SUPPORTING SEX WORKERS DURING COVID-19

- Safiya Washington, Youth Advocate, Pro Sex Work Advocate, Artist
- Lenny Hime, Software Engineer & Sex Worker
- Tabz of The Naturally Kinky, Certified Sexual Health & Wellness Consultant
- Mxstress Lilith, Professional Dominatrix and Performance Artist

Sex work is an umbrella term that includes cam workers, BDSM providers, doms, subs, switches, full service sex workers, strippers, porn models and actors, phone sex operators, and any people in the adult entertainment industry or sex industry who utilize sex or sensuality for entertainment or monetary gain. Many youth engage in sex work, with more moving to online platforms during COVID-19 in order to generate income. This influx, as well as the passing of SESTA/FOSTA has made online sex work more difficult and dangerous. Youth who do sex work deserve respect to set their own boundaries, equal rights and pay, safe ways to promote and engage in their work, and ultimately, the destigmatization and decriminalization of their work.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Do deep work and educate yourself in order to fully understand that sex work is WORK and deserves to be respected and protected. If you are educated by sex workers you need to pay them for their expertise.

Q + A

How can those advocating for stable and safe housing solutions for youth work with people who are advocating for sex workers? Listen to them. Listen to sex workers. Listen to young adults. It's very basic. In my time I've been involved in multiple youth housing organizations, because I did face homelessness. I've seen and experienced being silenced because of my age, with all forms of organizations (government, nonprofit, community workers, etc). Shut up and listen to sex workers. Our job is to make sure youth are safe and have resources. You shouldn't be putting youth out on the street who are sex workers. Period!

Beyond the boundaries you have to create to protect yourself in the work you do, what are the boundaries you have as an educator when informing folks about sex work?
Q&A (CONTINUED)

Boundaries are very different when it comes to educating on versus providing sex work. Not being very personal with my own information is key when doing sex work or providing education. Creating boundaries means not being open about my own personal life and experiences to my own detriment. We get flooded with people now coming into the industry asking for our advice and labor. If you are asking someone who has been doing this for years, don’t ask them about what they’re doing without paying them for their labor. What you are asking of them has taken years to learn. Be able to provide compensation.

What are the challenges young adults who engage in this work are experiencing as a result of COVID-19?
There is a learning curve being forced to do online sex work when you’ve only done full service and street work. The skills and risks associated with online sex work are very different. Some folks would rather put themselves physically out there, than have their likeness displayed on the internet, for privacy reasons and beyond. There are lots of different aspects to this transition which have occurred so fast and so unexpectedly that youth haven’t really had time to cope. They’ve had to throw themselves out there [online] and just see what happens because the only other option is to not eat. Many young adults who are now involved in sex work during COVID-19 weren’t doing so online before the pandemic. It’s also important to note that some young people that were providing full service sex work before the pandemic, were facing housing instability and food insecurity. Now with the added stressors of the Pandemic, they’re worrying about having a place to sleep, “and” the accessibility of being able to move online for a source of income. Those young adults are the most vulnerable at this time.

"WE NEED TO BE REMOVING THE WORD ‘EMPOWERMENT’ WHEN TALKING ABOUT SEX WORK. IT’S NOT UNLIKE OTHER JOBS, BUT THEY ALWAYS ASK SEX WORKERS IF WE’RE EMPOWERED WHEN EDUCATING THE PUBLIC. THAT’S NOT EVEN RELEVANT. NO ONE IS ASKING A SECRETARY IF THEY’RE EMPOWERED. IT’S IRRELEVANT. IT’S A JOB, WE DON’T HAVE TO DESCRIBE HOW WE’RE EMPOWERED BY IT."
-MXSTRESS LILLITH

ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW

1. Educate yourself on SESTA/FOSTA and how it hurts sex workers.
2. Address your internalized stigma towards sex work and how it may be affecting the youth you serve.
3. Listen to sex workers. Understand and respect their boundaries, and pay them for their labor of educating you on the nuances of sex work.
4. Housing first means sex workers, too. Ensure that the policies and practices of your organization create safety and space for youth engaging in sex work.

Learn more at pointsourceyouth.org/covid19resources
I AM LOW KEY PROUD OF SEX WORKERS! WHATEVER YOU DO TO SHUT US DOWN, WE WILL FIND ANOTHER WAY— IG, TIKTOK, TUMBLR, TWITTER. WHATEVER YOU DO YOU CAN’T GET RID OF SEX WORKERS. TO FELLOW SEX WORKERS, MAKE SURE YOU’RE SAFE, SMART, AND READ YOUR TERMS OF SERVICES. TABZ OF THE NATURALLY KINKY

RESOURCES & LINKS

- A new law intended to curb sex trafficking threatens the future of the internet as we know it
- Stop SESTA/FOSTA
- Black Sex Worker Reparation Fund organized by Anthy Hime
- About Us – Sex Workers Outreach Project
- Reform the Adult Entertainment Industry (sign the petition)
- Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance
- In fourth week of protests, calls for better conditions for strip club workers

SUPPORT OUR SPEAKERS

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