



HIV COMMUNITY LINK

OPERATION NORTHERN SPOTLIGHT: It is important to make the distinction between sex work as a choice and human trafficking

Calgary, Alberta (October 20, 2016) – Shift Calgary and the Calgary Police Service are long-term partners in assisting victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. As a program of HIV Community Link, Shift Calgary supports sex workers regardless of intent to leave the sex industry. We believe that it is of utmost importance to make the distinction between sex work and the concepts of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and that actions like the recent Operation Northern Spotlight stings may increase the confusion around these terms. This has the potential to further disenfranchise sex workers in our communities.

Canada's Criminal Code clearly separates human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and prostitution. We must work together to implement strategies that effectively target traffickers and exploiters, while not increasing marginalization amongst those legally selling sexual services. "Shift is a safe place for sex workers to report violence, and if they choose to do so, we support them in reporting to the police and pressing charges. We are appreciative of the Calgary Police's community-based policing and their efforts to maintain the safety of all Calgarians. We also advocate for sex workers' human rights to work safely and be protected from discrimination and harassment," says Leslie Hill, Executive Director of HIV Community Link.

Most Shift clients and sex workers in Canada do have some degree of choice and do not identify as being exploited. The literature demonstrates that the degree of control a sex worker has over their work is strongly correlated with their safety and emotional well-being, and that sex workers are reluctant to seek police protection when they have experienced violence. Developing a respectful relationship is the first step in working with a population affected by stigma and discrimination.

Sex workers deserve the right to health and safety and to be treated with respect. Shift supports the decriminalization of prostitution as an evidence-based way of effectively reducing stigma, discrimination, and violence towards sex workers.

About Shift

Using a harm reduction and human rights based approach, Shift provides support, outreach, education and advocacy services for adults of all genders currently or formerly working in the sex industry, or who identify as victims of human trafficking or exploitation. The program also serves the greater Calgary community as a resource for vulnerable and at-risk populations, as well as social and health care service providers, law enforcement, researchers, advocacy groups, the media, and the general public.

About HIV Community Link

HIV Community Link's mission is to ensure wellness for individuals and communities affected by HIV and Hepatitis C through prevention, education and support. We work with individuals and communities using a harm reduction approach to reduce stigma and discrimination, empowering choices, engaging communities and ending transmission.

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