

**Brief to the Status of Women Committee
Study on Women's Economic Empowerment
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BCCEC Executive Director
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For thousands of years, the Coast Salish peoples have flourished in the land that is now Vancouver. We would like to acknowledge and honor the three great Nations whose land this is: Squamish Nation, Musqueam Nation and Tsleil-Waututh Nation

Who We Are

The **BC Coalition of Experiential Communities** are a consortium of sex workers who are activists mandated as a mechanism for the voices of experiential people to support the development of legislation and policies; peer driven programs and services; and work toward the elimination of oppressive systems and forces that create harm within the sex industry.

Relevance to this Study

Recent peer reviewed, published research into who sex workers in Canada are have revealed that most sex workers do not work full time and do not work for some one else but rather work independently. In any given month approximately 26,000 sex workers are actively working in Canada but when the research expanded the count of individual sex workers to a 2 year time frame, that number expands to 170,000. This number does not include on street sex workers, exotic dancers or adult film and content creators. If we extrapolate to include other sex work venues, the sex worker population becomes closer to 280,000....and if we add third parties it becomes 400,000...if we include families of sex workers....we are talking about over 700,000 people who are directly impacted by sex work policy and law...

83% of sex workers are women.

Stigma and assumptions about who sex workers are have informed government policies and actions for decades with disastrous results.

One area where these policies have had severe impacts on the lives and safety of relate to economic stability and empowerment.

A study of on street sex workers in Vancouver noted that 73% of that cohort identified as having a disability and collecting disability support payments.

Other polices, laws and actions by the government of Canada have created economic barriers for sex workers. For example, assertions of wide spread exploitation and sex trafficking in the sex industry lead to the creation of FINTRAC work to identify and interrupt payments for sex work as a means to combat human trafficking.

As an unforeseen consequence of this action, sex workers cannot use traditional banking and financial tools. Some places in Canada have gone as far as to deem sex workers pay the "proceeds of crime" and began to seize their accounts and savings.

It is our hope that while this committee studies the Economic Empowerment of Women, you will

remember the 170,000 full contact sex workers in Canada, the people who rely on them and their families. That you will take the time to reflect on the dangerous actions and policy of governments in the past and present and the precarious position into which you have placed sex working women in this country.

Any recommendations for action, policy, law or priorities should reflect an understanding of the broader impacts of those decisions.

It is the hope of sex workers and the BCCEC Membership that you will consider how difficult life has become for sex working women in Canada and will prioritize our economic empowerment.

Access to basic banking and financial business tools, livable disability support payment rates, livable social assistance rates, access to Victims Compensation and opportunities for our community to move beyond sex work if we wish to.

We have been told sex work is decriminalized in Canada. That we are free to access all the same rights, tools and opportunities as all other Canadians.

This is not true.

Financial exclusion is only one aspect of the tangled web of stigma and remnants of criminalization sex workers face across every government system and in every corner of society.

If you truly wish to economically empower women, working to give sex workers basic financial inclusion is a good place to start.

For more information on the Canadian Sex Worker population and the truth about who we are please see the Population Project – published and peer reviewed research data which can be found -

www.populationproject.ca

By Us, For Us – which highlights the level of disabilities among on street sex workers in Vancouver can be found here;

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

The following short report details a snap short of some of the issues faced by sex workers when trying to open bank accounts, obtain access to basic financial tools and to safely get paid for their work.

Financial Exclusion BCCEC – February, 2023

Background

For decades sex workers have been denied access to basic business financial tools based on anti sex work ideology describing sex workers as all victims of crime with control over our own finances. This ideology also promotes our exclusion from use of traditional financial tools in efforts to combat sex trafficking – human trafficking of persons into the sex industry.

Legislation at the federal level, FINTRAC, International laws like FOSTA/ SESTA, public policies of banks and credit unions, lack of understanding about the truth of sex workers lives and attacks on the

places we use for work have all combined to create an extremely biased and hostile environment for sex workers trying to conduct business.

Sex workers are forced to use “work around” techniques to collect their pay via third or fourth parties in order to receive payment for their work.

These methods allow sex workers to work and be paid but are unreliable, unsafe, unstable and in some cases a complete scam.

COVID-19

During the initial lock downs due to COVID 19, “in person” sex industry businesses were shut down. Exotic show lounges, massage parlors and the majority of independent operators were closed for months.

Exotic dancers bore the brunt of the impacts of these closures as the clubs were not only subject to sex industry “opening guidelines” but also were under the umbrella of food and drink establishment regulations.

This meant that while massage parlors were allowed to re-open during phase 2 alongside hair salons and spas, exotic show lounges were forced to remain closed until phase 3 and in some places phase 4 before re-opening.

Many sex workers from across our industry migrated into on-line sex work using platforms like Pornhub and Onlyfans to try to earn enough to feed and house their families.

These platforms allow sex workers to sell adult content behind a “paywall”. Clients will pay a monthly subscription to view the content. A sex worker can build up a clientele which will help to cover cost of living via these monthly subscription fees which are collected from the client by the platform and then paid to the sex workers when they “cash out”. Some workers will collect their pay everyday, some will collect monthly and some will save up their earnings inside the platform as if the platform is a savings account in a bank and only cash out when they reach their goals.

Of course these platforms charge a fee for these transactions and act as a third and sometimes a fourth party between sex workers and receiving payment from the clients. Many platforms will use an outside payment processor to conduct the transactions as a 4th party and as such the fees continue to get higher and higher. Not just one party between sex workers and pay, but two parties each profiting from every single transaction.

In an almost cruel twist, anti sex work groups decided now was the time to attack these platforms and means of income. Federal legislation, Provincial legislation and public communications campaigns fueled an undermining of the safety of these opportunities for sex workers to continue to work even in a “no contact” sex work environment.

The most well known of this targeting is against Pornhub, a Canadian company who when under scrutiny suddenly and without warning removed 3 million independently made film clips from their site. This displaced thousands of sex workers who suddenly lost their income and were forced to find other ways to make ends meet including engaging in full contact sex work.

Public opinion and understanding of these issues continues to be skewed and biased by the ongoing attacks on our livelihoods. Even now, new legislation is under way which will further target and undermine sex worker safety and ability to be paid for their work.

Sex work is decriminalized in Canada...at least that's what sex workers have been told.

We have been told that under the Nordic Model of criminalization we are legally allowed to work as sex workers. Adult film and exotic dancing have never been criminalized in Canada but these legal forms of sex work are also being targeted for removal from the internet and financial exclusion.

Sex workers from all areas of the industry are reporting increasing issues with on-line sex work including;

- Platforms seizing sex workers earnings and refusing to pay out wages for work already completed
- Banks seizing sex workers earnings or freezing accounts due to suspicions of trafficking
- Sex buyers canceling payments.
- “Shadow banning” - where sex workers accounts are still active but no one can see them
- Stalking and Harassment
- Non consensual image sharing
- Threats of “outing”/ “outing” to co-workers in non sex work jobs, family and friends
- Extortionate costs for advertising
- Increased visibility for targeted robbery
- Increased privacy violations when posting content – more and more personal information required

As complaints and concerns began to mount, BCCEC Members decided to try work to raise awareness about the criminal acts and violence sex workers were experiencing in on-line sex work.

Federal Government actions initiated by anti sex work lobbyists are underway to limit sex workers access to working on-line and to eliminate what are arguably some of the safest jobs there are in sex work.

The BCCEC made submissions to the committees studying the legislation in both Parliament and the Senate and testified in the Parliamentary Committee and the Senate Committee in opposition to anti adult content hearings.

We also worked to counter misinformation being promoted in the hearings as fact challenging the law makers to examine and scrutinize every piece of information they were considering for adherence to the standards of researcher involving human beings which are expected in this country.

The fight for sex worker inclusion in decisions which affect our lives and ethics in information used in these decisions is ongoing and detailed in 2 separate reports as part of “Current Affairs” - Sex Worker Action and Planning 2023.

BCCEC members recognized that the issues with receiving payments and exclusion from access to traditional financial tools was a more practical and pressing issue in terms of the day to day lives of sex working people.

Problems associated with financial exclusion were already at precariously wide spread levels and are escalating.

The Director referenced a sex workers credit union in India – The Durbar Mahila Samanya Committee – Financial Cooperative;

https://www.nswp.org/sites/default/files/economic_empowerment_for_sws_bp_prf01.pdf

And suggested that Canadian sex workers had explored cooperative development before and could perhaps try to build a credit union here which could support sex workers access to the financial tools they need to prosper and thrive.

It was decided that a meeting to discuss ideas around these issues should be held.

Sex Worker Planning Committee

Credit Union Development Meeting Minutes

Check-In

Migration from the eastern provinces. - COVID lock downs in the east have made sex workers there desperate with many coming to BC to work in our open industry.

Psychadelic Drug Therapy – more and more becoming known as an effective treatment for traumas.

Payment and banking issues.

- We have problems with payment processing
- How to accept payments
- Director has been looking into how we could form a sex worker credit union
- Board of Directors at Vancouver Police Credit Union – Director called and left a message with the CEO. She called back! We formed this cooperative years ago and we are having trouble with money. Mohammed Yunnus – micro-lending bank in India – it's a neighborhood of brothels. 25,000 people living in that area. He won the noble prize. The CEO of the VPD Credit Union has met him!
- A bunch of hoops to jump through and we need a million dollars as a bond that we don't spend but it is there to protect members of the credit union.
- We could have a partnership maybe with another credit union? Vancity or Coast Capital? They wouldn't have control of us, but they would be the ones who had the million dollars and provide infrastructure.
- Choose a discreet name. We want people to feel comfortable using their bank card!
- It can help us to support sex workers with taking payments for their online work or deposits etc. Help sex workers with loans, building credit, etc. We could give grants.
- 95% loan repayment rate from sex worker community in India – no country, nor corporation can claim that. Women in the ghetto pay their debts

- have an ally in VPD possibly? But this may not be ideal – just thinking of where we can get \$1,000,000.00
- We need to work to meet the requirements for the government bank regulators. define what benefits to members, what requirements or needs the members have
- TNT has a classifieds section. People can start posting their profiles. We can also have a content / fan area like only fans in the future potentially. TNT can fund a lot of projects through our social enterprise.
- We would need a safe payment processor for that endeavor
- discussion of bank account and property seizures by the Pakistani gov with regards to the brothels in Lahore.
- We prefer a credit union over a traditional bank to “host” a bank for us
- Start with a few services and expand as we are able
- A collective objective. Leadership changes. Every year we review. Priorities can be re examined and people will vote on who will lead the credit union
- Vancity - Some have had negative experiences – One worker went with her lawyer and accountant and the Vancity representative literally laughed in her face. Vancity hosted the sex worker cooperative bank account. Others felt judged by Vancity. Coast Capital are sex worker friendly.
- Create a relationship with Coast Capital and move on from there
- Payment processing
- Member is going to write some financial advice that is specific to sex workers.
- Having our credit union will help us to help sex workers find loopholes and protect their money
- We could have an app for sex workers to access their accounts
- Wire transfers, e transfers, charge backs from clients
- If a client took someone’s money, we could fight for them
- Massage parlor owner, or clips4sale could do their transactions through our credit union
- How can we create a payment processing system that is controlled by us and could be defended by us collectively; law enforcement/ government seizure prevention
- Abolitionists are attacking us through limiting our content and how we can collect money for the content. We can try to gain an exception which will hopefully lead to more access for people generally speaking. We can set a precedent. Show them that they’ve made a mistake.
- User-friendly mainstream name would be better.
- concerns over being shut down
- there are “work arounds” for sex workers to protect their funds from seizure or charge back

- Cooperative that is worker controlled collectively. Entrepreneurs bettering their own lives!
- Pick a name that is similar to a conservative organization - to protect us from scrutiny
- Entertainment Professionals; Emotional Support Therapists; Intimacy Replacement Specialists could all be included or offered membership
- We are all interested and let's explore a little further.
- Daughter of VPDCU Ceo teaches credit union development at BCIT
- There are experts to help us with the paper work – a consultant whose job it is to help us understand the rules/ requirements/ provisions and then draw up the papers for us
- It took about a year to incorporate the West Coast Cooperative. Credit union might take longer.
- Perb will do etransfers but leolist will not. Leolist only accepts Litecoin crypto now.
- We need a crypto workshop! Member has a friend who could teach us quite a bit.
- Sign up to the naked list. Member is having trouble getting verified. Director can help with that.
- We are interested in short term financial advice as well as the credit union.
- Pay someone to come and present to us. Crypto workshop, payment processing workshop.
- Come up with questions to give to presenter in advance.
- Create a financial cheat sheet we can share with other sex workers. We need solutions to these issues with payments now!!
- Director will get more info about credit union development but it will take at least a year to incorporate
- Member will speak to her contact about crypto workshop and workarounds for payment processing; plus a resource sheet for other sw's
- open to other professionals using the services of the "bank"
- Member will create a document about how she accepts payments – we all can offer our own thoughts and suggestions. Crypto experience – each person's own experience.
- Paypal is bad for reversals; how can we protect ourselves. You don't have to connect a card to a paypal account. Member describes making another paypal account as her payee and transfers right away. Minimum of \$150 in some other way – etransfer, onlyfans, etc. Then she lets them use paypal. Let me know if you don't like it, I will refund a percentage of your money. Seems to reduce reversals. "Makes assholes happy." LOL
- One of the key directives should be for people to clean up their account at the end of each working day
- Coast capital is very okay with sex workers

Meeting wrap up!

Summary

it was clear during the discussion that these issues were top of mind for our community. The affordability crisis, housing crisis, narrowing sex work venue options and increasing advertising expenses were all adding up to hardship and a potential crisis for our community.

It was decided that a meeting to learn about and consider adopting crypto-currency should be held.

BCCEC Member agreed to work with Director and set the meeting;

Cryptocurrency Workshop

Jeff Bowen

Background:

- Cryptocurrency is decentralized, digital currency; using nodes throughout the internet
- It runs in a blockchain with blockchain technology – segments that attach to create a greater whole; the ledger where all transactions are logged
- Monero – a privacy crypto doesn't operate out of Australia because they require transparency
- May or may not be listed on an exchange depending on where they are located
- Exchanges: List different cryptocurrencies – least safe place to hold cryptocurrencies; can more easily be hacked. Like a bank you don't have your funds. Coinbase, Shakepay, etc.
- Wallets – software and hardware – software is connected to the internet; you want your own keys.
- Hold funds in a software or hardware wallet. Hardware is usually for large funds for investment
- Proof of work: Bitcoin – when it's building its own blockchain, this is happening through people running computers to mine the blockchain; calculating
- Because proof of work is demanding for energy, there are a lot of new ones coming out
- Green cryptocurrencies are in the forefront right now for cryptocurrency technology
- Bitcoin been on the radar around 10 years
- Shit coins – alt coins that are just hype and have no value
- People get in because of FOMO – fear of missing out which is literally gambling; dilutes the pool of cryptos that serve purposes
- Smart contract blockchains – Ethereum; you can lock in different contract pieces from a technical level; could be used for company governance to lock in data so it can never be altered or made fraudulent.
- Layered cryptos that perform like a web function; others could be developed for other functions
- Article about blockchain written by Annie's son:
<https://www.austinbagnall.com/post/blockchain-trend-or-transformation>

Using Cryptocurrencies:

- To cash out a wallet, you have to send your crypto to an exchange and use the exchange to cash out
- Exchange is on a website server; a software wallet is an app on your phone or computer; hardware is a physical wallet that holds your crypto
- Monero has its own wallet but you can use others if they are able to hold Monero
- To choose a wallet, start with which cryptos do I need? Then you need to find a wallet that will hold all the currencies you need it to hold.
- Recommend: Exodus; Metamask.io (software wallets – app on mobile or browser integration on computer)
- Exchanges: coinbase, shakepay, crypto.com, etc
- You only have to provide ID for an exchange, not a wallet. We are prompted to write on paper a 20-word long string to use to recover the wallet.
- Use a credit card to purchase bitcoin (or other crypto); trade your bitcoin for Litecoin; then send / transfer to an address
- It's not really private because it's all tied to our names and ID, which is connected to our bank accounts, credit cards, etc
- Bitcoin has a public ledger
- Because it's fluctuating so much, it's hard to say where it will end in the end
- It's an asset or a security
- How do I accept a crypto payment on a website? Two ways you could do that – site integration... the simplest way is to use a plugin or to list the address or qr code that you are accepting the crypto to (one-time payments)
- Display that amount with your wallet address
- Every crypto is divisible; you don't buy a whole Litecoin or bitcoin – you buy a fraction of it depending on the amount you spend
- It's natural for bitcoin to dip – everyone knows about bitcoin; digital gold. It has a store of value. But it fluctuates like gold.
- Bitcoin machine – in person atm version; one instance version of an exchange; use cash or your card to enter in the money and then send the \$\$ to your wallet address
- Some exchanges require facial recognition to create an account now
- What is the value of crypto to sex workers with all this facial recognition etc?
- Another way we are tracked and monitored
- The more you get away from the exchange the more private it becomes but you need the exchange for swaps and cashing out

- Peer2peer network that might work for us anonymously who can give us their fiat for our crypto – or something like that. A cooperative endeavor with a wallet to help people facilitate ads.
- The privacy is between the wallets; no privacy in buying and cashing out
- Clients can pay from their wallet to our wallet but we will still need to use an exchange to cash out; otherwise, we must use the crypto to make purchases online from sites that take crypto
- Example: Your ad usually costs \$20; you purchase \$25 worth of bitcoin, swap it for Litecoin, then pay for the ad right away before the crypto possibly decreases in value.
- If you can afford to let it rise, then great.
- Cashing out takes up to 10%
- Transferring too can have admin costs.
- Wallets cannot be seized, but accounts on exchanges can be seized
- A report on the dark web that they can track and see what currencies are being used; the data is there.
- Exchanges running from different countries, there will just be a workaround; it will happen one way or another.
- Monero is completely anonymous from person a to person b – including amount.
- Monero is a currency
- Can we start our own cryptocurrency called fuckme currency? We would need a coding team to build off of another code. It would be a very onerous project. Need a team of coders. It could take years.
- Cryptocurrencies are subject to FOSTA/SESTA rules
- Recommend signing up for an exchange. Do personal business off the exchange.
- Once more people have adopted cryptocurrencies, we could start paying our rent with it and other purchases.
- Hope for high adoption of monero!

Any questions? Jeff's email: nineteenletterslong@gmail.com

Summary

It became clear that crypto currency while useful in some cases was not a stable enough on a number of levels for use in the long term.

Sex workers still need access the simplest of financial tools for business and safe places to save their money.

Recommendations

1. That the Director of the BCCEC further explore the requirements for forming a Canadian sex workers credit union
2. That the Director explore funding options for further exploration of these ideas among sex workers
3. That at least one other member of the BCCEC work as the project coordinator with the BCCEC Director as co-coordinator.

Going Forward

During discussions after these meetings BCCEC members became aware of the barriers to forming an independent credit union. The financial requirements of a \$1,000,000.00 as a “bond” being the most daunting. Sex worker organizing is un-fundable at the best of times.

A BCCEC Member who also owns a small retail food business had been experiencing difficulties with her payment processing company and was frustrated.

BCCEC Members who had developed the Naked Truth and Nakedlist websites were also struggling with how to accept payments for advertising on the site in the future as a social enterprise. The only payment processor willing to work with sex workers wanted 40% of every transaction. This is the same as a pimp or escort agency would take.

The idea of starting a sex worker-led and cooperatively owned payment processing company was born.

If successful, The enterprise could create jobs for sex workers, payment stability and even potentially fund a sex worker credit union in the future.

It was decided that the BCCEC Director and Financial Exclusion Project Manager would meet with Vancity who had funded sex worker cooperative development in the past to explore the possibilities of these ideas.