



Media Release:
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Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association
Vixen Collective (Victoria's peer only sex worker organisation)



Sex Workers Alarmed by Government Funding Decision

Vixen Collective (Victoria's peer only sex worker organisation) and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association are deeply concerned at the Andrew's Labor Government's misguided decision to grant \$300,000 of funding to the organisation 'Project Respect' to work with "sex workers and victims of trafficking".

This ill informed decision to fund a service that will be largely inaccessible to most sex workers is squandering the precious few resources that exist to address violence against sex workers. Of greater concern is the impact this will have in furthering stigma and discrimination against sex workers.

There is a continuing history of sex worker protests against Project Respect in Australia, specifically because of its treatment of sex workers, its policies, and support of the 'Swedish' or 'Nordic' Model. Project Respect is an organisation that has repeatedly called for policies and law that are recognised as key drivers of violence towards sex workers.

Project Respect actively lobbies for the 'Swedish Model' of sex work criminalisation – a regulatory model that specifically discriminates against and endangers both sex workers and victims of human trafficking. In supporting the 'Swedish Model' Project Respect support laws that have resulted in a documented increase of stigma against sex workers, as measured by the Swedish Governments own reports among many others.

Laws such as the 'Swedish' or 'Nordic' Model are often promoted as "protecting" sex workers, yet Amnesty Intl has found:

"..evidence of human rights abuses of people who sell sex in Norway that are compounded by and in some cases, directly caused by the legal framework.."

The 'Swedish Model' criminalises consensual sexual activity and exacerbates the discriminatory view of sex work as immoral and criminal, with sex workers being to "blame" for any harm, punishment or judgment we incur in the course of our work.

In practice these laws *"..regularly force sex workers to operate covertly and/or prohibit actions that sex workers take to manage their safety and, in doing so, violate sex workers' human rights, including their rights to security of person, housing and health."*

The 'Swedish Model' exposes sex workers to high levels of discrimination and risk of violence due to legislated discrimination in accessing housing, laws that prohibit sex workers from working together for safety, as well as laws that prevent sex workers from hiring third party support like security. Further, our ability to report crimes is compromised, which impacts on violence against sex workers. By contrast when sex work is decriminalised, sex workers are more willing to report crime and are better able to collaborate with law enforcement to identify perpetrators of violence and exploitation, including human trafficking.

Sex workers peer based programs and services are the most effective way to respond to violence, stigma and discrimination for our communities. Appropriate targeted support and care that is responsive to the lived realities for sex workers and respectful of self-determination and agency is the best way to address the needs of sex workers who have experienced violence or exploitation, including human trafficking. Judgmental projects that coerce sex workers to "rehabilitate" from sex work, invalidate individual experiences and needs, serve to increase stigma and discrimination against us.

"Project Respect only want to 'help' me if I want to stop working, they want to make me 'free' from sex work – I'd like to access services that can actually help me and be free from their opinions"

Alice, Victorian Brothel Based Sex Worker

The Victorian Government must support best practice and evidence based policy, laws and services. This means resourcing peer-based services and recognising the need for full decriminalisation of sex work. The United Nations, World Health Organisation (WHO), Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Human Rights Watch, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labor Organisation (ILO), Amnesty International and many others have recognised the importance of meaningful sex worker inclusion in developing and delivering effective, appropriate services for sex workers and for the crucial need for decriminalisation of sex work for the human rights, health and safety of sex workers - it's time for the Andrew's Labor Government to catch up.

For further media information/interviews, please contact:

Jane Green, Vixen Collective Spokesperson: 0420 887 845

Jules Kim, Scarlet Alliance: 0411 985 135