Testimony from Permanently Visible Productions in support of FULL decriminalisation of sex work

We are a theatre company who worked with UK sex workers to create a show exploring the struggles for those selling sex as a job. We gained an incredible insight during this time and fully believe that FULL decriminalisation (BUYING AND SELLING) of sex work is by far the best option for the safety and protection of all those involved.

FULL decriminalisation would allow sex workers to work together in supportive environments which under current brothel keeping law is near impossible. Police crackdowns like the 2013 soho raids, break up safety networks and street workers are forced into isolated areas where they are at greater risk of attack. Claims that violence, particularly trafficking, can be reduced by criminalising the client were shown by a study in Vancouver last year to be totally ineffective by impacting sex workers existing safety strategies.

Full decriminalisation promotes safety because sex workers can collectively assert their rights to better working conditions. Any illegality (say that the responsibility moves to the client) in sex work will always keep it driven underground, always endangering the safety of workers. Workers forced underground are also more likely to be exploited.

By providing full legal recognition, society can acknowledge sex workers are workers like others in employment. Any forwarding thinking, civilised society should respect the wishes of consensual, able minded adults.

Roughly seventy percent of sex workers in the UK are mothers, mostly single mothers, trying to support families in the face of unemployment, benefit cuts, low wages, homelessness and debt. Unavoidable criminal records or constantly dodging police to secure clients that risk being penalised, mean that sex workers can’t improve their situation.

With full decriminalisation we enable sex workers to report abuse, rape and exploitation. Abusers and rapists often take advantage of the legal vulnerability of sex workers and deliberately target them. Sex workers in New Zealand (where decriminalisation has been in place since 2003) report that now they have the full support of the legal system they can turn to the police for help without fear of prosecution or police corruption.

But we’re not naïve, we know that it would take a hell of a lot of investment from governing bodies, the authorities and society to monitor and police these changes to avoid exploitation and change public opinion. But decimalisation of all those involved in the consensual buying and selling of sex, is what the people who are effected directly by a change in law- that we’ve spoken to- want. Let’s respect their choice and help them lead better, safer lives.

Please come to the right conclusion.

Yours

Jenny Kondol
Artistic Director
Permanently Visible Productions