



Vixen Collective, Victoria's peer only sex worker organisation Media Release - Friday, 20th March 2020

Vixen Collective secures office at Victorian Trades Hall, calls for government support for Victorian sex workers during coronavirus

Founded in 2005, Vixen Collective has consistently campaigned for the rights, health and safety of Victorian sex workers for over fourteen years. Throughout this time Vixen Collective has remained without government funding, operating without an office, staffed by volunteers from our own community – often borrowing space and resources from other allied community organisations. We have been preparing to announce, that as part of a commitment to supporting the campaign to fully decriminalise sex work in Victoria, Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) has provided Vixen Collective with an office at VTHC. Obviously with the outbreak of coronavirus and public health guidance around social distancing, we are unlikely to be able to utilise this space as we had anticipated in the immediate future.

Sex workers as a workforce are primarily independent contractors and sole traders, as such we are particularly marginalised in terms of the impact of coronavirus. The sex industry itself has been in a state of 'contraction' for some time, with incomes for many workers falling over the last decade. The impact of coronavirus is already being felt by our community. We call on the Victorian Government to engage directly with the recognised representative peer organisations of our community and work with us to support sex workers in this time.

Vixen Collective is a peer only sex worker organisation – this means that our organisation is made up entirely of current and former sex workers. Peer based sex worker organisations do not allow the owners and operators of sex industry businesses or ancillary staff in the sex industry (people such as managers, receptionists, drivers and cleaners etc.) to participate. This is because we recognise that the interests of owners/operators of any business conflicts with the interests of workers, and as such organisations that operate to support the rights of workers should be workers only.

Peer-only services are recognised as the best practice model for service delivery to our community because peer-only services:

-)] Have a proven track record of success, including through the HIV response in Australia, reflected in HIV and STI rates amongst sex workers that are the same or lower than the general population
-)] Are recognised in academic research and in government policy - including peer education being listed as a "priority area" in the current National HIV Strategy, Victorian HIV Strategy, National STI Strategy, National Hepatitis B Strategy, National Hepatitis C Strategy, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBV & STI Strategy
-)] Have much higher levels of access to spaces often not able to be entered or easily navigated by those outside community
-)] Can engage in training, mentoring and passing on community-based knowledge and practice that those without lived experience of sex work cannot
-)] Are accountable to our own community in a way that services based outside our community are not

At this time, we recognise the past and present labour of Victorian sex workers who have worked with Vixen Collective in so many ways to support and advocate for our community.

We appreciate the many allied organisations and supporters who have assisted us in working towards this goal, who are too numerous to list and look forward to their continued support.

We thank Victorian Trades Hall Council, who recognise that supporting sex worker rights is an issue that centres around recognising sex work as work, and that the fight for labour rights of workers must include sex workers.

"We are proud to host Vixen Collective at Victorian Trades Hall, which has been the centre for progressive change in Victoria since 1856. Victorian Trades Hall Council recognises that sex work is real work and we stand in solidarity with sex workers in the campaign for the full decriminalisation of sex work." - Luke Hilakari, Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council

We encourage organisations or individuals interested or able to provide support during this time, to contact us via our email on vixencollectivemelbourne@gmail.com

For further media information/interviews, please contact:

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