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Improving Sex Worker Supports at WAVAW: Community Consultation Report

Introduction

In accordance with WAVAW's commitments to better serving sex working communities following their 2018 apology to sex workers, WAVAW has actively been seeking feedback on how to improve supports for sex working survivors. WAVAW is currently in the final stages of an 8-week long community consultation project, which involved the distribution of a community survey as well as key informant interviews with both sex worker-lead community organizations and WAVAW staff. The primary objectives of this consultation process were to learn more about the context of feminist anti-violence and sex work, what needs sex workers might have from antiviolence organizations generally, and how WAVAW can best support these needs moving forward. The feedback shared with WAVAW was then categorized into key themes that were used to inform concrete recommendations for specialized service delivery. Such themes and their accompanying recommendations are discussed comprehensively in this report. Although a wide range of intersecting topics emerged throughout the consultations, the most commonly cited themes were:

1) The value of lived experience and subsequent necessity of collaborating with sex working communities when creating specialized services;

2) Stigma as a barrier to sex worker safety and the resulting need for safe, non-judgemental, and affirming support services; and

3) Trust and capacity-building as guiding principles, both of which ought to be well established prior to service development.

Each of these pieces provide critical insight into the ways in which WAVAW can make supports more inclusive, relevant, and accessible to sex working survivors. By acting in alignment with these stated goals, WAVAW can better embody principles of accountability while simultaneously bridging the gap between stated commitments to improvement and substantive, sex work-affirming actions.

The structure of this report is as follows. First, a brief background is provided to contexualize the topic of sex work within the feminist anti-violence movement. Next, project design and decision-making processes are outlined before consultation results and recommendations are presented. A discussion of key findings and concluding remarks are detailed in the subsequent sections.

Background

In both historical and contemporary contexts, sex work has been a highly contested topic within the feminist anti-violence sector. On one hand, significant efforts have been made to advance the rights of sex workers, with many feminist organizations actively working to create spaces that are inclusive, affirming, and empowering for sex working communities. However, many abolitionist-leaning organizations continue to operate under the assumption that sex work is inherently violent, despite the fact that sex workers themselves have routinely called the validity of this claim into question. This assumption is a product of white, middle class feminism, which often lends itself to the non-profit sector.

As discussed extensively in the pre-research report for this project, WAVAW's previous organizational stance on sex work was, in part, a product of this exclusionary iteration of "feminism" that wrongfully conflated sex work with trafficking. WAVAW has since acknowledged the harm this stance caused and has been working to ensure that their updated decriminalization stance is reflected across all organizational operations. A critical aspect of this repair work entails restisting anti-sex work bias in the feminist anti-violence sector and centering the perspectives of folks with lived experience in sex work.

The value lived experience brings to community organizing can be illustrated through the following local sex worker-lead initiaitves:

B.C. Bad Date and Aggressor and Reporting (BC BDAR) Project

The BC BDAR Project is a sex worker-lead safety initiative aimed at creating a province-wide database of bad date reports. It is designed to provide sex workers with the opportunity to "report violent incidents or safety concerns to peers and/or outreach workers" (*BC BDAR*) without the risk of criminalization or surveillance by law enforcement. It also acts as an added layer of workplace protection by providing sex workers with important background information on potential clients. The project is currently in its'community consultation phase, and is actively seeking input from sex workers to determine how the database can be co-created with sex workers in accordance with their needs and expertise.

Canada v. Bedford

Canada v. Bedford is a 2013 supreme court case where three discriminatory provisions of the Criminal Code that criminalized sex work were deemed unconstituional and subsequently struck down.This monumental supreme court victory can be attributed to the legal advocacy conducted by sex working communities, namely through organizations such as Pivot Legal Society,

Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence and PACE Society, all of whom intervened in the case.

Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van

Emerging from a partnership between Pace Society and WISH Drop-In Centre Society, the MAP Van offers mobile outreach services to street-based sex workers every afternoon and evening. Supports provided include "snacks, hot and cold beverages, harm reduction supplies, referrals and support, clothing, bad date reporting and basic first aid supplies" ("Mobile Access Project(Map Van)"), all of which aim to foster a safer working environment for street-based sex workers. Similar to the previous initaitves, this project is run primarily by folks with lived experience in sex work.

Not only do these examples provide a glimpse into existing sex work-affirming initiatives within the anti-violence sector, they also reveal sustainable frameworks for engaging with sex working communities when it comes to achieving a particular advocacy goal. Such strategies for meaningful engagement are important to consider as WAVAW prepares for an additional round of community consultation following the implementation of this report's recommendations.[1]

Project Design and Decision-Making Processes

This project employs a qualitative approach to understanding the feedback shared with WAVAW during community consultations. A qualitative framework is helpful for this purpose as it is best able to capture nuances within the anecdotes, lived experiences, and insightful ideas provided by the community, many of which may be lost in a purely quantitative framework.[2]

As such, the initial round of consultation for this project involved the distribution of two short surveys[3] to obtain a big-picture summary of WAVAW's current relationship with sex working communities. The first survey was circulated among WAVAW staff via email, and asked respondents to identify gaps in service delivery for sex workers as well as provide suggestions for improvements. The second survey was distributed to the greater community through social media posts that contained links to this landing page on WAVAW's website.[4] The community

[1] This project is considered to be a preliminary environmental scan; deeper community consultation is required to discuss the specifics of a proposed sex worker-affirming initiaitve.

[2] A quantitative framework is also impractical for this project due to the challenges associated with obtaining a statistically representative sample, especially given the project's short 8-week timeframe.

[3] For specific survey questions, see here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-g0FaykrqBly31CBQxbZqyn7HhC6NDaK2Bpw_1-O878/edit?usp=sharing

[4] This page includes a link to the community survey, a brief background on this project, and a link to the pre-research report. It will eventually include a high-level summary of this report's findings.

survey asked folks what type of supports sex working survivors of violence would like to see from WAVAW and was divided into two subsections based on whether or not the respondent had accessed services at WAVAW. Note that for this survey, priority was given to respondents who disclosed lived experience in sex work.

Following the distribution of these surveys, key informant interviews were conducted with six WAVAW staff members and four representatives of local sex worker-lead organizations to delve deeper into the specific ways that WAVAW can better serve sex working communities.[5] Similar to the surveys, WAVAW staff and community representatives were provided with slightly different sets of interview questions to gauge both internal and external perspectives on the future of sex worker-affirming supports.[6] These 45-minute interviews took place on zoom over the span of two weeks, many of which were recorded (with consent) to assure accuracy of information in interview transcripts.[7] As an added transparency measure, interview transcripts were also emailed to participants for review.

After compiling and reviewing the feedback received from each of these consultation pieces, seven emerging themes and their component parts were identified. The relevancy of these themes was then determined by examining both the frequency with which the particular theme was mentioned as well as the number of participants that mentioned it. Based on this information, a list of concrete recommendations that WAVAW can implement to meet the needs of sex working communities was created. Both the themes and their accompanying recommendations are discussed at length in the following sections.

Note: To protect the confidentiality of interview participants, names are anonymized in this report using numbers. However, if deemed necessary, the positions of WAVAW staff may occasionally be identified in accordance with consent received during the interview process.

Results (*see summary of themes in Appendix)*

Lived Experience

[5] Unfortunately, time constraints inhibited WAVAW from meeting with more community representatives during the interview process. This is why there is a disparity between the number of staff and community interviews.

[6] Interview questions for WAVAW staff can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fcs1VEMjb15wvypiy2504lip_d0lFoeiSPRkqo3G4lk/edit?usp=sharing

Interview questions for sex worker-lead community organizations can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mUFreGON3TiPb_s04T36xdYIhuuugj7rEPan4mDwRmM/edit

[7] Recorded interviews will be deleted as of August 11, 2022.

The value lived experience brings to service delivery was one of the most frequently cited themes among survey survey and interview participants. In particular, the importance of collaborating with sex workers and sex worker-lead organizations when creating specialized supports was mentioned 85 times, designating it the third most-discussed topic among all seven themes. The necessity of meaningful collaboration was also mentioned explicitly by 95% of participants.

The Need for By/For Supports

By/for supports were routinely referred to by interview participants and survey respondents as an essential component of sex work-affirming anti-violence services. Since sex workers are undoubtedly experts in their respective professions and have extensive wisdom when it comes to the nuances of the industry and the specific needs of sex working communities, it is imperative that specialized supports are sex worker-lead. This rationale aligns with existing programs at WAVAW such as Meaningful Inclusion and Indigenous supports, both of which are considered by/for initiatives. Otherwise, sex working survivors may feel disconnected from the supports they are accessing, especially if non-sex working service providers are unable to relate to and effectively validate their lived experiences. Many sex workers have reported this disconnect as a major barrier to service accessibility. For instance, a representative from Living in Community (LIC) states that sex workers who seek support from anti-violence organizations are often pressured by abolitionist-leaning service providers to leave the industry. Rather than focusing on the violence a sex worker may have experienced either on or off the job, these service providers disproportionately fixate on the survivor's identity as a sex worker, making it appear as if the violence sex workers experience is a product of the industry as opposed to the oppressive societal structures that criminalize sex work. This sentiment was echoed by Respondent 2 of the Community Sex Work Survey, who claimed that their decision to disclose lived experience in sex work to a member of WAVAW's counselling team in 2016 was met with judgement and critisism

Sex Worker Representation in Staff, Board, and Volunteers

To ensure that by/for services are implemented effectively, many participants expressed the need for sex worker representation at all organizational levels, including WAVAW staff, board, and volunteers. Respondent 3 of the Sex Work Community Survey says:

"Personally, I would be more inclined to access services at WAVAW if I knew for sure there was some sex work representation in the staff or a specific outreach/inreach program run for/by other SWs. Nothing can beat lived experience when it comes to trauma informed support for marginalized communities."

This view was also reiterated in relation to the expressed need for staff representation of trans sex workers, especially given the diversity of lived experience in sex work. Such diversity of

lived experience needs to be accounted for to ensure that WAVAW is not inadvertently favouring the perspective of one sex working community at the expense of others.

Nevertheless, while creating organizational space for sex worker community representatives is an unquestionable priority, several WAVAW staff members have also raised important points about the potential retraumatization sex working staff members may experience as they engage in anti-violence work. In acknowledgement of this reality, further capacity-building around the creation of a safe workspace for sex working staff (including the compilation of important self care resources) is crucial.

Collaborate With Sex Workers and Sex Worker-Lead Organizations

Similarly, many participants emphasized the importance of seeking direct guidance from sex worker-lead community organizations and sex workers themselves as WAVAW explores options for specialized service delivery. Since folks with lived experience are at the frontlines of advocacy efforts and service provision, they have inside knowledge into the gaps of existing sex worker supports. By working in collaboration with such individuals and organizations, WAVAW can determine if they are able to provide support in filling these identified gaps. Failing to consult with folks engaged in sex work prior to creating specialized supports might ultimately result in irrelevant services that do not serve the best interests of sex working communities.

However, when forming these partnerships, WAVAW's Manager of Social Change warns that WAVAW must be cognizant of funding structures to ensure that WAVAW does not find themselves in a competitive space for funding with sex worker organizations. Given the troubling reality that funding for sex worker organizations is already relatively miniscule, WAVAW ought to seek funding from streams that won't compromise those allocated to sex worker organizations.

Stigma

Comparable to lived experience, sex work stigma can be considered one of the overaching themes of this project. In fact, the ways in which stigma hinders sex workers' access to safe, non-judgemental, and affirming supports was this project's most relevant sub-theme by a substantial margin. Not only was it mentioned a total of 95 times but was referred to by 100% of participants.

Harm Caused by Abolitionism

*"*We need to alleviate the burden of shame sex workers experience; we need to erradicate shame in order to survive capitalism."

- WAVAW Counsellor

According to survey and interview participants, abolitionism, particulary on behalf of feminist anti-violence organizations, has harmed sex working commuities in a myriad of ways. Abolitionist sentiment contributes to the violence sex workers experience and is rooted in patriarchal assumptions about sex workers agency, or lack thereof. A representative from WISH labels such anti-sex work sentiment as "victim blaming in its strangest form" given its tendency to wrongfully define the individuality of sex workers in accordance with a paternalistic social script that conflates sex work and violence. This social script fuels the work of anti-trafficking campaigns, many of which have significant influence on sex work policy. Subsequently, sex work policy rarely maintains a clear distinction between sex work and trafficking, making it increasingly difficult for sex workers to work safely due to constant surveillance and criminalization. As representative from Peers Victoria asserts, this pattern creates a domino effect where the criminalization of sex work leads to societal stigma, which, in turn, compromises sex workers' access to support services.

Stigma Embedded in Laws/Law Enforcement

Both survey and interview participants regularly alluded to the role stigma plays in creating harmful sex work laws. Referring to discriminatory laws such as Bill C-36, participants spoke of the negative outcomes criminalization has on sex working communities. Instead of focusing on improving labour conditions for sex workers, such laws "impede sex workers from legally taking preacuations to protect themselves" (Swan Representative), thus creating a precarious work environment characterized by heightened risks of violence. This troubling legal context can be summed up in a quote by a representative from WISH, who states that "even 'legalizing' sex work is state sanctioned oppression; we need laws against sexual exploitation and rape, not laws against sex work."

Similar to the laws themselves, stigma also trickles down into law enforcement. As a result, sex workers do not have a good relationship with police and often experience judgement, overpolicing, and even violence from officers while on and off the job despite the VPD's non-enforcement policy around sex work. This reality is important for WAVAW to keep in mind given that victim services, as it currently stands, predominantly involves navigating the criminal justice system. Many sex workers do not feel comfortable interacting with the criminal justice system and may prefer alternative avenues to justice. Although WAVAW does support survivors who choose to seek justice outside of the criminal justice system, victim services are publicly advertised as involving police and/or courts, which may deter sex workers from accessing supports.

The Need for Safe, Non-Judgemental, and Affirming Supports

To mitigate the detrimental impacts of stigma, many folks emphasized the necessity of safe, non-judgemental, and affirming supports for sex working survivors. According to frontline staff at WAVAW, many sex working survivors who are currently accessing supports do not feel comfortable disclosing lived experience in sex work until rapport with service providers is established over a long period of time. This reluctance to disclose one's status as a sex worker likely comes down to trust, which has been compromised in the past by many anti-violence organizations including WAVAW. A WAVAW staff member recalls two particular concerns voiced by sex working survivors who found previous service delivery at WAVAW to be exclusionary. First, staff visiblity tensed up when survivors talked about experience in sex work, making them "feel as if they could not be their full selves" (WAVAW staff representative) in front of service providers. Second, many survivors could sense the underlying values staff held when it came to sex work at the time, most of which included the assumption that all folks who disclosed experience in sex work needed help exiting the industry.

Although WAVAW has since updated their stance on sex work, a significant amount of repair work still needs to be done in order to cultivate a trusting space that is truly sex work-positive. This trusting space ideally would involve an increased awareness on behalf of staff, board members, and volunteers about the reality of sex work criminalization and how it relates to service provison, an opportunity for survivors to safely critique the anti-violence sector and provide feedback on the effectiveness of existing services, an acknowledgement of the diversity of lived experience in sex work, and judgement-free, sex worker-informed supports.

Accessibility

Although somewhat less than lived experience and stigma, accessibility has also proven to be a prevalent theme among survey and interview participants. The most frequently mentioned accessibility barrier for sex working survivors was an outreach weakness, which was stated 30 times by 43% of participants.

Accessibility for Downtown Eastside Residents

Concerns have been raised over the accessibility of anti-violence services for street-based sex workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Although sex workers living in tent cities have been experiencing elevated levels of harassment since the onset of the pandemic, few efforts have been made to ensure they are receiving adequate supports. A representative of the victim services team at WAVAW states that the proximity of WAVAW's office from the Downtown Eastside acts as a barrier to service accessibility since most sex workers operating out of the Downtown Eastside likely prefer to access supports within their immediate community. As such, WAVAW ought to build the capacity to deliver in-community services, especially given the barriers many folks face when it comes to transportation. In doing so, WAVAW can collaborate

with local shelters to create updated safety protocols that better meet the needs of the community. Such collaborations will subsequently promote awareness about the services WAVAW offers, ideally alleviating the gaps in outreach mentioned by Respondent 3 of the Community Survey:

"Most people know about Vancouver Rape Relief and their transphobic/abolitionist policies. I've been working in the DTES for over 2 years now, and I have only recently heard about what you do. There's definitely a communication/marketing/outreach weakness."

Linguistic and Geographic Barriers

A less frequently discussed yet substantial barrier many sex workers face when it comes to accessing support services is language. Although there is a significant community of non-english speaking sex workers in Vancouver, many local organizations lack the language capacity to support them. According to a representative from Swan, this language inaccesibility paired with immigration-related concerns deters many non-english speaking sex workers from seeking out support. Since migrant sex workers experience multilayered criminalization due to their status as migrants and sex workers, there is an urgency to increase support service accessibility for these communities.

The Need for Improved Outreach

To unpack the root causes and impacts of outreach-related challenges at WAVAW, one may turn to organizational infrastructure. Many participants suggested that since WAVAW is not publicly advertised and perceived as a sex worker-serving organization, sex working communities are likely unfamiliar or less inclined to seek out supports. This is likely reflected in the low volume of bad date reports WAVAW receives despite the fact that WAVAW is one of the only organizations in BC that has the infrastructure to provide 24-hour access to bad date reporting. Furthermore, as WAVAW's Manager of Social Change asserts, the label of "Rape Crisis Centre" in WAVAW's official name may dissuade some folks from calling the crisis line to fill a bad date report as they may assume that its purpose is only to support those who require immediate assistance following a sexual assault. This issue of language speaks to the importance of reframing both the purpose of the crisis line and who it serves.

Meanwhile, from a frontline staff perspective, it is often increasingly difficult to maintain contact with sex working survivors through conventional means such as phone or email. Once survivors have accessed their initial appointments whether it be counseling or hospital accompaniments, follow-ups are typically a challenge, especially if the survivor is experiencing homelessness. One way around this may be to work directly with shelters and supportive housing organizations to better maintain community connections while simultaneously learning how to better provide supports rooted in harm-reduction.

Feminism and Anti-Violence

The relationship between sex working communities and the feminist anti-violence sector has been highly contested, with survey and interview participants revealing the problematic ways in which certain organizations identifying with the label "anti-violence" are, at times, the ones perpetrating the most harm to sex workers. When breaking this theme into its component parts, the need for feminist anti-violence to conceptualize sex work through a labour rights framework was the commonly cited topic as it was mentioned 68 times by 43% of participants. However, despite being mentioned slightly less frequently, the conflation between sex work and trafficking that often occurs within feminist anti-violence was referred to by 62% of participants.

Conflation Between Sex Work and Trafficking

The conflation between sex work and trafficking has been an unfortunately common practice within the feminist anti-violence sector despite the devastating implications it wields for the safety and agency of sex workers. To contextualize this conflation, a representative from Swan identifies three primary groups within the anti-violence sector:

a) SWERF Organizations: organizations that generate the most harm given their explicitly anti-sex work stance, which typically conflates sex work and violence.

b) Fence-Sitter Organizations: organizations that prefer to not to be involved in discussions on sex work and 'remain neutral' despite the fact that this, in itself, is a stance.

c) Organizations Willing to Work Towards Inclusivity: organizations committed to building relationships with and advocating for sex workers.

While substantial efforts need to be made to end the exclusionary and often violent campaigns SWERF organizations are leading, fence-sitter organizations require comparable attention given their precarious stance. Considerable work needs to be done to ensure that these organizations do not follow in the footsteps of SWERF organizations and latch onto the problematic notion that sex work and trafficking are one and the same.

Likewise, feminist anti-violence needs to unpack the root causes of violence to truly understand why conflating sex work and trafficking is so damaging to sex workers. Within the contemporary context of criminalization, the structures and norms governing sex work make working conditions more dangerous than they would be in a decriminalized environment. These conditions can be characterized by high levels of police brutality, a lack of cultural supports, sex work exclusion campaigns, and stigma, all of which contribute to the violence sex workers experience. As such, violence is not a function of sex work itself but rather, the patriarchal

systems that degrade and victimize sex workers under the guise of 'morality'. Attributing violence to sex work itself removes responsibility from perpetrators of violence and obscures the role power dynamics play in creating the conditions for such violence.

Trauma and Trust

In light of the harm the feminist anti-violence sector has caused to sex working communities, many sex working survivors are reluctant to seek support from anti-violence organizations. Since trust has routinely been compromised, claims to sex worker inclusivity on behalf of anti-violence are no longer enough. According to a representative from Living in Community, there is a general sense among sex workers that feminist anti-violence is not designed for them. This can, in part, explain why WAVAW does not receive many bad date reports on the crisis line. It also speaks to the necessity of establishing trust with sex working communities prior to offering specialized services.

Labour Rights Framework

"At the end of the day, sex workers have the right to work violence free. A feminist approach involves dismantling the oppressive structures that disallow healthy lives regardless of profession."

- WISH Representative

A critical way for feminist anti-violence organizations to build trust with sex working communties is to view sex work through a labour rights lens. A representative from WISH insightfully links the importance of this lens to inconsistencies in societal narratives about sex. On one hand, reproductive rights are centered upon the right to choose, meaning that folks are free to safely engage in sexual activities as they please since they have the bodily autonomy to do so. However, once exchanging money is added to the equation, the perspective instantly changes as folks no longer consider sex to be a lifestyle choice. This view is perplexing as it overlooks sex workers' right to an income, a right that is widely advocated for in most other occupations. As a counselor at WAVAW suggests, the focus then becomes the 'sex' and not the 'work', a perspective which is ultimately reductive and increases stigma.

In moving beyond this view, a discussion on labour conditions that prompts folks to reflect on their own workplace protections will ideally resonate and inspire advocacy for sex workers' rights. This area of advocacy is particularly important as stigma bars sex worker access to conventional labour supports such as benefits, safety procedures, anti-harassment policies, unions and simply workplace community. Additionally, a victim services worker at WAVAW emphasizes the value of a strength-based approach, where the strengths folks bring to their work are recognized and celebrated. This approach helps destigmatize the profession while simultaenously empowering sex workers.

Intersectionality

Despite being the least discussed theme in this project overall, an intersectional lens provides important insight into the diversity of lived experience in sex work and how it relates to healing supports. Specifically, the feedback provided by survey and interview participants revealed the manner in which the fight for sex worker's rights is directly linked to calls for improved access to housing, food, healthcare, and safe supply. This need for better access to these basic needs was mentioned 40 times by 48% of participants.

Racism

Utilizing a race-based framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of the needs migrant and Indigenous sex workers may have. As previously mentioned in the Accessibility section of this report, many immigrant sex workers face criminalization due to their work and status as a migrant, which compromises their ability to safely access support services. Similarly, the ongoing structure of settler colonialism that hypersexualizes and dehumanizes Indigenous women bleeds into the sex work industry, where Indigenous sex workers experience disproportionate levels of violence compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Such layered experiences are not captured in a 'one size fits all' framework to understanding sex work. Therefore, it is crucial that a race-based approach is employed when creating safe and culturally informed spaces for both migrant and Indigenous sex workers.

Access to Housing, Food, Healthcare, and Safe Supply

"Without basic needs met, it is hard to access healing supports."

- Peers Victoria Representative

Survey and interview participants were in full agreement with the notion that access to basic needs such as housing, food, healthcare, and safe supply increases safety among sex working communities. Currently, many sex workers do not access medical services unless they are experiencing a severe emergency due to the discrimination they face at the hands of healthcare providers. For instance, a representative at Swan states that police are routinely called on sex workers who access services at hospitals due to the racist assumptions about organized crime/trafficking that healthcare staff hold. Incidents like these dissuade sex workers from accessing support services, which can be especially troubling for sex workers struggling with chronic health conditions or substance use.

Moreover, access to secure housing food, and safe supply provides an added layer of protection for survival and street-based sex workers by significantly reducing reliance on potentially

dangerous clients. This, in turn, reduces the systemic vulnerability and resulting violence many sex workers experience, thus improving their overall livelihoods.

Additional Forms of Identity-Based Oppression

As WAVAW begins to explore options for specialized service delivery, it is important that the lived experiences of sex workers from diverse backgrounds, including sex workers with compunding levels of oppression, are meaningfully taken into account. Mainstream discussions about sex work often focus disproportionately on the experiences of cis women sex workers at the expense of Trans, Two Spirit, and gender diverse, many of whom also have relevant lived experience in sex work. Similarly, more emphasis must be placed on understanding the varying degrees of privilege sex workers hold when it comes to identity markers such as ability, class, age, and sexuality.

Guiding Principles

In discussing how WAVAW can approach the creation of specialized supports for sex working survivors, both survey and interview participants alluded to three key guiding principles for WAVAW to abide by. Trust and capacity-building were the most favoured principles out of the three identified and they were mentioned 90 times by 71% of participants.

Accountability and Transparency

"WAVAW's apology was encouraging but [I'm] happy see this community consultation project happening as it is in the missing piece.

- Living in Community Representative

Accountability and transparency are essential guiding principles for the repair work WAVAW is currently undertaking, as they allow WAVAW to be more intentional about goals for proposed supports. Part of this process involves unpacking internalized biases and paying closer attention to how WAVAW shows up in community. This is important in order for WAVAW to effectively differentiate themselves from SWERF organizations within the anti-violence sector and uphold commitments to sex working communities as outlined in the 2018 apology.

Avoiding Paternalism

"We all need a say in what happens with our bodies, it doesn't matter what we do for work or what role we have in our life; we need to identify and challenge the things that are getting in the way of autonomy and agency."

- WAVAW Executive Director

A key component of creating a safe space for sex working survivors is ensuring that they are comfortable voicing their self-identified needs should they choose to do so. Often times, non-sex working folks in the anti-violence sector will assume they know what is best for sex workers despite lacking lived experience in the industry. This becomes highly problematic when these voices create a power imbalance by dominating or co-opting the voices of sex workers, many of whom struggle to get a seat at the table when it comes to decision-making processes. As such, it is important that any framework for understanding the needs of sex working communities is non-paternalistic and values lived experience.

Trust and Capacity-Building

"Anti-oppression work is active! This means asking yourself questions and critically examining policy and directions. Otherwise it's all just words and no change."

- WISH Representative

Trust and capacity building are absolutely vital in preparing for the creation of future sex worker initiaitves at WAVAW. While this process of trust and capacity building will undoubtedly not occur overnight, it is crucial that WAVAW builds a strong foundation both internally among staff and externally with community partners. From an internal perspective, space must be carved out for staff to openly discuss sex work as a team so that any residual biases are shifted in favour of more nuanced understandings of sex work. To do this, ongoing organization-wide training and workshops can be provided to staff, volunteers, and board members as a required component of professional development. Likewise, from an external standpoint, WAVAW can continue to strengthen relationships with sex working communities and organizations through deeper consultations and dialogue, increased avenues for community feedback, and improved community outreach.

Next Steps

In terms of next steps, survey and interview participants brought a wide range of creative ideas to the table, all of which hold immense value as WAVAW explores directions for future supports. The two most popular ideas were specialized programming (mentioned 63 times by 50% of participants) and advocacy initiatives (mentioned 52 times by 43% of participants), however, all are summarized in the tables below:

Specialized Programming
● Partner with sex worker-lead organizations to co-create a specialized work safety program for sex workers. This educational program would consist of workshops on topics related to workplace rights, mental health & wellness, financial literacy, and

employment skills.

- Establish long-term supports (1 year +) for folks exiting the sex work industry.
- Facilitate a sex worker peace circle.
- Provide 24-hour wrap around services for sex workers.
- Run a drop-in based support group where sex working survivors are able to come together and discuss their work in a safe environment. The ultimate goal of this program is to build community among sex workers.
- Alongside sex working survivors, co-create a client rights form for any new sex worker-informed program. This form should communicate WAVAW's intentions and would ideally be distributed to folks upon intake.
- Create a novel counseling program for sex working survivors, with specialized counselors for Indigenous sex workers and Trans sex workers. If there is overlap between eligibility for particular counseling streams, allow survivors to self-select into whichever program they feel is best.

Advocacy Initiatives

- Conduct legal advocacy to support decriminalization and law reform. This can be done by writing to MPs, testifying in a review process on sex work laws,
- Engage in sex work-based advocacy within feminist anti-violence circles, directing efforts toward "fence-sitter organizations" (see Feminism and Anti-Violence section of this report) who have yet to take a stance on sex work.
- Support existing advocacy initiatives lead by sex worker-serving organizations, many of whom are currently struggling to balance advocacy work with the provision of critical frontline support services.
- Advocate for clearer distinctions between sex work and trafficking at a policy level.
- WAVAW can participate local and large scale conferences to share the commitments they have made to better serving sex working survivors.
- Conduct advocacy related to healthcare access, including efforts to create a specialized sex worker clinic similar to that of Peers Victoria (see: https://www.safersexwork.ca/core-services/#dropin)

- Advocate for sex workers' labour rights, including better workplace safety measures such as ani-harassment policies.

Expanding Existing Supports

- Expand the hours existing services are available for to accommodate sex workers who may be working shifts at night or in the early morning hours.
- Update service intake forms, providing survivors with the opportunity to disclose lived experience in sex work if they choose to do so.
- Increase language capacity to better serve non-english sex workers.
- Expand upon the Transformative Justice Program to incorporate the interests of sex working communities.
- Build staff competency around supporting sex working survivors in an affirming way.
- Ensure that access to counselling and victim services are available to sex working survivors on a long-term basis (i.e. if folks experience violence on the job on multiple occassions, they are easily able to re-vist an old file with WAVAW rather than ending support access after the first intake).
- More training on bad rate reporting via crisis line.

Updating Strategic Directions

- Explicit statement of sex worker inclusivity within WAVAW's mandate and constitution.
- Expand overall internal inclusivity and accessibility efforts.
- Build internal training on sex work into WAVAW's organizational priorities.
- Conduct reviews to ensure that no organizational policies are harmful to sex workers.

- Review membership on the board to ensure that sex workers are being represented. Determine strategies to make board positions more accessible to sex workers.

Other

- A sex work advisory committee consisting of sex work serving organizations and sex working communities that meets monthly to discuss particular program and advocacy goals.
- Provide public educational resources for individuals, groups, and organizations interested in learning more about sex work. These resources can be made available online via social media and organizational website and through the distribution of physical pamphlets, booklets, and wallet cards.
- In collaboration with local sex worker-lead organizations, create a living document dedicated to identifying referral resources for sex workers that are safe and accessible. This will allow trust to be established in community organizations while ideally preventing sex workers from having a poor experience with a service provider. This document would be similar to WAVAW's existing safe referral guide but would be created with external partners rather than internally.
- Conduct deeper consultation with sex working communities to receieve on specific program and advocacy initiatives.
- Create a sex worker caucus or coalition similar to the Transformative Justice coalition.
- Train staff, board, and volunteers through Living in Community's curriculum.
- Become more involved in community organizing in the DTES.
- Direct outreach efforts to sex workers experiencing homelessness.
- Since many students go into sex work to pay for expensive schooling, collaborating with sexual assault service centres at post-secondary instituions (e.g. UBC SASC) may be beneficial.
- Form partnerships with Indigenous elders.

Recommendations

Lived Experience

1. Ensure that specialized support services for sex workers at WAVAW are designed and provided solely by folks with current or former lived experience in sex work.

2. Evaluate and update hiring practices to provide substantive opportunities for sex workers to join WAVAW as staff, board members, and volunteers.

3. Strengthen relationships with local sex worker-lead organizations; this may look like lending resources to existing initiatives such as the drop-in program at WISH, co-creating a novel program, or simply implementing the recommendations outlined in reports by sex worker-lead organizations (e.g. see "We Belong" report by Peers Victoria here).

Stigma

4. Conduct a scan of community partners to confirm that WAVAW has not maintained any ties with abolitionist-leaning organizations. Use WAVAW's prominent platform within the anti-violence sector to educate folks about the harm associated with abolitionism.

5. Through the Transformative Justice Project, explore sex work-affirming avenues for justice outside the criminal justice system. Expand victim services to incorporate these alternative paths to justice and ensure all supports are easily accessible by sex workers.

6. Facilitate ongoing training for WAVAW staff, board, and volunteers on a range of topics related to sex work, such as: an overview of sex work as it relates to the feminist anti-violence sector (including WAVAW's history with sex workers), unpacking internalized biases surrounding sex work, and increasing knowledge of safety resources for sex working survivors.

Accessibility

7. In collaboration with local sex worker-lead organizations, build organizational capacity to deliver additional in-community services to sex working survivors located in the Downtown Eastside.

8. Increase language capacity at WAVAW by hiring multilingual frontline staff who can effectively communicate with and support non-english speaking sex workers.

9. Ensure that WAVAW's public rebranding better reflects WAVAW's commitment to becoming an outwardly sex worker-serving organization.

Feminism and Anti-Violence

10. Effectively communicate the distinction between sex work and trafficking in a way that is sex work-affirming and distinguishes WAVAW from SWERF organizations.

11. Engage in meaingful trust-building with sex working communities prior to creating specialized services.

12. Leverage organizational capacity to better advocate for improved workplace conditions for sex workers. (e.g. this could look like facilitating workplace safety & employment skills workshops for sex workers or even government lobbying (particularly around sex work unionization))

Intersectionality

13. Create safe, language-accessible, and culturally-informed supports for migrant and Indigenous sex workers.

14. Conduct advocacy work in relation to healthcare access, housing justice, food security, and distribution of safe supply, all of which have a direct impact on the livelihoods of sex workers.

15. When receiving community input on future sex work-affirming services, ensure equitable opportunities for participation in consultations so that sex workers with diverse lived experience are effectively represented.

Guiding Principles

16. Conduct a follow-up consultation with sex working communities as WAVAW determines next steps for this project. This will allow WAVAW to be transparent about intentions for future service delivery while simultaneously remaining accountable to sex workers by providing avenues for continuous feedback.

17. When providing frontline support, create a safe and trauma-informed space for sex working survivors to self-identify their own needs. Respect the agency of sex working survivors by validating these needs and avoiding paternalistic assumptions about their lived experiences.

18. Adopting a similar approach to that of WAVAW's Trans Inclusion work, dedicate at least a full year to trust and capacity-building to ensure that the resulting support services are fully developed and sustainable in the long-term.

Next Steps

19. In collaboration with sex workers, co-create a specialized support program designed solely for sex working survivors. This may include but is not limited to 24 hour wrap-around services, specialized counseling (likely separate programs for folks with diverse lived experience such as Indigenous sex workers, current sex workers, and folks leaving the industry), and affirming support groups.

20. Allocate funding and resources (i.e. time, space, social influence, media contacts, etc.) to support existing sex worker advocacy efforts. Sex worker-lead organizations have identified several areas of advocacy that require support, including legal advocacy in support of decriminalization and medical advocacy in hopes of establishing a sex worker clinic.

21. Establish a sex worker advisory committee consisting of representatives from sex work serving organizations and sex working communities to direct WAVAW in the implementation of specialized supports.

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Appendix

Lived Experience	*Stigma*	*Accessibility*	*Feminism and Anti-Violence*	*Intersectionality*	*Guiding Principles*	*Next Steps*
By/for supports Staff/board/volunteer representation Collaborate with sex workers/sex worker lead organizations	Harm caused by abolitionism Stigma in laws & law enforcement Need for safe, non-judgemental,and affirming supports	Accessibility for DTES residents Linguistic and geographic barriers Need for better outreach	Conflation between sex work and trafficking Trauma and trust Labour rights framework	Racism Access to housing, food, healthcare, and safe supply Additional forms of identity based oppression	Accountability and transparency Avoiding paternalism Trust and capacity building	Specialized programing Advocacy initiatives Expanding existing services Updating strategic directions Other

Table 1: Summary of Themes

Presentation slides with figures:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1iTBQtqgcChxew9rCTvbwc6iPVX3qy6wS68-AC38wFVA/edit?usp=sharing