal Aid call 1-866-458-5500 (1-866-458-3300 outside Lower Mainland)  
To report a police officer to the Police Complaint Commission call: 1-800-665-6878

Your local legal aid number here and Police Complaint Commission number here. These numbers are for Vancouver. Every province has its own 1-800 numbers. Also, if you are a legal aid organization or law firm, you might want to put your number here.

